Mixtheory: Non-Linguistic Communal Expression in African American Literature

by Jennifer Johns Sieck

A.B., Davidson College, 1991
M.A., Union-PSCE, 1993
M.A., The George Washington University, 2006
M.Phil., The George Washington University, 2007

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Jennifer C. James
Associate Professor of English

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Dissertation Research Committee:

Jennifer C. James, Associate Professor of English, Dissertation Director

Adele Logan Alexander, Associate Professor of History, Committee Member

Andrew Zimmerman, Associate Professor of History, Committee Member

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of

Lauren Virginia Sieck

Helen Hawes Johns and Aubrey William Johns

Miriam Young Sieck and Luther Salmon Sieck

and

Dr. Isabel Wood Rogers

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Dissertation Abstract

Mixtheory: Non-Linguistic Communal Expression in African American Literature

In this interdisciplinary study, I explore the role of non-linguistic communal expression in African American literature, including how representations of music, dance and quilting shape autobiography, novel and film. I argue that, across eras and genres, African American authors leverage power from forms that are communal, non-linguistic and culturally specific, rather than from language alone. My project breaks new ground by showing that this emphasis displays an operational strategy borne out by neuroscience. Placing the human and natural sciences into dialogue with one another, I demonstrate how non-linguistic forms of African American expression can catalyze action.

I conceptualize corresponding notions of African American expression and subjectivity as "mixtery," an African American technique for combining fragments to generate new meanings. Its theoretical incarnation, mixtheory, can describe the process of creating African American songs, quilts or dances; however, it can also encompass the insertion of African American communal expression into African American literature. In addition, mixtheory provides a way to reconceive African American subjectivity as collaborative, yielding selfhood and community, or plural personhood, in tandem.

I illustrate how a mixtery of neurological stimuli and cultural practices contributes toward the emergence of empowerment in texts from the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries. Beginning with Frederick Douglass's autobiographies (1845, 1855, 1893), I contend that African American communal song motivated Douglass's eventual escape from enslavement. Further, Julia A. J. Foote's *A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch* (1879) mobilizes music and mixtery to create a singing, rather

than talking, book. Its hybridity joins the popular nineteenth-century form of the hymnal with that of autobiography, exemplifying communal song as a modality of plural personhood. Almost a century later, Toni Morrison locates quilting as a source of mixtery that can counter trauma in her novel *Beloved* (1987). Finally, the film *Rize* (2005) chronicles young African Americans in Los Angeles who develop a form of dance called krumping to tell stories and build community simultaneously.

By making visible forms that critique hegemonies of race, gender, class and language, this project establishes the integral importance of African American communal expression within and beyond African American literature.

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quilting

somewhere in the unknown world
a yellow eyed woman
sits with her daughter
quilting.

some other where
alchemists mumble over pots.
their chemistry stirs
into science. their science
freezes into stone.

in the unknown world
the woman
threading together her need
and her needle
nods toward the smiling girl
remember
this will keep us warm

how does this poem end?
do the daughters' daughters quilt?
do the alchemists practice their tables?
do the worlds continue spinning
away from each other forever?

—Lucille Clifton[1]

Introduction

In her poem, "quilting," Lucille Clifton juxtaposes forms of knowledge whose sources seem intractably disparate. A woman and her daughter quilt while, elsewhere, "alchemists" canonize scientific inquiry. The perception that the vernacular involves the speculative while science engages rigor can result in a dialectic of distance. While limited discourse currently exists between these epistemologies, congruencies between the seemingly separate realms can converge to yield new understandings. This project

[1] Lucille Clifton, "quilting" in *Quilting: Poems 1987-1990* (New York: Boa Editions, Ltd., 1991) 3. Reprinted with permission from Boa Editions, Ltd., *www.boaeditions.org*.

embarks on bringing science to bear on African American literature and cultural practices, such as quilting, represented within it. Using recent breakthroughs in neuroscience, I theorize the presence of non-linguistic forms of African American expression, including music, dance and quilting, in texts from the nineteenth through the twenty-first centuries. The worlds of quilters and scientists need not "continue spinning away from each other," and this project aims to demonstrate that they are already closer than previously imagined.

This study grew out of an observation that many African American "texts"—broadly defined—attribute the acquisition of human agency to embodied knowledge, a marked divergence from the pervasive view of language as the key to "Western" subjectivity.[2] Specifically, in texts across eras and genres, empowerment emerges from forms of African American expression that are both communal and outside of language. For example, in his three autobiographies, Frederick Douglass cites singing with other African Americans while enslaved with his initial realization of slavery's inhumanity and subsequent desire for freedom. Traveling through the woods to pick up monthly provisions provided an opportunity for enslaved African Americans, including Douglass, to sing uncoerced in an unsurveilled setting. Their improvisational singing created a forum for the individual and communal expression of emotion, an ancient neurological recipe for action that leads to survival. Thus, I argue that communal song helped to motivate Douglass's eventual escape, which unfolded over a number of years; however,

[2] In keeping with its etymology, an expansive definition of text can encompass non-linguistic works, such as film. I am thinking particularly of text's Latin root *textere*, "to weave," which evokes the fabric arts ("Text," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Gelman Library, George Washington University, 25 Jan. 2010, <http://dictionary.oed.com/>. Additionally, text can mean the "words of a song," an iteration that becomes especially relevant in exploring Julia Foote's autobiography in chapter two ("Text," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*).

some critics continue to read his story as the achievement of written literacy, an accomplishment equated with whiteness, masculinity and individualism. While critical focus on his autobiographies is beginning to shift from literacy to music, this project seeks to break new ground by showing that Douglass's emphasis on African American communal expression displays an operational strategy common to African American literature and borne out by neuroscience.

No previous studies offer an explanation for the efficacy of non-linguistic forms of African American expression that incorporates both science and culture. Without ignoring the often fierce debate about the blurry spectrum of culture and nature further complicated by constructs such as race and gender, strides in neuroscience facilitate making connections between biology and behavior's mutual influence. "Real-time" technology such as functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) can permit glimpses into the intersection of the social, psychological and neurological. For example, fMRIs can detect how dancers' brains respond to watching dance on video, leading to the discovery that simply observing dance can trigger a parallel neurological motor system that can assist in learning.[3] Using neuroscience, I outline how forms of non-linguistic communal expression can catalyze the ability to leverage power, particularly in situations that appear to hold none, suggesting their importance includes, but also reaches beyond, the practice of culture. Further, I show that non-linguistic expression can retain neurological effectiveness within literature and that Douglass, among others, understands its potential, if not scientifically, then functionally, using it to transform experience while

[3] Scott Grafton and Emily Cross, "Dance and the Brain" in *Learning, Arts and the Brain: The Dana Commission Report on Arts and Cognition*, eds. Carolyn Asbury and Barbara Rich (Washington, D.C.: Dana Press, 2008).

interrupting hegemonies of language, race and gender. Finally, I establish that these techniques span genres as well as generations.

In the early 1990s, Italian neuroscientists discovered mirror neurons, part of a parallel motor system in the brain that performs movement neurologically rather than physically. Giacomo Rizzolatti, Leonardo Fogassi and Vittorio Gallese documented that observing goal-directed movement, such as reaching for a piece of food, can activate mirror neurons, which behave as if the observer were actually performing the action.[4] Stated differently, watching movement can "light up" the same areas of the brain as making movement kinesthetically, or muscularly; however, the brain's virtual practice session involves more than mechanical imitation. Mirror neurons can convey "direct experiential understanding" of other people's actions, intentions and emotions non-verbally, conducting empathy between individuals without the need for language.[5] Emotion, in particular, can play a pivotal role in interpreting intention that underlies action. In addition, record producer-turned-cognitive psychologist Daniel Levitin asserts in *This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* that the mental rehearsal provided by mirror neurons can serve as preparation for future movement, such as when "musicians can play back a musical part on their instruments" after only hearing it once.[6]

In concert with mirror neurons, music itself plays a neurological role in encouraging movement. Historically, Levitin recounts, music's evolutionary function

[4] Giacomo Rizzolatti, Leonardo Fogassi and Vittorio Gallese, "Mirrors in the Mind" (*Scientific American* 295.5 Nov. 2006: 54-61).
[5] Rizzolatti, Fogassi and Gallese 60, 61.
[6] Daniel Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (New York: Plume, 2006) 266-267.

included stimulating emotion which, in turn, provoked humans to act in order to survive.[7] He explains that music "far more than language . . . taps into primitive brain structures involved with motivation, reward and emotion."[8] Neuroscience can therefore confirm Douglass's astute, though necessarily anecdotal at the time, claim that the songs of sorrow inspired his escape from slavery. Additionally, mirror neurons can corroborate his assertion that "the mere hearing of those songs" could relay empathy for enslaved persons better than "whole volumes of philosophy."[9] Douglass's inclusion of the songs in his autobiographies acknowledges the potential for music to activate not only participants' mirror neurons, but also those of others, including whites. In other words, mirror neurons can be conduit for transmitting empathy and forms of expression within, as well as across, cultures.[10]

The insertion of music, among other forms of non-linguistic communal expression, into African American literature problematizes language as a viable medium for African American expression and subjectivity. Recent scholarship explores sound as a vehicle for resisting enslavement, including *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History through Songs, Sermons and Speech* by historians Shane White and Graham White. Sociologist Paul Gilroy also connects a reworking of enslavement with black musical expression that generates a "philosophical discourse which refuses the modern, occidental separation of ethics and aesthetics, culture and politics."[11] In tandem,

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[7] Levitin 183.
[8] Levitin 191.
[9] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* in Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Library of America, 1996) 24.
[10] Levitin 267.
[11] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993) 38-39.

he describes a "politics of transfiguration" in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* whereby

> the formation of a community of needs and solidarity . . . is magically made more audible in the music itself and palpable in the social relations of its cultural utility and reproduction. . . . This politics exists on a lower frequency where it is played, danced, and acted, as well as sung and sung about, because words, even words stretched by melisma and supplemented or mutated by the screams which still index the conspicuous power of the slave sublime, will never be enough to communicate its unsayable claims to truth.[12]

He concludes that "artistic expression becomes the means toward both individual self-fashioning and communal liberation," and, specifically, that music is foremost among the "novel forms" that emerge as a result.[13]

I contend that non-linguistic expression can broaden opportunities for participating in literature. For example, music is, according to Levitin, a communal activity and "inseparable" from movement, as it has been throughout most of human history.[14] Everyone makes music and therefore dances together in almost all human cultures.[15] Within the last 500 years, however, "Western" society became the singular exception to this common practice.[16] "Expert" musicians now perform for audiences

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[12] Gilroy 37.
[13] Gilroy 40. Jennifer James critiques Gilroy's dismissal of work as another means of "self-fashioning and communal liberation" as ahistorical, particularly for African Americans. Separating African American labor and agency also removes their integral relationship with creative expression.
[14] Levitin 257.
[15] Levitin 257.
[16] Levitin 194, 257.

who listen motionlessly rather than everyone participating equally.[17] In parallel, by emphasizing language to the exclusion of other forms of expression, "Western" literature becomes a venue for "experts" who assume a passive audience, rather than a participatory forum that can include music, dance and quilting within it.

Law, if not also class and gender, often proscribed written literacy for nineteenth-century African Americans. Music represented an accessible opportunity for engaging in an activity helpful for surviving enslavement, as did dancing and quilting. Jon Michael Spencer, for example, claims in *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion* that music's fundamental component of rhythm "empowered those who possess it to endure slavery by temporarily elevating them out of the valley of oppression up to a spiritual summit."[18] Again, neuroscience can offer a biochemical correlation as Levitin notes that listening to music can enhance a person's mood by raising dopamine levels in the brain.[19] Music, dancing and quilting can open up space within African American literature that allows those who might not otherwise be able to participate to do so, modeling a different way to conceptualize literature. I argue that African American literature does not succumb to the malaise of some "Western" music audiences, but understands that texts can be as syncretistic as African American religion which might have the veneer of, for example, Christianity yet retain practices pre-dating that encounter. African American literature subsumes non-linguistic forms of expression into language while simultaneously exploding its boundaries.

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[17] Levitin 257.
[18] Jon Michael Spencer, *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 136.
[19] Levitin 191.

Poet and novelist Nathaniel Mackey, like Toni Morrison, takes critics to task for disregarding form in African American literature. In his celebrated essay, "Other: From Noun to Verb," Mackey argues for the recognition of the parallel movement within African American expression that transforms nouns to verbs and the pejorative designation of "other" into a technique for reappropriating difference:

> While the regressive racial views of white writers like [Gertrude] Stein and Ezra Pound tend to be regarded (if they're regarded at all) as secondary to their artistic innovations, black writers tend to be read racially, primarily at the content level, the noun level, as responding to racism, representing "the black experience." That black writers have been experimentally and innovatively engaged with the medium, addressing issues of form as well as issues of content, tends to be ignored. . . . The nonrecognition of black artistic othering is symptomatic of the social othering to which black people are subjected, particularly in light of the celebration accorded artistic othering practiced by whites.[20]

This work seeks to recognize modes practiced by some African Americans, especially African American women, that do not venerate language and, therefore, often go unnoticed, if not dismissed, by many. An analogy to the struggle for recognition of forms that can yield different kinds of knowledge than that afforded by language can be found in the discovery that crocheting can model the complex structures of hyperbolic geometry. Science writer Margaret Wertheim notes that lettuce, sea slugs and coral have emulated such crenulated curves for millennia, but mathematicians failed for centuries to

[20] Nathaniel Mackey, "Other: From Noun to Verb," *Representations* 39 (1992: 51-70) 68.

notice these structures, instead working for years to prove their impossibility.[21] Wertheim posits that mathematicians limited themselves to symbolic representation and therefore could not see that—much less, how—hyperbolic geometry could exist, until mathematician Daina Taimiņa began first to knit and then, more precisely, to crochet mathematical models in 1997.[22] My argument about the importance of non-linguistic expression is similar. The perceived superiority of language as both form and purveyor of knowledge can result in discounting or failing to recognize embodied forms of knowledge that remain outside of language. Their disassociation with language and therefore with dominant constructions of race and gender can render them suspect or almost invisible. These non-linguistic forms, including song, dance and quilting, have received some recognition as cultural practices having value; however, neuroscience further confirms their utility as practices that can transform their practitioners individually and socially. They can also have a powerful impact on those who observe them, again, via mirror neurons. Many whites, for example, wrote about being transfixed upon hearing the songs of enslaved African Americans in the nineteenth century.

In addition to neuroscience, I draw from theorists in the humanities and social sciences including, but not limited to, Mikhail Bakhtin (literary theory), Sigmund Freud (psychoanalysis), Claude Lévi-Strauss (anthropology) and Toni Morrison (literary and critical race theory). Further, I develop a theory of African American creativity, subjectivity and literature based on a conception of African American song by a formerly enslaved African American woman from Kentucky. A strategy similar to Lévi-Strauss's

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[21] "Margaret Wertheim on the Beautiful Math of Coral," TED, Long Beach, CA, 5 Feb. 2009, <http://www.ted.com/talks/margaret_wertheim_crochets_the_coral_reef.html#>. I am grateful to Sally Montague for bringing this presentation to my attention.

[22] David W. Henderson and Daina Taimiņa, *Experiencing Geometry: Euclidean and Non-Euclidean with History*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005.

notion of *bricolage* appears consistently in African American literature and culture. In *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-Strauss identifies *bricolage* as the human practice of building "mythical thought," or cultural knowledge, from materials at hand rather than those tailored to the task, like a brick used in place of a hammer.[23] For example, many enslaved African Americans ingeniously used whatever resources were "'at hand'" — whether to compose songs, concoct meals or create quilts—in order to counter the often limited availability of materials due to slavery.[24] Both distinct and pervasive, this technique warrants a culturally specific marker denoting African American practices similar to, yet distinct from, *bricolage*.

White and White characterize music made by enslaved African Americans in terms of *bricolage* in *The Sounds of Slavery* and a companion chapter that appears in *The Slavery Reader* edited by Gad Heuman and James Walvin. However, they also observe a unique quality to the combining of sounds stemming from "a sense in which, because slaves recognized more things *as* bricks [materials], their pile of bricks was larger [than that of whites], and was composed of bricks of sharply contrasting colors and odd-seeming designs."[25] In their chapter, White and White cite a statement by an African American woman that offers a theoretical term for the *bricolage*-like tactic frequently found in a range of African American contexts:

> In explaining to Jeanette Robinson Murphy how spirituals were created, one of the former slave women, to whose singing Murphy had listened appreciatively, pointed to a significant difference between the religious

[23] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) 17.
[24] Lévi-Strauss 17.
[25] Shane White and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History through Songs, Sermons and Speech* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005) 37.

> music of African Americans and that of whites. "Notes is good enough for you people," the woman declared, "but us likes a mixtery."[26]

"Mixtery" could be considered an African American incarnation of *bricolage*, the word itself embodying the concept of combining fragments to yield new meanings. Mixtery can describe the process involved in creating African American songs, quilts or dances; however, it can also encompass the inclusion of African American communal expression in African American literature. I argue, for instance, that incorporating African American song into a text simultaneously deploys mixtery and constitutes a mixtery. Further, mixtery provides a way to formulate African American subjectivity which, I contend, is necessarily collaborative. I explore mixt[h]e[o]ry in greater detail in chapters two, three and four.

Using these theoretical approaches, I examine, as aforementioned, Douglass's autobiographies published in 1845, 1855 and 1893, respectively, and I illustrate how communal African American expression persists in another nineteenth-century autobiographical work as well as in a twentieth-century novel and a twenty-first century film. In particular, the spiritual autobiography of African American evangelist Julia Foote published in 1879, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire*, also focuses on communal song, though somewhat differently from Douglass. More than a century later, Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987) locates agency in quilting as well as communal song. Finally, the invention of a form of dance called krumping by a group of African Americans youths in Los Angeles after the turn of the millennium exemplifies how dance can be a medium for subjectivity in the 2005 documentary *Rize*.

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[26] White and White, "'Us Likes a Mixtery:' Listening to African-American Slave Music" in *The Slavery Reader*, eds. Gad Heuman and James Walvin (New York: Routledge, 2003: 405-426) 420-421.

Similarly to, yet distinctively from Douglass, Julia Foote employs music throughout *A Brand Plucked from the Fire*. Her principle goal is to promote religious conversion though she also crusades against misogyny and the vestiges of slavery. (A contemporary of Douglass, Foote grew up free in the North rather than enslaved in the South.) I argue that music, specifically African American communal song, accompanies Foote's own conversion and acceptance of her conviction that God called her to preach, despite prohibitions in all Protestant denominations at the time against women preaching or becoming ordained as clergy. Foote taps into the convergence of culture and neurobiology by presenting hymns, as well as other participatory elements of worship, in her text, inviting her audience to experience communal song and be transformed as she herself was. Music's neurological relationship to emotion and action make music, particularly African American communal song, an apt choice for effecting change in a context that is also culturally expectant. Notably, anthropologist David P. McAllester observes that "'music transforms experience'" in every human culture, a phenomenon that ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl connects with "the association of music with the supernatural."[27] From catching the Holy Spirit to possession by *loa*, Nettl asserts that "all known cultures accompany religious activity with music."[28]

Mirror neurons are, in a sense, a system of call and response, perhaps the prototypical structure of African American worship and, indeed, African American expression more generally. For instance, Gilroy describes call and response as the "principal formal feature" of the "musical traditions" of the black Atlantic.[29] Foote issues

[27] Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005) 47.
[28] Nettl 47.
[29] Gilroy 78.

repeated calls to her "congregation" that frequently take musical form, such as lines from a hymn, that could activate her audience's mirror neurons. Familiarity with the logic of call and response could increase the potential for and potency of a response.[30] She creates a musical atmosphere that is recognizably and identifiably African American where emotion and thereby action can be elicited, simultaneously circumventing language. While some critics note her extensive use of music, none view its use as a critique of language. I intend to show that Foote's text takes on the quality of music and thus revises notions of language along with race and gender. Put differently, I advocate for reconsidering Foote's spiritual autobiography as music rather than language, or, envisioned hybridly, as a hymn/book. In parallel, my overall project aims to make visible forms that the predominance of language and the strictures of racism, sexism and class threaten to erase.

Quilting represents another often overlooked form of non-linguistic expression, partly due to its primary, but by no means exclusive, association with women. For example, quilts factor significantly into Morrison's *Beloved*, yet their presence throughout the novel has received surprisingly minimal critical attention. Similarly, the neuroscience of quilting does not yet exist while the neuroscience of music and dance continue to develop as independent fields of inquiry.[31] As earlier noted, movement can

[30]As will be more fully explained in chapter four, neuroscientist Beatriz Calvo-Merino contends that "the brain's response to seeing an action is influenced by the acquired motor skills of the observer" (Beatriz Calvo-Merino, Daniel E. Glaser, Julie Grèzes, Richard E. Passingham and Patrick Haggard, "Action Observation and Acquired Motor Skills: An fMRI Study with Expert Dancers," *Cerebral Cortex* 15 (August 2005): 1245). In other words, knowing how to perform the movement being observed increases the neurological reaction to watching it and triggers a simulated reenactment in the observer's motor system.

[31] Nevertheless, quilting already assists with imagining the structure and workings of the brain. For example, in the article "Crazy-Quilt Brain" published in *BioScience*, Julia Ann Miller likens the cerebral cortex to "a layered winter quilt, a two- to three-millimeter-thick stack of six characteristic strata" (Julia Ann Miller, "Crazy-Quilt Brain," *BioScience* 37.10 (Nov. 1987) 701. She notes that the cortex "can be

trigger mirror neurons; however, Gallese, along with art historian David Freedberg, contends that representational as well as abstract depictions of movement can also lead to neurological s(t)imulation.[32] They argue that images of people dancing in a painting or even the brush strokes of an abstract painting can provide sufficient evidence of human intentionality to activate mirror neurons. By extension, the movement involved in quilting and the corresponding traces of movement observable in, for example, stitches could also trigger mirror neurons.

Dancing is perhaps a more obvious harbinger of mirror neurons than music and quilting, and I use David LaChapelle's film *Rize* to demonstrate the diversity of forms of non-linguistic expression as well as to document the continuity of the pattern. Recent neurological studies of forms of dance ranging from tango to capoeira—the latter loosely resembling krumping—indicate that watching a dance form with which one is kinesthetically familiar strengthens the effect of the observation on the mirror motor system in the brain.[33] To a krumper, for example, watching krumping would potentially be more invigorating neurologically than watching a tango. As with music, culturally specific forms are important, and krumping builds neurological potential into its design. Its circular structure permits simultaneous participation in and observation of movement, an ideal forum for exchange expressed non-linguistically. Dancers take turns performing

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aptly compared to a patchwork quilt" whose "sensory, association, and motor regions are divided into distinct patches, called areas" (Miller 702). Further, as quilting orders experience, the "general role of the cortical areas is 'to construct categories in an unlabeled world'" (Miller 702). In addition, fMRI images of the brain inspired psychologist and quilter Marjorie Taylor, among other artists, to create textile models of the brain. According to "Neural Knitworks" by Michael Brooks, "Taylor's first piece was a quilt with a cerebral cortex in blue velvet on a silver background" (Michael Brooks, "Neural Knitworks," *New Scientist* 199.2687 (Dec. 20, 2008) 51). Taylor's quilt can be seen online at The Museum of Scientifically Accurate Fabric Brain Art curated by Bill Harbaugh at <http://harbaugh.uoregon.edu/Brain/#>.

[32] David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese, "Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 11.5 (2007: 197-203) 202.

[33] Calvo-Merino, Glaser, Grèzes, Passingham and Haggard, "Action Observation and Acquired Motor Skills" 1245.

in the center of a circle, developing solos that draw from the gathered group yet reflect an individual style. At the same time, the group gleans from the dancer(s) in the circle, exchanges that build social as well as personal distinction.

These forms of African American communal expression serve as reminders of knowledge that is absent from the literary canon because it did or could not take linguistic or material form. Douglass's deliberate inclusion of African American song, for example, recognizes its value as knowledge that can counteract enslavement. The songs of sorrow, like quilting and krumping, offer interventions in which individuals can manage emotion in a communal context through modalities grounded in African American expression. In addition to being outside of language, they can involve mixtery, or improvisation, both in determining content and, more importantly, in coming into being as dynamic exchanges rather than static representations. They can be so ordinary as to be every day and thereby often disregarded as sources of power, serving as alternatives for persons denied access to language and other hegemonic structures, including African Americans and women. The study of literature and history relies heavily on material artifacts that can belie African American methodologies for constructing subjectivity and community in ways that do not conform to dominant discourses. For example, there are relatively few quilts made by enslaved African Americans still in existence today; however, historians acknowledge quilting's importance, especially to African American women.[34] In *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Ante-Bellum South*, historian Gladys-Marie Fry posits that quilting offered personal benefits as well as helped to build a sense of community. Quilting

[34] Gladys-Marie Fry, *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Dutton Studio Books in association with the Museum of American Folk Art, 1990) 83.

provided African American women with "fulfillment and a sense of self-worth. They also found support and camaraderie as they stitched. This bonding, rooted in the most desperate of human conditions—slavery—built a network among the quilters, and among their men and children who joined them on occasion."[35] The inclusion of non-linguistic communal expression in African American literature disrupts the notion of narrative as singularly authoritative and honors forms of knowledge that exist apart from language.

Drawing from the theoretical work of Amiri Baraka and Nathaniel Mackey, I argue that the importance of some forms of African American expression lies in the process of engaging in them, rather than a product that might result; indeed, some exist only as processes. For instance, the practice of quilting helps Sethe to consider that recovery from enslavement and the "Misery" might be possible, and the reworked quilt that results serves as a residual record of active engagement with trauma. In other words, the quilt's greatest potential as a tool for transformation occurs when Sethe and Beloved are actively "tacking scraps of cloth to Baby Suggs' old quilt."[36] Written language risks losing this dynamism. I intend to show that these texts are emblematic of African American literature's rejection of the product-orientation of written language in favor of the insertion of process-oriented forms of expression.

This project also aims to correct the lack of attention to the integral importance of the communal to African American practices that challenge language and hegemonic conceptions of race, gender and power. The inclusion of these forms of embodied knowledge in African American literature provides an indication of their critical relationship to African American subjectivity. I argue that communal African American

[35] Fry, *Stitched from the Soul* 83.
[36] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987) 241.

expression doubles as a way to reconceptualize subjectivity. Rather than the hegemonic American conception of personal autonomy as radically discreet, African American individuality can encompass correspondence with the communal in a dynamic, ongoing process. For example, krumpers develop unique personal styles by taking turns performing in the center of a circle of dancers. Each soloist expresses emotion through movement in an unspoken, yet powerful exchange with the group. In *Krump 2.0*, part of a series of instructional DVDs, a krump group prepares for a member to move to another city by holding a krump session, and the dancers liken the member to a piece of a puzzle without whom they feel incomplete. One of the group's leaders comments that "we called this session so we could . . . take a piece of us out there where he's going and we'll have a piece of him here."[37] Dancers achieve this non-verbal exchange by "speaking without words," also the title and subject of an earlier segment of the video. In it, krumper Tight Eyez explains that

> when you are speaking without words, you don't have to say anything to . . . get your point across . . . or period in the session. . . . You're supposed to be powerful enough to move the crowd without even saying anything. You should be able to express what you're saying with your body . . . with your hands and your feet instead of just verbally.[38]

Developing individual identity through interpersonal interaction facilitates subjectivity that is mutually constructing. Stated differently, African American communal expression can yield selfhood and community, or plural personhood, in tandem.

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[37] *Krump 2.0: Advanced Krump Techniques*. Dir. Kokie Nassim. Golden Series of Krump. DVD. Krump Kings, 2005.
[38] *Krump 2.0*.

In a poem that offers a response to Clifton's call of a decade earlier, Nikki Giovanni envisions communal expression as a strategy uniquely qualifying African Americans to advise NASA on the first expedition from Earth to Mars. Likening the voyage to Mars to the unknowns of the Middle Passage, "Quilting the Black-Eyed Pea" reimagines the musical tactics of enslaved African Americans crossing the Atlantic and advocates a similar approach in anticipation of another formidable dislocation:

> In the belly of the ship a moan was heard . . . and someone
> picked up the moan . . . and a song was raised . . . and that song
> would offer comfort . . . and hope . . . and tell the story . . .
>
> . . . . And we will tell them what to do: To successfully go to Mars
> and back you will need a song . . . take some Billie Holiday for
> the sad days and some Charlie Parker for the happy ones but
> always keep at least one good Spiritual for comfort . . . [39]

Giovanni couches the journeys' use of song in terms of emotion and recognizes its palliative effects as well as its moral imperative. She predicts that, upon landing on Mars, "you'll see a smiling community / quilting a black-eyed pea . . . watching you descend."[40] African American communal song establishes plural personhood that prevents both groups from seeing one another as "other."

To understand African American literature as merely language is to privilege language in a way that the texts themselves do not. The challenge remains to recognize African American texts, not as solely linguistic entities, but as movement, sounds and

[39] Nikki Giovanni, *Quilting the Black-Eyed Pea: Poems and Not Quite Poems* (New York: William Morrow, 2002) 4.
[40] Giovanni 4.

images—sometimes all at once, as quilting can be—whose purposes include evoking empathy and ethics. This project advocates for reconsidering African American literature in ways that reflect its non-linguistic dimensions. In a 1993 interview, Morrison anticipates the potential for African American literature to inform and transform the landscape of American literature, much like African American music has become American music: "What has already happened with the music [of African Americans] in the States, the literature will do one day."[41] This study intends to show that the process is already underway.

[41] Gilroy 78. The interview originally appeared in Gilroy's *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (New York: Serpent's Tail, 1993).

Chapter 1: "For the Heart Has No Language Like Song:" Communal Agency in Frederick Douglass's Autobiographies

Scholars are beginning to challenge the traditional reading of Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* as a story of attaining literacy and, thereby, freedom.[1] This chapter argues that the long road to Douglass's emancipation begins with music rather than language. Sound created by, for and with African Americans evokes Douglass's emotions, catalyzing his perception of slavery as unjust and igniting his consequent quest for emancipation. The unique combination of emotional and cultural expression in a communal context motivates Douglass in a way that language cannot. Further, this chapter contends that non-linguistic forms of African American expression literally and figuratively move Douglass toward self-determination and, eventually, escape. In tandem, it claims that Douglass credits the synthesis of these forms and communal, rather than individual, agency with his liberation.

Douglass published three autobiographies in nearly half a century. The first and shortest, *Narrative*, appeared in 1845 when Douglass was twenty-seven years old. Ten years later, he published a revised version of the text, *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Finally, the last and most lengthy of his autobiographies went to press in 1893, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. In each autobiography, Douglass describes songs sung by enslaved African Americans, including himself, making a journey to the main farm on

[1] In the following works, critics revise the canonical framing of Douglass's autobiographies as stories of literacy, attending to his privileging of song and the vernacular: Valerie Babb, "The Joyous Circle: The Vernacular Presence in Frederick Douglass's Narratives" *College English* 67.4 (March 2005): 365-377; Robert H. Cataliotti, *The Music in African American Fiction* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995); Jon Cruz, *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); and, David Messmer, "'If Not In the Word, In the Sound': Frederick Douglass's Mediation of Literacy Through Song" *American Transcendental Quarterly* 21:1 (March 2005): 5-21.

the Lloyd plantation for monthly provisions. This study focuses on Douglass's portrayal of the songs as vocalizations outside of language, to be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter. Though frequently analyzed, the passages offer new meaning when understood in terms of recent neuroscientific discoveries that explain music's intimate connection with emotion and action.[2] The version that appears in *Narrative* continues to receive the most critical attention:

> While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out—if not in the word, in the sound;—and as frequently in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone. Into all of their songs they would manage to weave something of the Great House Farm. Especially would they do this, when leaving home. They would then sing most exultingly the following words:—
>
> "I am going away to the Great House Farm!
>
> O, yea! O, yea! O!"
>
> This they would sing, as a chorus, to words which to many would seem unmeaning jargon, but which, nevertheless, were full of meaning to

[2] For example, Valerie Babb posits that Douglass uses slave songs to undermine the authority of the majority culture as well as the written word. His focus on the songs "hints at the ineffectiveness of dominant discourse to convey meaning and the potency of vernacular tradition to effect illumination" (Babb 375). Revising her own earlier, more orthodox reading of *Narrative*, Babb claims that "Douglass's appreciation of the multiple meanings of vernacular expression" is "perhaps his greatest nod to the power of the spirituals [songs of sorrow] and the vernacular tradition from which they derive . . . Douglass credits *them*, not literacy, with his realization of slavery's wrongs" (373, 375).

themselves. I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do.

I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit, and filled me with ineffable sadness. I have infrequently found myself in tears while hearing them. The mere recurrence to those songs, even now, afflicts me; and while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek. To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds. If any one wishes to be impressed with the soul-killing effects of slavery, let him go to Colonel Lloyd's plantation, and, on allowance-day, place himself in the deep pine woods, and there let him, in silence, analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul,—and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because "there is no flesh in his obdurate heart."

> I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears. At least such is my experience. I have often sung to drown my sorrow, but seldom to express my happiness. Crying for joy and singing for joy, were alike uncommon to me while in the jaws of slavery. The singing of a man cast away upon a desolate island might be as appropriately considered as evidence of contentment and happiness, as the singing of a slave; the songs of the one and of the other are prompted by the same emotion.[3]

Varying the text in *Life and Times*, Douglass contends that the songs convey the "soul-crushing character of slavery" more effectively and affectively than "whole volumes exposing the physical cruelties of the slave system; for the heart has no language like song."[4] Simultaneously indicting language and validating blackness, the songs trump the written word. Literary critics have problematically viewed nineteenth-century African American autobiography, including Douglass's, through the lens of logocentrism, equating subjectivity with hegemonies of language, race and gender. Douglass contests the notion that literacy offers emancipatory power, a premise underpinning antebellum

[3] Douglass, *Narrative* 23-25. Douglass quotes the passage virtually verbatim in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, saying "I cannot better express my sense of them now, than ten years ago." He condenses the passage in *Life and Times*, however, fusing segments from the earlier work with new phrasing.
[4] Douglass, *Life and Times* 502.

legislation designed to prohibit enslaved African Americans from learning to reading and write. Correspondingly, he questions language's capacity to represent blackness.

Neuroscience can now say why the power of music can exceed that of language, and it provides new ways to view links between music and movement as well as culture and community. As noted earlier, music, "far more than language . . . taps into primitive brain structures involved with motivation, reward and emotion," according to Levitin.[5] Unlike language, music requires both hemispheres of the brain for processing, including many brain regions that are evolutionarily ancient, such as the cerebellum that regulates timing, movement and emotion and plays a role in auditory processing.[6] As the renowned scientist Francis Crick reminded Levitin in a conversation shortly before his death, emotions "for our ancient hominid ancestors were a neurochemical state that served to motivate us to act, generally for survival purposes."[7] In other words, music evokes emotion which prompts action. Likewise, for Douglass, the songs of sorrow moved him so deeply that one might consider his eventual escape from slavery an active response to the strong emotion they elicited.

In keeping with what neuroscience now sees as a compelling evolutionary connection, Douglass links music with mood modification in *My Bondage and My Freedom*: "Slaves sing more to *make* themselves happy, than to express their happiness."[8] This assertion amends a prior observation in *Narrative* in which he states definitively, yet abstractly: "I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the

[5] Levitin 191. Specifically, Levitin explains that "at a deeper level, the emotions we experience in response to music involve structures deep in the primitive, reptilian regions of the cerebelar vermis, and the amygdala—the heart of emotional processing in the cortex" (87).
[6] Levitin 174-175, 187.
[7] Levitin 183. Crick's citation of "survival purposes" resonates with Douglass's designation of slavery as "death-dealing" (Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 184).
[8] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 185.

north, to find persons who could speak of the singing among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy."[9] In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, he specifically cites the example of escapees who seized the *Pearl* to support his claim that enslaved persons intentionally used music to raise their spirits:

> The remark is not unfrequently made, that slaves are the most contented and happy laborers in the world. They dance and sing, and make all manner of joyful noises—so they do; but it is a great mistake to suppose them happy because they sing. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows, rather than the joys, of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears. Such is the constitution of the human mind, that, when pressed to extremes, it often avails itself of the most opposite methods. Extremes meet in mind as in matter. When the slaves on board of the "Pearl" were overtaken, arrested, and carried to prison—their hopes for freedom blasted—as they marched in chains they sang, and found (as Emily Edmunson tells us) a melancholy relief in singing. The singing of a man cast away on a desolate island, might be as appropriately considered an evidence of his contentment and happiness, as the singing of a slave. Sorrow and desolation have their songs, as well as joy and peace. Slaves sing more to *make* themselves happy, than to express their happiness.[10]

[9] Douglass, *Narrative* 24.
[10] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 185.

Research bears out Douglass's contention: listening to music increases dopamine levels in the brain—levels associated with "positive mood and affect."[11] One way, then, to look at the songs of sorrow is as a therapeutic tool for enslaved persons since new breakthroughs in neuroscience can now explain why "music is clearly a means for improving people's moods."[12] Again consistent with neurological findings, for Douglass, enslaved persons are less victims whose feelings find clandestine expression than persons taking action in an effort to find "a melancholy relief" within their circumstances, if not release from them.[13]

This is not to say, however, that neurobiology fully accounts for the power harnessed by some African Americans through song. The often rancorous debate between viewing human consciousness as socially constructed or biologically determined turns on a spectrum of opinion ranging from the conviction that there are no common characteristics of concepts such as emotion across cultures to the contention that certain biological components bind human beings together despite great divergences in culture.[14] Neuroscience offers a way to bridge the gap as the recent discovery of specialized brain cells called mirror neurons points to culture as an evolutionary source.[15] As previously

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[11] Levitin 191. Hence, the title of Levitin's book likens music's relationship to the brain to popular culture's association of drugs with dopamine levels and mood-altering substances in a twist on an anti-drug public service announcement by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America that ran on television in 1987. The tag line accompanying the image of an egg frying in a skillet was "this is your brain on drugs." In a fictional reference to music's mood-altering potential, Alice Walker's novel *Meridian* includes a reference to the protagonist's "music-drunken head" (Alice Walker, *Meridian* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) 15.

[12] Levitin 191. These data are relatively new. Neurologist Oliver Sacks notes that "there was virtually no neuroscience of music prior to the 1980s" (Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* (New York: Knopf, 2007) xiii).

[13] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 185.

[14] Emotion is but one trait among many, such as gender, debated in terms of social construction versus biological determinism.

[15] Freedberg calls for "humanities researchers to embrace what neuroscientists are learning about how the brain perceives art," saying that "the time has come to take up the challenge" (David Freedberg, "Action, Empathy, and Emotion in the History of Art," *From Mirror Neurons to the Mona Lisa: Visual Art and the*

noted, mirror neurons activate parts of the brain involved in movement when a person observes, but does not make, movement being performed by someone else. Importantly, the movement must be directed toward a goal, such as reaching for food, as mirror neurons help to interpret intention.[16] The brain seems to practice internally what it perceives, storing the data for future execution. In other words, "the purpose of mirror neurons is presumably to train and prepare the organism to make movements it has not made before."[17]

Levitin suggests that

> perhaps we are witnessing another revolution in the aspect of evolution that depends on social behavior, on culture . . . . Maybe mirror neurons, now in concert with sheet music, CDs and iPods, will turn out to be the fundamental messengers of music across individuals and generations, enabling that special kind of evolution—cultural evolution—through which develop our beliefs, obsessions, and all of art.[18]

Perhaps mirror neurons prepared Douglass for freedom, as he attributed his realization of slavery's wrongs to the songs of sorrow. In both *Narrative* and *My Bondage and My Freedom*, he writes, "To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the

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Brain, New York Academy of Sciences, 5 November 2005 <http://www.nyas.org/brainart>). In addition, some anthropologists are working to migrate from a discourse of dualism—biology versus culture—to a blend of the two as explanatory of human emotion, a "biocultural approach." See, for example, Alexander Laban Hinton, ed., *Biocultural Approaches to the Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[16] Scientists inadvertently noticed the existence of mirror neurons when they observed that the same regions of a monkey's brain "lit up" when the monkey saw someone else reaching for a banana as when the monkey reached for a banana. The monkey understood that the goal of the movement was to reach for food and "mirrored" the motion neurologically. Rizzolatti, Fogassi and Gallese write in the article explaining their discovery that "a strict link thus appears to exist between the motor organization of intentional actions and the capacity to understand the intentions of others" (Rizzolatti, Fogassi and Gallese 59).

[17] Levitin 266.

[18] Levitin 266, 267. The idea of and terminology for mirror neurons invites exploration of conceptual similarities to Lacan's mirror stage.

dehumanizing character of slavery."[19] The cultural expression inherent in the songs could have helped Douglass to imagine himself escaping from his enslavement before actually doing so, especially since mirror neurons relay goal-directed intentions. The songs potentially transmitted culture so powerful and sustaining that their legacy continues, as evidenced, for example, by the use of African American song to effect change by participants in the Civil Rights Movement.

Though the approaches of ethnomusicologists, neurologists and philosophers differ on the issue of music's relativity, all agree that music exists in every human culture.[20] Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl carefully explains, however, that "this musicality cannot really be tested with the use of concepts—intervals, rhythms—that are supposedly derived from no single culture's music and thus culturally neutral."[21] Put differently, every culture organizes sound—composer Edgard Varèse's succinct definition of music—but to attempt a standardized comparison of music across cultures

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[19] Douglass, *Narrative* 24; *My Bondage and My Freedom* 185.

[20] Notably, Sigmund Freud did not listen "to music voluntarily or for pleasure," declining to attend musical performances in Vienna and writing that "'some rationalistic, or perhaps analytic, turn of mind in me rebels against being moved by a thing without knowing why I am thus affected and what it is that affects me'" (Sacks, 292, 293). Given his status as a founder of psychoanalytic discourse, this begs the question of whether his emphasis on the intellectual (in the sense of non-feeling) and on language missed a crucial role of emotion in treating psychological disorders. Perhaps, however, he merely focused on different emotional routes, such as that of narrative. Music apparently moves Freud, but he seems to respond to his discomfort in not understanding its emotional sway by resisting it altogether. Sacks also catalogs the absence of music in the writings of Henry and William James as well as an "'almost lost taste for pictures or music'" reported by Charles Darwin later in life (292). All are renowned for their writings, interestingly, like Douglass. Darwin and Douglass lived roughly contemporaneously in the nineteenth century, preceding the James brothers and Freud by approximately thirty years. By contrast, the latters' contemporary Nietzsche, a pianist and composer himself, viewed music as "vitally important" and "believed that music was one of the arts which so sharpened our sense of *participation* in life that it gave meaning to life and made it worth living" (Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind* (New York: The Free Press, 1992) 150, emphasis mine). (For a comparison of Freud, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Jung's perspective on music, see Storr's *Music and the Mind*.) According to Storr, Nietzsche's view of art aligns with that inherent in Douglass's recounting of the songs of sorrow: it "could reconcile us with life rather than detach us from it" (157). In any case, one wonders if the relationship or lack thereof that these (and other) scholars had with music has influenced the "Western" tradition's relationship with music and language and if so, at the expense of the former.

[21] Nettl 57.

invites ethnocentrism.[22] Nettl nonetheless identifies a few commonalities that appear to be shared by most cultures, including

> the conception of music as an art that consists of distinct units of creativity, which can be identified, by place in ritual, by creator or performer, by opus number. One does not simply 'sing' but one sings *something* that has an identity. Thus, music is composed of artifacts, although cultures differ greatly in their view of what constitutes such an artifact.[23]

In composing the songs of sorrow, enslaved African Americans generated "artifacts" of their own making that served as confirmation of the existence of a musical culture distinct from that of those who oppressed them, a crucial step toward empowerment. The songs of sorrow resonated both individually and socially, reaffirming the group's cultural identity and bonds constructed by music, not enslavement.

In neurological terms, "our brains learn a kind of musical grammar that is specific to the music of our culture, just as we learn to speak the language of our culture."[24] Most children are "expert listeners" by age six, a result of "an extended period of acculturation, during which the infant takes in the music of the culture [into which] she is born."[25]

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[22] Levitin cites Varèse's definition of music as "'organized sound'" (14). Levitin also points out that "sound waves—molecules of air vibrating at various frequencies—do not themselves have pitch" (22). Rather, "sound is a mental image created in the brain in response to vibrating molecules . . . . but it is not pitch unless and until it is heard" (Levitin 24).

[23] Nettl 46-47.

[24] Levitin 108. Similarly, psychologist Diana Deutsch's research suggests that musical attunement is learned rather than innate. For example, a higher percentage of native Chinese speakers have perfect, or absolute, pitch than native English speakers due to the musicality of the Chinese language. (Absolute pitch involves associating a pitch with a specific note as most people can do more readily with color, having no need to hold red and yellow, for instance, next to one another to determine their relative color.) (Diana Deutsch, Trevor Henthorn, Elizabeth Marvin and HongShuai Xu, "Absolute Pitch among American and Chinese Conservatory Students: Prevalent Differences, and Evidence for a Speech-Related Critical Period" *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 119.2 (Feb. 2006): 719-722).

[25] Levitin 227. Levitin reveals his musical context through examples in his book, as does Sacks in his.

Levitin links this learned acculturation with identity, evidence of "the evolutionary idea of music as a vehicle for social bonding and societal cohesion. Music and musical preferences become a mark of personal and group identity and of distinction."[26] In the process of becoming expert listeners, children display a "preference for the music of their culture by age two" and that preference, coupled with music's ability to serve as a source of psychological safety, could be another important reason that Douglass draws strength from and finds emotional expression in the songs of sorrow, connecting them with culture and community.[27]

Although the element of surprise keeps a piece of music from being "emotionally flat and robotic," acculturated listeners anticipate certain aspects of a musical composition, such as rhythm, and this predictability evokes a sense of trust in those making music.[28] In a dynamic relationship that some researchers and music therapists liken to that of parent and child, listeners who feel musically secure can "surrender" to the experience emotionally without fear of being "exploited," as it appears that the singers "within the circle" do.[29] In other words, culture engenders comfort. Douglass suggests that, transitively, listeners can also detect unfamiliar or hostile soundscapes. His autobiographies record a distinction between soundscapes generated primarily by coercion and those created solely by choice. In *Life and Times*, for example, he compares the sounds demanded of slaves in surveilled settings with those more freely made in the

[26] Levitin 232.
[27] Levitin 230, 242.
[28] Levitin 173, 220, 242.
[29] Levitin 242. Psychoanalyst Gilbert Rose makes a Freudian argument that it is the infant-caregiver bond that song recreates (Gilbert J. Rose, *Between Couch and Piano: Psychoanalysis, Music, Art and Neuroscience* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004). Perhaps mirror neurons permit song to offer cultural constancy in a kind of substitution for the often unpredictable presence of permanent caregivers, such as Douglass's mother (and father). Maybe musical stability could be preserved and transmitted more securely than that of human relationships, made tentative by the cruel capriciousness of slavery.

woods, placing his contrasting description of the latter immediately prior to the songs of sorrow passage:

> Slaves were expected to sing as well as to work. A silent slave was not liked, either by masters or overseers. "*Make a noise there! Make a noise there!*" and "bear a hand," were words usually addressed to slaves when they were silent. This, and the natural disposition of the negro to make a noise in the world, may account for the almost constant singing among them when at their work. There was generally more or less singing among the teamsters, at all times. It was a means of telling the overseer, in the distance, where they were and what they were about. But on allowance days those commissioned to the Great House farm were peculiarly vocal.[30]

Indicating that it was "the natural disposition of the negro to make a noise in the world"—a nod to culture rather than to biology, Douglass refuses to cede complete power to slaveholders even while he depicts forced singing; in his mind, the slaves were, in part, being themselves even in captivity and exercising non-linguistic expressions of agency under the guise of obeying a command.[31] By contrast, in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, song freely emerges in fleeting moments of leisure catalogued soon after the songs of sorrow:

> The few minutes allowed them at dinner time, after partaking of their coarse repast, are variously spent. Some lie down on the "turning row," and go to sleep; others draw together, and talk; and others are at work with

[30] Douglass, *Life and Times* 502. A similar description also appears in *My Bondage and My Freedom* before the songs of sorrow passage, although in the present rather than past tense due to its publication prior to the Emancipation Proclamation (Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 184).
[31] Douglass, *Life and Times* 502.

> needle and thread, mending their tattered garments. Sometimes you may hear a wild, hoarse laugh arise from a circle, and often a song.[32]

Likewise, the songs of sorrow do not represent coerced sound, and the liminal space of the forest facilitates unrestricted music as well as movement in an unsurveilled setting, not unlike The Clearing in Morrison's *Beloved*.[33] In her novel published more than a century after Douglass's first two autobiographies, Morrison reimagines nineteenth-century spaces inhabited exclusively by African Americans as sites of profound cultural expression coupled with emotional release.

Human cultures consistently interweave music and movement, or, as Frederick Nietzsche puts it, "'we listen to music with our muscles.'"[34] Music acts as a conduit between the emotional and motor systems, so the context for the songs of sorrow is unsurprisingly, then, one of movement as the singers are traveling through the woods to the Great House Farm.[35] Douglass adds an overt reference to dancing to his description of the songs of sorrow in *My Bondage and My Freedom* as quoted above and in *Life and Times* as follows:

> The remark in the olden time was not unfrequently made, that slaves were the most contented and happy laborers in the world, and their dancing and

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[32] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 188. The circle is perhaps in a veiled reference to the ring shout and thereby dancing.

[33] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 184. Similarly, Douglass's Sabbath school met in unsurveilled spaces, also appearing to allow greater freedom and agency to Douglass and the class members. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass writes, "After getting the school cleverly into operation, the second time—holding it in the woods, behind the barn, and in the shade of trees—I succeeded in inducing a free colored man, who lived several miles from our house, to permit me to hold my school in a room at his house" (300). Even Douglass's descriptions of the trees and woods provide evidence that they represented shelter from the almost constance surveillance characteristic of slavery: "the shade of the trees" in *My Bondage and My Freedom* and the "dense old woods" in *Narrative* which become the "grand old woods" in *Life and Times* (*My Bondage and My Freedom* 300, *Narrative* 23, *Life and Times* 502).

[34] Sacks (xi).

[35] In evolutionary terms, "those of our ancestors who were endowed with an emotional system that was directly connected to their motor system could react more quickly, and thus live to reproduce and pass on those genes to another generation" (Levitin 183).

> singing were referred to in proof of this alleged fact; but it was a great mistake to suppose them happy because they sometimes made those joyful noises.[36]

Like song, dance was restricted on some plantations which might account for Douglass's withholding of this reference in *Narrative*.[37] Though the songs of sorrow accompany the work of procuring supplies rather than hard, physical labor in the fields under the panoptic gaze of an overseer, they exemplify antebellum work songs in their conjunction of music and movement with "a sense of collectivity and community."[38] Further, they borrow the sensibility of the work song that historian Lawrence Levine describes as, "in both form and function . . . a communal instrument. It allowed workers to blend their physical movements and psychic needs with those of other workers."[39] The songs exemplify the power of "rhythm and its entrainment of movement (and often emotion) . . . to 'move' people, in both senses of the word."[40]

In evolutionary terms, the ability to sing and dance is thought to have indicated physical prowess and psychological health whereby one could exhibit a sense of well-

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[36] Douglass, *Life and Times* 503.
[37] In *Culture on the Margins*, Jon Cruz notes that "any form of black culture that fell outside the emerging religious enclosure—work songs, 'secular' music, songs that accompanied dancing, and Africanist 'shouts'—qualified immediately as 'low,' 'sensual,' and 'lawless'" (105). Though Douglass refers to *Narrative* as "the best work of my life" in *Life and Times*, he recounts feeling pressured by white abolitionists to write the first book (Douglass, *Life and Times* 939). Differences between the first and third accounts suggest that he felt constrained by his patrons, and he credits the passage of time and repeal of slavery as contributing toward increased candidness in his later works.
[38] White and White write that "slaves accompanied seemingly every type of possible work with song" (xv). In addition, they note the distinctiveness of the cultural expressions as "time and again, whites watched almost uncomprehendingly as slaves used sound and coordinated bodily movements to turn work into performance" (White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery* 42).
[39] Levine 595. Douglass also writes of working in the fields with his co-conspirators while singing, in retrospect, so boisterously as to arouse suspicion before their first escape attempt. In *Beloved*, Morrison portrays a fictional work crew that kept on task while managing strong emotion through song heard but not understood by their oppressors.
[40] Sacks 246.

being and leisure beyond basic survival.[41] According to Levitin, "the sort of rhythmic dancing and music making that have characterized most music across the ages serves as a warranty of physical and mental fitness, perhaps even a warranty of reliability and conscientiousness (because . . . [that] expertise requires a particular kind of mental focus)."[42] Through the songs of sorrow, participants signal that, despite the trauma of slavery, they remain intact as persons. The songs affirm individual and group identity while simultaneously enhancing both, at once acceptance and aid. This perspective also advocates for a non-pathologizing perspective of African Americans in the context of a majority culture that can still pair race with disability.

The songs of sorrow passage appears in each autobiography before a scene in which Douglass refuses to start a hymn at overseer Edward Covey's "family devotions," as Douglass calls them in *Narrative*.[43] Yet David Messmer cites the latter incident as the pivotal moment at which the "abstract, representational discourse of music, not reading and writing . . . acts as the turning point in Douglass's open defiance of slavery."[44] Choosing this moment as defining rather than the songs of sorrow, however, identifies

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[41] Levitin 252.

[42] Levitin 254. In describing "an African musical context," John Michael Chernoff posits an alternative approach to "rhythmic conflict" that might read as Levitin's "particular kind of mental focus:" "'rhymthic conflict brings coolness to communication'. Coolness 'calls for mediated involvement rather than concentrated attention, collectedness of mind rather than self abandonment'" (White and White, "'Us Likes a Mixtery'" 420).

[43] Douglass, *Narrative* 57. In *Narrative*, Douglass writes about the songs of sorrow in Chapter II and about his refusal to start a hymn in Chapter X. The parallel passages about the songs of sorrow appear in Chapter VI in *My Bondage and My Freedom* as well as *Life and Times* while the paragraph about refusing to raise a hymn appears in Chapter XV in both *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Life and Times*. In each text, the sheer length of the passage about the songs far exceeds the space that he devotes to his refusal to sing—two to three pages versus one paragraph. The titles of the chapters also hint at the context of the two scenes. Douglass includes the songs of sorrow in a chapter called "Treatment of Slaves on Lloyd's Plantation" in *My Bondage and My Freedom* and subtitles the section, "The Singing of Slaves." He revises the chapter's framework and thereby its title in *Life and Times* to "A Child's Reasoning." Further, the chapter's subtitle loses the definite article and becomes "Singing of Slaves," a rhetorical shift that suggests slave songs are not monolithic but rather encompass a range of musical styles. The chapter title and subtitle for the later scene in which he refuses to sing remain the same in both *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Life and Times*: "Covey, the Negro Breaker" and "Family Worship," respectively.

[44] Messmer 6.

individual silence, not communal song, as Douglass's source of power. It also isolates an instance of soundless stasis in the presence of whites instead of music accompanied by movement in an all-black environment. Additionally, the songs of sorrow document ongoing resistance within an African American communal context.

Sound rather than silence—though the latter is still a form of resistance—yields insight leading to action for Douglass. He notes in *Narrative* that "my non-compliance [silent response to Covey's command] would almost always produce much confusion."[45] Being "a very poor singer himself," Covey could not comfortably assume Douglass's "duty of raising the hymn," a twice-daily task assigned to Douglass because his singing ability exceeded that of Covey.[46] Douglass's non-violent resistance disrupts the structure of power whenever he refuses to start the hymn and undermines Covey's seemingly pervasive sense of control not only by his "non-compliance" but also by the unpredictability with which he exercises his silence; Douglass turns instability—a hallmark of slavery—back onto Covey. According to Douglass's account in *Narrative*, Covey's "life was devoted to planning and perpetrating the grossest deceptions. Every thing he possessed in the shape of learning or religion, he made conform to his disposition to deceive. He seemed to think himself equal to deceiving the Almighty."[47] In the tradition of tricksters, Douglass deceives the deceiver. He understands that his non-compliance begins a power struggle from which Covey tries, less than successfully, to recover: "To show himself independent of me, he would start and stagger through

[45] Douglass, *Narrative* 57.
[46] Douglass, *Narrative* 57. Douglass's chapter title, "Family Worship," describes a religious practice that took often place in the morning and evening.
[47] Douglass, *Narrative* 57.

with his hymn in the most discordant manner."[48] The presence of Covey's family and other enslaved individuals might also exacerbate Covey's confusion. How can he maintain the illusion of authority when he can neither control Douglass nor competently accomplish the rejected task himself? In addition to resisting being forced to perform, Douglass also resists the very different circumstances of Covey's family devotions as compared with singing in the woods on allowance day. Douglass's definition of music varies greatly from that of Covey, the former featuring community members equally participating and the latter involving the antithesis of mutuality—coercion of an individual.

Since childhood, Douglass understood singing as well as silence—the aforementioned withholding of singing at Covey's house—to be forms of agency though he comes to understand their differences in sociological terms. He accessed food as a youth by singing to Lucretia Auld, a white woman on Colonel Lloyd's plantation. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, he writes that "when pretty severely pinched by hunger, I had a habit of singing, which the good lady very soon came to understand as a petition for a piece of bread. When I sung under Miss Lucretia's window, I was very apt to get well paid for my music."[49] The songs of sorrow differ from his serenades to Auld which he performed individually rather than as part of a group. Douglass aimed his earlier performance at an oppressor so that she would give him food, literally singing for his supper. The stakes go up and the kind of agency being deployed changes with the songs of sorrow which attempt a more complicated task both on behalf of and by a black/communal rather than white/individual audience. Douglass loses the naïveté of

[48] Douglass, *Narrative* 57.
[49] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 207.

youth that a piece of bread can remedy. Rather, he tracks a psychological, social and ethical shift that can no longer be addressed alone, much less by bread.

Douglass takes a calculated risk in emphasizing African Americans singing en masse as the publication of *Narrative* in 1845 and *My Bondage and My Freedom* in 1855 bookended "the moment of minstrelsy's greatest popularity (1846-1854)."[50] His acute awareness of minstrelsy's ubiquity likely influenced his depiction of African American performance, particularly musical performance, in both texts. Minstrelsy became so pervasive in American culture that, according to Eric Lott, "for a time in the late 1840s minstrelsy came to seem the most representative national art."[51] In *Love and Theft: Black Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, Lott posits that Douglass had "the clearest sense of any contemporary as to what was at stake in early minstrelsy—its limitations, possibilities, and ultimate importance" and recognized blackness not only as performative—"a matter of display or theatre," but also as a "potential source of political advantage."[52] Douglass calls on black minstrels to "cease to exaggerate the exaggerations of our enemies; and represent the colored man rather as he is" in his *North Star* review of "Gavitt's Original Ethiopian Serenaders."[53] If Douglass saw the potential in shaping the representation of blackness even in the context of minstrelsy, he might also have applied that conceit to framing the songs of sorrow, carefully distinguishing a musical genre distinct from minstrelsy in its emotional content as well as its audience. The songs of sorrow do not resemble minstrelsy's sardonic charade and, unlike minstrel

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[50] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 9.
[51] Lott 8.
[52] Lott 36.
[53] Frederick Douglass, "Gavitt's Original Ethiopian Serenaders," *The North Star*, 29 June 1849 in *Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Culture: A Multi-Media Archive*, ed. Stephen Railton, Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia, 2006. 12 June 2008. <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/minstrel/miar03at.html>.

shows, have no audience other than the singers. Douglass deemed the sustenance that he identified in African American communal song worth the risk of misinterpretation. He counterbalanced representing blackness, however, with the notion that empathy can be conveyed across cultures through song.

The purpose of the songs of sorrow also differs vastly from that of minstrelsy, whose illusions Douglass aims to shatter. The generative act of creating the songs of sorrow produces meaning whereas minstrelsy silences authentic expression. As Jon Cruz argues,

> if slaves were capable of revolting and rebelling, then they were certainly able to sing about the meaning of things and of the world they wished to change or leave. Meaning, not confusion, drives the strategies to convene, cultivate, and protect a clandestine sphere . . . . Meaning is both the *impetus* and the *outcome*, it is the hermeneutic circle, of the process of such song-making. Song-making, after all, was central to the slaves' abilities to produce a discursive grasp of slavery, despite the fact that such collective activity and communal expression, such cultural work, operated within the context of surveillance, and in many cases, perpetual repression.[54]

Douglass's deployment of the songs "suggests the possibility of a slave subjectivity that does not depend on writing either for its existence or for its participation in a network of resistance," according to Messmer.[55] Messmer's language—specifically, the use of the word "network"—encodes a key point that is largely absent from critical

[54] Jon Cruz, "Historicizing the American Cultural Turn" *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4.3 (August 2001: 305-323) 312.
[55] Messmer 10.

discussion of Douglass and the songs of sorrow. The songs exemplify a subjectivity that is simultaneously created by individuals and a community. For Douglass, individual subjectivity and the communal form by way of mutual construction. Desmond Tutu identifies a corresponding "African conception of humanity known, in the Nguni languages, as *ubuntu*" which "means humaneness and represents a way of perceiving community, that a person is a person through other people, that humanity resides in mutual respect and interconnectedness."[56] The idea of a mutually constructing subjectivity, or plural personhood, holds the key to both the songs and the agency Douglass gained through them.

Beginning with *Narrative*, Douglass further develops his conception of plural personhood in his meditations on the Sabbath school class that he taught. In a nineteenth-century society stratified by slavery, race, class and gender, Douglass depicts a radically egalitarian group as well as leadership style. He outlines an interdependence between individual and group:

> We were linked and interlinked with each other. I loved them with a love stronger than any thing I have experienced since.[57] It is sometimes said that we slaves do not love and confide in each other. In answer to this assertion, I can say, I never loved any or confided in any people more than

[56] Lynne Duke, "Rev'd Up; Archbishop Desmond Tutu Looks Back, Definitely Not in Anger" *Washington Post* 9 Oct. 2006: C08. Yet another iteration of the concept is Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision in which all people "are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly" (Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," *Why We Can't Wait*, 1963, 1964 (New York: Signet Classic, 2000) 65). Gwendolyn Brooks also gives it voice in her poem "Paul Robeson" in which she imagines Robeson expressing, via a synthesis of music and language, "Warning, in music-words/devout and large,/that we are each other's/harvest:/we are each other's/business:/we are each other's/magnitude and bond" (Gwendolyn Brooks, *Family Pictures* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1993) 19).

[57] Critics note that Douglass's narratives make scant reference to his wives; however, Douglass concludes *Life and Times* by noting that it records his public life. Though he hints at a private life untold, he also receives criticism for bifurcation of the two.

> my fellow slaves. . . . I believe we would have died for each other. We never undertook to do any thing, of any importance, without a mutual consultation. We never moved separately. We were one; and as much so by our tempers and dispositions, as by the mutual hardships to which we were necessarily subjected by our condition as slaves . . . . We met often, and consulted frequently, and told our hopes and fears, recounted the difficulties, real and imagined, which we should be called on to meet. At times we were almost disposed to give up, and try to content ourselves with our wretched lot; at others, we were firm and unbending in our determination to go.[58]

In *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Life and Times*, he adds nearly identical statements qualifying the group's coherence and mutual trust: "We were generally a unit, and moved together. Thoughts and sentiments were exchanged between us which might well have been considered incendiary had they been known by our masters."[59]

Douglass refers to the group in terms of motion and emotion in each passage. Syntactically, he shifts the negatively framed "we never moved separately" in *Narrative* to the positively stated "we moved together" in his latter two autobiographies; and, shared emotion contributes to the group's connectedness and intimacy, serving, like the songs, as a motivating force.[60] While Douglass works to sway Henry and John Harris to join him in escaping from slavery, he notes in *My Bondage and My Freedom* that "our feelings were more alike than our opinions. All, however, were ready to act, when a feasible plan should be proposed. 'Show us *how* the thing is to be done, said they, 'and

[58] Douglass, *Narrative* 72-73.
[59] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 301, *Life and Times* 601-602.
[60] Douglass, *Narrative* 72, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 301, *Life and Times* 601.

all else is clear.'"[61] Douglass emphasizes the importance of shared feelings, suggesting that mutually held emotions can co-exist with the group's divergent opinions (a view that informs his paradigm for a democratic nation). The shared sentiments also lead to action. The combination of intense feeling and communal action "within the circle" of the Sabbath school class inspires an escape attempt, another non-linguistic expression of agency that marks a major decision in Douglass's life. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass writes that a renewed abhorrence of slavery and the beginning of a new year

> drove from me all thoughts of making the best of my lot, and welcomed only such thoughts as led me away from the house of bondage. The intense desire, now felt, *to be free*, quickened by my present favorable circumstances, brought me to the determination to act, as well as to think and speak. Accordingly, at the beginning of this year 1836, I took upon me a solemn vow, that the year which had now dawned upon me should not close, without witnessing an earnest attempt, on my part, to gain my liberty.[62]

Notably, Douglass lists the non-linguistic "act" before "think" and, lastly, "speak" as crucial keys in his resolve to obtain freedom.[63] He repeats the passage in *Life and Times*, but italicizes "act" rather than "to be free," as if to emphasize the dependency of freedom on action while further contrasting the potential of acting with that of thinking and

[61] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 306 and repeated except for the italicization of "how" in *Life and Times* 605.
[62] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 305.
[63] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 305.

speaking.[64] Given Douglass's understanding of performance, a double entendre might also be at work; if blackness can be performative, perhaps freedom can be, also.

Consistent with earlier moments in the text, Douglass does not equate literacy with freedom. In *Narrative*, he attributes a Sabbath school class member's emancipation to his own unqualified "agency," not literacy.[65] In addition, he works to convince the class to seek freedom by oral persuasion although he taught them to read. Similarly, just as it was not "volumes of philosophy" that motivated his pursuit of freedom, it was not a speech on the abolitionist circuit that marked his oratorical debut.[66] As the songs of sorrow brought about realization of slavery's horrors, Douglass reports in *My Bondage and My Freedom* that his efforts to convince Henry and John Harris of the same "began my public speaking."[67] Though public speaking falls within the category of language, Douglass again locates this beginning—performance freely given rather than proscribed by abolitionists—within an African American social context and positions himself within an African American oral tradition.

By contrast, Douglass feels constrained on the abolitionist speaking circuit. In *Narrative*, he expresses initial reluctance at testifying about his experience as a slave, calling it "a severe cross."[68] Nevertheless, he chooses his timing even under duress: "I felt myself a slave, and the idea of speaking to white people weighed me down. I spoke but a few moments, when I felt a degree of freedom."[69] At first, his abolitionist sponsors chide him for his improvisational tendencies, but also for having opinions of his own.

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[64] Douglass, *Life and Times* 604-605.
[65] Douglass writes, "And I have the happiness to know, that several of those who came to Sabbath school learned how to read; and that one, at least, is now free through my agency" (*Narrative* 72).
[66] Douglass, *Narrative* 24.
[67] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 306.
[68] Douglass, *Narrative* 96.
[69] Douglass, *Narrative* 96.

They ask for facts only, but Douglass rebels against their attempted strictures. He depicts a scene reminiscent of his refusal to start the hymn at Covey's family devotions in *My Bondage and My Freedom*:

> So also said Friend George Foster, who always wished to pin me down to my simple narrative. "Give us the facts," said Collins, "we will take care of the philosophy." Just here arose some embarrassment. It was impossible for me to repeat the same old story month after month, and to keep up my interest in it. It was new to the people, it is true, but it was an old story to me; and to go through with it night after night, was a task altogether too mechanical for my nature. "Tell your story, Frederick," would whisper my then revered friend, William Lloyd Garrison, as I stepped upon the platform. I could not always obey, for I was now reading and thinking. New views of the subject were presented to my mind. It did not entirely satisfy me to *narrate* wrongs; I felt like *denouncing* them. I could not always curb my moral indignation for the perpetrators of slaveholding villainy, long enough for a circumstantial statement of the facts which I felt almost everybody must know. Besides, I was growing, and needed room.[70]

Notably, anger pushes Douglass beyond narrative, which can neither describe slavery nor nourish Douglass's growth, unlike unsurveilled space whose accessibility Douglass again cites as critically important.

Douglass also recounts learning to read as involving a communal effort; however, his acquisition of written literacy differs in some ways from the communal agency that he

[70] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 367.

locates in the songs of sorrow and Sabbath school class. Tacitly acknowledging the aid of others in *Narrative*, he does not state that he taught himself to read and write, but rather that he "succeeded in learning to read and write."[71] He credits Hugh Auld, his master in Baltimore, for his motivation, borne out of resistance to Auld's "bitter opposition" to his literacy.[72] In addition, he acknowledges the "kindly aid" of Sophia Auld, his Baltimore mistress, who taught him the alphabet which "had given me the *inch*, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the *ell*."[73] He took the ell by "making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street" and trading them bread for reading lessons.[74] He models the sensibility of the communal exchange exemplified by the songs of sorrow though he gains skills in this instance not "within the circle" but outside of an African American context of mutuality. The expression of emotion is also notably absent, disconnected yet again from written language.

As with freedom, Douglass does not liken literacy to knowledge. He does not use the term "literate," though critical discourse long associates him with one of its definitions. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists as the third meaning of the word "literate," "one who can read and write."[75] The first definition, "a liberally educated or learned person," evokes a more expansive sense of literacy closer to Douglass's even

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[71] Douglass, *Narrative* 41. A contemporary story in *The Washington Post* remembers Douglass's achievement of literacy conventionally, as more narrowly autodidactic (and, interestingly, invites readers to experience emotion inspired by Douglass): "And, of course, feel free to be moved by the man himself, who taught himself to read and write, escaped from slavery at 20 and went on to publish an abolitionist newspaper, write a few books, advise President Lincoln, speak out for women's rights and rouse the masses with speeches on world peace and the rights of the poor" (Christina Breda Antoniades, "Peaceful Locales for Relaxing and Reflecting" *Washington Post* 16 March 2008: N04).
[72] Douglass, *Narrative* 38.
[73] Douglass, *Narrative* 38, 40.
[74] Douglass, *Narrative* 41.
[75] "Literate," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Gelman Library, George Washington University, 14 March 2008, <http://dictionary.oed.com/>.

broader definition.[76] Written literacy becomes, in Douglass's chapter titles, another source of knowledge among many, not the exclusive one. In tandem with their length and order—moving later in each version, chapter titles also serve to critique the role of literacy.[77] Chapter X in *My Bondage and My Freedom* is entitled "Life in Baltimore." Only a subheading within the chapter, "Commencement of Learning to Read—Why Discontinued," gestures toward and away from literacy, again in a disintegrative way. He breaks the much shorter saga into two chapters in *Life and Times*: "Learning to Read" (Chapter X) and "Growing in Knowledge" (Chapter XI), the latter title encompassing non-linguistic modes of understanding. Finally, his designation of a Baltimore shipyard as his "school for eight months" reinforces his wide-ranging conceptualization of knowledge and revises the convention of a traditional educational institution as a place in which to gain it.[78]

Douglass advocates for what cognitive scientist William Benzon contends that "music allows us, for the duration" to do: "to radically reconceive and reconstruct our relationship with the world."[79] Implicit in Douglass's citation of non-linguistic expression as a catalyst for transformation is Benzon's philosophical starting point that takes music as its "central activity."[80] In revising Descartes's famous quote to "we sing and dance, therefore we are," Benzon proposes a shift in focus to "a group of people

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[76] "Literate," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.
[77] The placement of his tale of literacy reflects his autobiographies becoming successively less constrained by white abolitionists. The story appears in Chapter VII in *Narrative*, whereas it moves to chapters X and X and XI, respectively, in the latter two books. (*Narrative* does not use chapter titles.)
[78] Douglass, *Narrative* 80.
[79] William L. Benzon, *Beethoven's Anvil: Music in Mind and Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2001) 13. Likewise, White and White observe in *The Sounds of Slavery* that the "preference of many African American slaves for what . . . to many . . . whites, seemed disjunctive, nonsequential song lyrics reflected, in part, the exacting demands of lyric improvisation. It also hinted at something as deep-seated as a different way of making sense of the world" (71).
[80] Benzon 19.

acting together to express emotion" rather than "the isolated self in search of the external world."[81] Music involves a different way of being than language, a way of being that, for Douglass, necessarily involves others.

Douglass returns over and over to his experience of making music in a group. Music therapist Helen Odell-Miller's nuanced description of how individuals improvise within a music therapy group parallels Douglass's depiction of the songs of sorrow:

> What has always struck me as unique to music therapy, particularly in group work, is that in a group music therapy improvisation people can literally all "talk" at once. This is a very different aspect of relating from that of relating through words, when it is difficult to understand or hear another if a group of people are speaking simultaneously. In music therapy, the very act of playing music all at the same time allows something to be expressed about the group as a whole—in fact, the joint sounds could be said to link together and express something of the essential dynamic within the group. This can be very potent, both in group and individual work.[82]

Through improvisation, Odell-Miller's music therapy group employs Sigmund Freud's technique of free association, only non-linguistically. In *The Dynamics of Transference*, Freud explains that free association is "the fundamental rule of psycho-analysis which lays it down that whatever comes into one's head must be reported without criticizing

[81] Benzon 18-19.
[82] Helen Odell-Miller, "Music Therapy and Its Relationship to Psychoanalysis" in *Where Analysis Meets the Arts: The Integration of the Arts Therapies with Psychoanalytic Theory*, eds. Yvonne Searle and Isabelle Streng (New York: Karnac Books, 2001: 127-152) 139.

it."[83] Originally a substitute for hypnosis, Freud found that free association disinhibited patients from suppressing thoughts and feelings in their unconscious that needed to be expressed to facilitate healing, thus becoming essential to the therapeutic process. Group music therapy allows multiple, free-associating voices to be heard simultaneously, creating polyphony—a musical term that Mikhail Bakhtin borrows to describe multi-vocal, or polyphonic, texts. Bakhtin writes in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* that, in Dostoevsky's novels, he finds

> *a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices* . . . . What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event.[84]

As in the music therapy group, the multiple voices of the songs of sorrow blend a Bakhtinian polyphony with musical improvisation akin to psychoanalysis' free association resulting in the potential for transformation on both personal and social levels. Stated differently, in Douglass's description, individual voices find simultaneous expression; their uncensored meditations discover feelings in a fluency similar to that of psychoanalytic narratives though unfettered by language: "The thought that came up,

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[83] Sigmund Freud, *The Dynamics of Transference* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XII*. Trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1991: 97-108) 107.

[84] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 6, emphasis in original. He goes to on state: "The essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order than in homophony. If one is to talk about individual will, then it is precisely in polyphony that a combination of several individual wills takes place, that the boundaries of the individual will can be in principle exceeded. One could put it this way: the artistic will of polyphony is a will to combine many wills, a will to the event" (Bakhtin, 21).

came out—if not in the word, in the sound."[85] The combined vocalizations of individuals result in both intra- and interpersonal dialogue, and the group as a whole affirms and redefines its identity non-linguistically, "express[ing] something of the essential dynamic within the group."[86] Hence, the songs are dialogic in Bakhtin's sense as they allow multiple voices not only to be heard, but to be heard in conversation with one another, and are polyphonic in their simultaneity.

In a remarkable parallel to Odell-Miller's language, Levine writes that antebellum spirituals

> testify to . . . a strong sense of community. The overriding antiphonal structure of the spirituals—the call-and-response pattern . . . placed individuals in continual dialogue with each other. The structure of their music presented slaves with an outlet for individual feelings even while it continually drew them back into the communal presence and permitted them the comfort of basking in the warmth of the shared assumptions that permeated slave songs.[87]

As with Odell-Miller's group in which "people can literally all 'talk' at once," songs sung by enslaved African Americans could "'overlap . . . in such degree that at no time is there any complete pause,'" as William Francis Allen observed in 1867.[88] White and White explain further in *The Sounds of Slavery* that "overlapping created thicker sonic textures and a more complex interweaving of rhythms, characteristics that . . . rendered slave

[85] Douglass, *Narrative* 23.
[86] Odell-Miller 139.
[87] Levine 589.
[88] White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery* 34-35.

singing virtually impossible to notate," again defying language.[89] They cite other nineteenth-century listeners who, "listening for harmony . . . heard only heterophony, as voices were pitched in relation to, and conversation with, other voices, weaving melodic and tonal improvisations into the fabric of sound."[90] Like Odell-Miller and Levine, neurologist Oliver Sacks recognizes the social aspect of music as fundamentally important. When his patients experience music therapy in a group setting, "a sense of community takes hold, and these patients who seemed incorrigibly isolated by their disease and dementia are able, at least for a while, to recognize and bond with others."[91] Although the source of isolation differs, in antebellum slavery, the often temporary opportunity to become a community through song—as on allowance day each month in Douglass's experience—offered an antidote to alienation.[92]

The joint presence of African American music and a social setting plays an integral role in the illustration with which Morrison begins *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, a work of literary criticism.[93] She cites a scene from Marie Cardinal's autobiographical novel, *The Words to Say It*, that exemplifies the "Africanist presence" that Morrison goes on to theorize in her book, originally a series of lectures delivered at Harvard University. Cardinal, a white, Algerian-born Frenchwoman, describes her first anxiety attack which occurs during a Louis Armstrong concert. The music and audience overwhelm her to the point that she thinks she cannot

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[89] White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery* 34-35. To listen to examples of songs discussed in *The Sounds of Slavery*, visit <http://www.beacon.org/soundsofslavery> for tracks from the CD originally published with the book.
[90] White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery* 36.
[91] Sacks 344-345.
[92] Sacks 344.
[93] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

breathe and so flees from the performance. She finds herself "'gripped by panic at the idea of dying there in the middle of spasms, stomping feet and the crowd howling.'"[94]

The involvement of music in this passage—specifically jazz, considered by many to be both the quintessential African American and American musical form—is not lost on Morrison; she wonders whether "an Edith Piaf concert or a Dvorak composition have had the same effect?"[95] She focuses, however, on the presence of blackness more so than music in her commentary about Cardinal's work, connecting it to other examples that do not necessarily include music and movement. Yet experiencing music made by an African American (by a group, counting Armstrong's band) in a social setting composed the context of Cardinal's crisis. The audience was not passive either, but responding to the music—in keeping with both culture and evolution—with "'stomping feet'" and "'howling.'"[96]

The source for many nineteenth-century accounts of songs sung by African Americans comes from "literature not written by them" that cites a similar cultural disjuncture and sometimes also a transformative experience. The disjuncture dates to antebellum "sounds of slavery," products of African American soundscapes that could come into contact with white soundscapes jarringly.[97] The divergence also followed geographical lines to which Douglass alludes; for example, he notes in *Narrative* and *Life*

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[94] Morrison, *Playing* vii.
[95] Morrison, *Playing* viii.
[96] Morrison, *Playing* vii. Levitin explains, "The polite listening response, in which music has become an entirely cerebral experience (even music's emotions are meant, in the classical tradition, to be felt internally and not to cause a physical outburst) is counter to our evolutionary history. Children often show the reaction that is true to our nature: Even at classical music concerts they sway and shout and generally participate when they feel like it. We have to train them to behave 'civilized'" (258).
[97] White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery*. According to White and White, black and white soundscapes also mutually influenced one another and some soundscapes overlapped such that they could not be parsed in terms of race.

and Times that northern perceptions of songs sung by slaves as indications of happiness contrasted with his interpretation of them as evidence of profound unhappiness.[98]

Douglass, too, deploys the language of difference to depict African American song; however, his conception holds another meaning than that of outsiders. In *Narrative*, he begins the paragraph about the songs of sorrow by saying that "the slaves selected to go to the Great House Farm . . . were peculiarly enthusiastic" while in *My Bondage and My Freedom* he describes them as "peculiarly excited and noisy."[99] In *Life and Times*, he states specifically that the singers "were peculiarly vocal," finally qualifying the sound itself with the adverb.[100] "Peculiar" in this instance is not pejorative, but rather marks difference in the sense of uniqueness, again affirming the existence of African American cultural expression. Douglass's use of the term endorses the songs as the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines peculiar: "distinguished in nature, character, or attributes from others; unlike others, *sui generis*; special, remarkable; distinctive."[101] The words "peculiar" and "wild" have variable meanings such that they almost become coded language for Douglass. Like the songs, those "within the circle" understand them to connote a difference that is culturally specific, while external observers infer foreignness associated with an invented "other." In none of his autobiographies does Douglass use "weird" or "strange" to describe the songs, language

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[98] In *Narrative*, he writes, "I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy" (Douglass, *Narrative* 24). He writes in *Life and Times*, "I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of these songs would have done more to impress the good people of the north with the soul-crushing character of slavery than whole volumes exposing the physical cruelties of the slave system; for the heart has no language like song" (Douglass, *Life and Times* 502).

[99] Douglass, *Narrative* 23, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 184.

[100] Douglass, *Life and Times*, 502.

[101] "Peculiar," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. The entry notes that the word's first definition (cited above) was "in later use coloured by sense A.5:" "singular, unusual, strange, odd."

that appears in many accounts of African American slave songs by contemporary white observers.[102] Douglass negotiates the shared and divergent territory of the songs as familiar and unfamiliar as he attempts to demonstrate the existence of a distinct African American musical tradition and at the same time prevent readers from hearing the songs as meaninglessly alien to their own experience which might threaten the songs' potential as vehicles for empathy.

One could also think of Douglass's use of "peculiar" in the manner of an anthropologist who self-reflexively situates himself in relation to the songs and yet also provides insight into them as social practices.[103] He applies "peculiar" in other contexts within his autobiographies that suggest he does not reserve the word exclusively for the songs or even for African American culture. For example, in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, he writes that overseer Austin Gore "possessed, to a large extent, the peculiar characteristics of his class," exposing slavery as a social construct.[104] However, he also qualifies the ash cake, a variety of bread made by slaves, with the term when describing the meager diet of enslaved African Americans in the same text: "The surface of this peculiar bread is covered with ashes."[105] Closely following the songs of sorrow passage within the same chapter, he records in ethnographic detail this African American foodway, paying homage to the resourcefulness with which minimal materials become functional cultural expression. As aforementioned, the paragraph refers to other forms of

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[102] Similar to Cardinal's account, antebellum written records of the era document an Africanist presence in which "whites continued to use words such as 'wild' or 'strange' to describe the sounds that they had heard, but they often acknowledged the haunting power of what had been revealed to them" (White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery* 18).

[103] Cruz believes that Douglass's autobiographies "gave white abolitionists authentic insight that was also politically flattering knowledge," and, in lending abolitionists a kind of Rosetta Stone to black culture, Douglass displays his skills as "a superb practitioner of cultural politics" ("Historicizing" 312, 313).

[104] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 199. A similarly worded statement appears in *Life and Times* on page 513.

[105] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 188.

expression in which, despite ill treatment and slim rations, African Americans continue to engage, including conversation, sewing, laughing and singing.[106]

In 1863, northerner George Hepworth attended a church service in Carrollton, Louisiana, that impacted him emotionally somewhat like the songs of sorrow did for Douglass. White and White recount his experience in *The Sounds of Slavery*:

> As the "weird chorus rose a little above, and then fell a little below, the key-note," however, Hepworth was suddenly "overcome by real sadness and depression of soul which it seemed to symbolize." Later, he recalled, at the conclusion of a prayer delivered by an old man, "the whole audience swayed back and forward in their seats, and uttered in perfect harmony a sound like that caused by prolonging the letter 'm' with the lips closed. One or two had begun this wild, mournful chorus, but in an instant all joined in, and the sound swelled upwards and downwards like waves of the sea."
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> Part of what Hepworth described here—the "mournful, dirge-like expression of sorrow"—was probably a type of congregational moaning, a very deep form of worship, in which it was felt that words were no longer needed. Some slaves clearly believed that moaning, as well as shouting, was a prerequisite for redemption.[107]

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[106] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 188.

[107] White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery* 101-102. They also quote "former Louisiana slave Elizabeth Ross Hite" (again linking the prohibition of sound with the agency found in expressing it) whose "master 'didn't want us shoutin' and moanin' all day long,' but, she declared emphatically, 'you gotta shout and you gotta moan if you wants to be saved'" (102). Additionally, Hepworth's aquatic description again brings to mind the "wave of sound" made by the thirty women in Morrison's *Beloved* as well as Freud's meditation on religion as an "oceanic feeling" in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Morrison 26; Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* Trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989) 36).

As earlier mentioned, "'music transforms experience'" in every human culture, a phenomenon that Nettl connects with the "supernatural" as "all known cultures accompany religious activity with music."[108] Douglass associates prayer with the songs whose power indeed seems to lie in transforming experience, including his.[109] A century later, the alchemical mixture, or mixtery, of music and movement also has a transformative effect on Cardinal as her panic attack precipitates a journey of self-discovery. However, Cardinal first experiences fear and psychological rupture in her encounter whereas Douglass and other enslaved persons find psychological release and solace. Like the moaning described by Hepworth, sound functions as part of a redemptive process in the quest for emancipation from slavery in Douglass's account, a tradition that Morrison continues in *Beloved*. Again, Hepworth's description follows the formula of communal song leading to the expression of emotion, and, as White and White note, it eschews the need for language.

Music seems to be implicated in subjectivity in a way that language is not, in part, because the "brain's music system appears to operate with functional independence from the language system."[110] Neuroscientists, therefore, can observe persons seemingly without access to certain brain functions, such as language or memory, who retain their musical abilities in order to determine how the brain works in their absence and, by

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[108] Nettl 47.

[109] In his first two accounts of the songs of sorrows, Douglass writes, "Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains" (*Narrative* 24; *My Bondage and My Freedom* 185). In all three versions, he includes a variation of the following sentence: "They breathed the prayer and complaint of souls overflowing with bitterest anguish" (Douglass, *Life and Times* 503).

[110] Levitin 127. Levitin also notes that "music and language do, in fact, share some common neural resources and yet have independent pathways as well" (127). In addition, "music predates agriculture in the history of our species. We can say, conservatively, that there is no tangible evidence that language preceded music. In fact, the physical evidence suggests the contrary" (Levitin 256). Musical instruments, such as the fifty-thousand-year-old Slovenian bone flute, "are among the oldest human-made artifacts we have found . . . . The archaeological record shows an uninterrupted record of music making everywhere we find humans, and in every era. And, of course, singing most probably predated flutes as well" (Levitin 256).

deductive reasoning, in their presence. For example, persons with dementia often respond to music even if they are unresponsive to other stimuli. Persons who might not know their names anymore or recognize the faces of loved ones reemerge as distinct individuals in the presence of music. The power of music is so strong that they react, revealing that "there is still a self to be called upon, even if music, and only music, can do the calling."[111] Likewise, for persons

> with aphasia, the inability to communicate verbally may be almost unbearably frustrating and isolating; to make matters worse, they are often treated by others as idiots, almost as nonpersons, because they cannot speak. Much of this can change with the discovery that such patients can *sing*—sing not only tunes, but the words of operas, hymns, or songs. Suddenly their disability, their cut-offness, seems much less—and though singing is not propositional communication, it is very basic existential communication. It not only says, 'I am alive, I am here,' but may express thoughts and feelings that cannot be expressed, at this point, by speech.[112]

Slaveholders' attempts to deny memory and limit language among enslaved African Americans mimicked these neurological conditions. Douglass renders slavery as "soul-crushing," a system which metaphorically, if not also psychologically, created situations in which persons might feel silenced, isolated and powerless.[113] Some enslaved African Americans who experienced restrictions on language imposed by slaveholders circumvented them with song, announcing their human existence in a

[111] Sacks 346.
[112] Sacks 215-216.
[113] Douglass, *Life and Times* 502.

system that considered them property.[114] Perhaps for them, as for Sacks's amnesic patient, Woody,

> the act of singing is important in itself. Finding, remembering anew that he *can* sing is profoundly reassuring to Woody, as the exercise of any skill or competence must be—and it can stimulate his feelings, his imagination, his sense of humor and creativity, and his sense of identity as nothing else can. It can enliven him, calm him, focus and engage him. It can give him back to himself.[115]

The prohibition of singing on some plantations alludes to music's power. Even those who were not restricted from singing, like Douglass, could and did assert their denied humanity through the "existential communication" of song.[116]

If songs "enliven" enslaved persons as Sacks suggests that music enlivens his patients, they restore a sense of selfhood, identity and community to those treated within the system of slavery, like persons with aphasia sometimes are in Sacks's experience, "almost as nonpersons."[117] However, while singing could serve as a source of collective and personal empowerment and a method of resistance, it

> does not mean that it necessarily led to or even called for any tangible and easily identifiable protest, but rather that it served as a mechanism by which American Blacks could be relatively open in a society that rarely

[114] A former slave from Memphis testified to employing this strategy: "'You want to say something . . . (and you know how we was situated, so we couldn't say or do a lot of things we wanted to), and so you sing it'" (Levine 595). In addition, a former slave from Alabama reported: "'They didn't allow us to sing on our plantation,'" declared . . . Alice Sewell, who was just fourteen when the war ended "'. . . 'cause if we did we['d] just sing ourselves happy and get to shouting and that would settle the work'" (White and White 55). Sewell's comments also echo Douglass's observation about slaves singing to make themselves happy.
[115] Sacks 344.
[116] Sacks 215.
[117] Sacks 344, 215.

> accorded them that privilege, could communicate this candor to others whom they would in no other way be able to reach, and could assert their own individuality, aspirations, and sense of being in a repressive society structured to prevent such affirmations.[118]

Douglass indicates that, in music and community, he and others found resources to wrest power from a seemingly powerless position. The concept that song created by an African American community could provide sustenance in such an ordinary, yet extraordinary, way suggests that survival even under extreme duress can become more possible as a result of seemingly small, often recurring gestures. Morrison carries out this idea in *Beloved*, for example, when Sethe, an African American woman enslaved by Kentucky farmers, brings salsify or myrtle into the kitchen daily in order to shift her outlook so that she can stand working in the Sweet Home kitchen, a place that is neither sweet nor home.[119] The gesture signifies on Douglass putting a root in his pocket at the advice of Sandy Jenkins who claims that it will prevent Douglass from being whipped by anyone, a fundamentally different approach to Morrison's and one that Douglass tries and soon abandons in favor of a strategy more like Sethe's.[120] Sandy looks to an inanimate object to offer security whereas the source of Sethe's strength is human agency. Morrison does not pretend that the flowers themselves shield Sethe. Instead, like singing for Douglass, the non-linguistic action—"if she picked some pretty growing thing and took it with her"—alters Sethe's imaginative world enough to make it momentarily

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[118] Levine 587-588.
[119] Morrison writes, ". . . [S]he who had to bring a fistful of salsify into Mrs. Garner's kitchen every day just to be able to work in it, feel like some part of it was hers, because she wanted to love the work she did, to take the ugly out of it and the only way she could feel at home on Sweet Home was if she picked some pretty growing thing and took it with her" (*Beloved* 22).
[120] In *Life and Times*, Douglass refers to Sandy parenthetically as "of the root-preventative memory" (599).

habitable.[121] Morrison emphasizes the necessity of taking this step repeatedly because "the day that she forgot was the day butter wouldn't come or the brine in the barrel blistered her arms."[122]

Likewise, readers might travel quickly from Douglass's enslavement to his escape, but the sense of collapsed time results more from the narrative than from the actual sequence of events. Levitin explains that "the most important way that music differs from visual art is that it is manifested over time."[123] Music activates regions in the brain associated with processing structure "when that structure is conveyed over time."[124] Sign language also activates these regions which respond to "sight—to the visual organization of words."[125] For Douglass, freedom "was heard in every sound, and seen in every thing."[126] His version of freedom, activated aurally and visually, also manifests itself over time. While the songs of sorrow motivate Douglass when he was enslaved on Colonel Lloyd's plantation, his successful escape occurs more than a decade later. He subconsciously sees a structure of, or the possibility of structuring, freedom that unfolds not unlike a piece of music.

In addition to its manifestation over time, music might be a particularly effective structural model for freedom, given that the singers of the songs of sorrow composed the

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[121] Morrison, *Beloved* 22.
[122] Morrison, *Beloved* 22.
[123] Levitin 125.
[124] Levitin 130.
[125] Levitin 130.
[126] Douglass, *Narrative* 43. "The silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness. Freedom now appeared, to disappear no more forever. It was heard in every sound, and seen in every thing . . . . I saw nothing without seeing it, I heard nothing without hearing it, and felt nothing without feeling it. It looked from every star, it smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind, and moved in every storm" (Douglass, *Narrative* 42-43).

music that they sang.[127] According to Douglass's account in *Narrative*, the singers "would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune."[128] As mentioned earlier, only within the last five hundred years in "contemporary Western society" have expert performers played music for audiences who listen rather than everyone making music and moving simultaneously.[129] Douglass wants his readers to participate in his texts by using their imaginations—and possibly even memories for some nineteenth-century readers. He constructs the texts similarly to the songs of sorrow and Sabbath school class, in that their meaning can form mutually—through dialogues between author and reader that also include the voices of the singers, for example. He invites readers to listen to the songs and be transformed by them, just as he was. His conception of song as a communal creation allows him to signify on written language and reconceive it as a social space that can attempt to represent non-linguistic media and alternative renditions of reality.

While writing about the songs years later, Douglass reports that "an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek," giving credence to research that suggests imagining music generates almost as strong a neurological response as actually

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[127] Interestingly, "the structure in music requires both halves of the brain, while attending to the structure in language only requires the left half;" perhaps this is another subtle clue, if only symbolically, why persons experience music as restorative—reunifying their whole selves (Levitin, 130).

[128] Douglass, *Narrative* 23.

[129] Levitin 194, 257. Levitin writes, "The arguments against music as an [evolutionary] adaptation consider music only as disembodied sound, and moreover, as performed by an expert class for an audience. But it is only in the last five hundred years that music has become a spectator activity—the thought of a musical concert in which a class of 'experts' performed for an appreciative audience was virtually unknown throughout our history as a species. And it has only been in the last hundred years or so that the ties between musical sound and human movement have been minimized. The embodied nature of music, the indivisibility of movement and sound, the anthropologist John Blacking writes, characterizes music across cultures and across times. Most of us would be shocked if audience members at a symphonic concert got out of their chairs, whooped, hollered, and danced as was de rigeur at a James Brown concert. But the reaction to James Brown is certainly closer to our true nature" (257-258). (Interestingly, Levitin selects a performance by an African American musician to illustrate the connection between movement and music.)

listening to it.[130] Levitin, among other scientists, theorizes that music and memory's intimate relationship is due, in part, to the existence of a "multiple-trace memory model" in which the brain functions like a complicated combination lock.[131] Our brains remember stored memories by "finding the right cue to access the memory and properly configure our neural circuits."[132] Somewhat like being able to look up a book by subject, author, title and call number in a library catalog,

> the multiple-trace memory models assume that context is encoded along with memory traces, the music that you have listened to at various times in your life is cross-coded with the events of those times. That is, the music is linked to events of the time, and those events are linked to the music.
>
> A maxim of memory theory is that unique cues are the most effective at bringing up memories; the more items or contexts a particular cue is associated with, the less effective it will be at bringing up a particular memory. This is why, although certain songs may be associated with certain times of your life, they are not very effective cues for retrieving memories from those times if the songs have continued to play all along and you're accustomed to hearing them . . . . But as soon as we hear a song that we haven't heard since a particular time in our lives, the floodgates of memory open and we're immersed in memories . . . .

[130] Douglass, *Narrative* 24; Sacks 32.
[131] Levitin 165. Douglass again seems to anticipate neuroscience as he uses the verb "trace" when he ascribes his "first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery" to the songs of sorrow: "I trace my first glimmering . . . " (24).
[132] Levitin 165.

> Memory affects the music-listening experience so profoundly that it would not be hyperbole to say that without memory there would be no music.[133]

The songs of sorrow retain their potency, in part, because of their rarity and rich referentiality. Douglass reports that he has not heard them since his enslavement, with one exception: "I have never heard any songs like those anywhere since I left slavery, except when in Ireland. There I heard the same *wailing notes*, and was much affected by them."[134]

Not only did the memory of the songs of sorrow function as "a sort of Proustian mnemonic" for Douglass, but the songs themselves possibly worked to reconnect him with still earlier memories, such as those of his childhood prior even to understanding his status as enslaved.[135] In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, he claims that as a "mere child, I had ascertained [freedom] to be a natural and inborn right of every member of the human family."[136] He writes more personally of his childhood in *Life and Times*: "Living thus with my grandmother, whose kindness and love stood in place of my mother's, it was some time before I knew myself to be a slave. I knew many other things before I knew

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[133] Levitin 166-167. See also Levitin 210. For example, the aforementioned scene from *Beloved* mirrors both Levitin's scientific language and Douglass's depiction of communal agency accessed by African Americans through song: "For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for *the right combination*, *the key*, *the code*, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash" (Morrison, *Beloved* 261, emphasis mine). In addition, Marie Cardinal's citation of "'one precise, *unique* note, tracing a sound whose path was almost *painful*'" is also reminiscent of the memory-trace model in which the more singular the music, the more able it is to elicit specific memories (Morrison vii-viii). The note seemed to tap into trauma deep in her psyche.

[134] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 184. He also contrasts the songs of sorrow with "the almost constant singing" demanded by overseers as part of their surveillance of working slaves (Douglass, *Life and Times* 502). As noted earlier, he marks the change in sound accompanying the songs of sorrow in *Life and Times*: "But on allowance days those commissioned to the Great House farm were peculiarly vocal" (Douglass, *Life and Times* 502).

[135] Sacks 344.

[136] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 304.

that."[137] He likely learned how to listen expertly in the musical sense, then, before he knew of his enslaved status, implying that he gained non-linguistic knowledge in an African American communal context.

The education that Douglass received from his grandmother places gender, as well as language, in contention with regard to knowledge. Literacy, a realm so associated with freedom in the nineteenth century that laws in many states barred African Americans from attaining it, explicates his status as a slave and Douglass likens its acquisition to a "curse" that "had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out."[138] The absence of emotion forecloses action; he cannot climb out of the "horrible pit" nor administer the "remedy" to his "wretched condition" without the scaffolding of emotion that music, rather than language, provides. By contrast, his grandmother taught him kindness, love and "many other things," specifically excluding any knowledge of being enslaved. In the parlance of mirror neurons, she helped him think of himself as free without the dialectic of enslavement, passing on important information that allowed him take action years later.

The all-male composition of the Sabbath school class also raises the question of how gender and agency relate in Douglass's autobiographies. Douglass does not call attention to gender with regard to persons singing the songs of sorrow, whereas he denotes gender in relation to his class. The interpretative portion of the songs of sorrow passages in *Narrative* and *My Bondage and My Freedom* uses a masculine personal pronoun; however, Douglass primarily refers to the group of singers rather than to any

[137] Douglass, *Life and Times* 478.
[138] Douglass, *Narrative* 42.

particular individual. Even this exception does not refer to a specific person, but alludes to a "representative" slave, prior to a modern feminist critique of a masculine pronoun standing in for female and/or male: "The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears."[139] Interestingly, Douglass revises the statement in *Life and Times* where gender and number change to form a plural that reinforces the idea of the communal: "The songs of the slaves represented their sorrows, rather than their joys. Like tears, they were a relief to aching hearts."[140] By contrast, Douglass specifically invokes "manhood" in suggesting that Sabbath school class would be lacking in it if they did not attempt to escape: "I talked to them of our want of manhood, if we submitted to our enslavement without at least one noble effort to be free."[141] He also refers to them as a "band of brothers" and as "manly" in *My Bondage and My Freedom* and in *Life and Times*.[142]

The relationship of gender, class and agency differs in Douglass's narrative, however, than in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl; Written by Herself*, for example, which Jacobs published in 1861, six years after Douglass released *My Bondage and My Freedom*. While Douglass and Jacobs both penned their own narratives, Douglass eventually made a profitable living from public speaking and publishing his own newspaper, *The North Star*, after escaping from slavery.[143] Jacobs's financial situation remained tenuous at best throughout her life, and, although she lived in Rochester, New York contemporaneously with Douglass, she did not write for *The North*

[139] Douglass, *Narrative* 24. The parallel sentence in *My Bondage and My Freedom* reads: The songs of the slave represent the sorrows, rather than the joys, of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by tears" (185).
[140] Douglass, *Life and Times* 503.
[141] Douglass, *Narrative* 72.
[142] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 301, *Life and Times* 601.
[143] He spends the first three years after his escape doing odd jobs as racism in New Bedford prevents him from earning the wages that he commanded in Baltimore as an expert calker.

Star, but she did work near Douglass's operations. Jacobs, along with other female abolitionists, sewed items in the newspaper's headquarters to raise funds for the abolitionist cause.[144] Further, Douglass not only gained political subjectivity when black men received the right to vote in 1870, but held appointed political office in the District of Columbia, first as U.S. Marshal and, later, Recorder of Deeds. Jacobs, however, died impoverished after a life of service to poor persons and veterans in part, in the District of Columbia, without receiving the suffrage granted to all women by the Nineteenth Amendment more than twenty years after her death.[145]

Douglass and Jacobs participate in material culture differently due, in part, to gender. Douglass's contributions primarily take the form of texts whose relative ease of preservation and reproduction portends greater financial compensation and historical prominence. Gender impacts Jacobs's access even to the opportunity to create texts as her labors tend toward processes, such as caregiving for people, rather than products like texts. Even her fundraising sewing projects seem more ephemeral than Douglass's texts despite their shared production space. Douglass, however, shows how meaningful non-linguistic expression can be when he writes about the intangible songs of sorrow. He understands that participation in process-oriented, rather than product-oriented, creativity yields knowledge and experience as or more valuable than "whole volumes of philosophy."[146] Further, he recognizes that the persons involved in these transformative endeavors hold important cultural information that does not require written literacy. He

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[144] The mixture of sewing and political activism brings to mind 124, the house in Morrison's *Beloved* which used to be a station on the Underground Railroad (Morrison, *Beloved* 249). Chapter Three contains more detail on 124.

[145] Notably, the necessity of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 tempers the notion of political subjectivity for African Americans as defined by the *de jure* right to vote which the *de facto* reality of Jim Crow increasingly diminished after the Civil War.

[146] Douglass, *Narrative* 24.

sees genuine value in the vernacular, often exceeding the so-called wisdom of a "Western" tradition ensconced in language and law that bind rather than free him. The songs, for example, provide sufficient education in empathy and thereby challenge claims of language as paramount to understanding.

Class, however, possibly gave both Douglass and Jacobs relative advantage in their pursuit of freedom.[147] Douglass lived on a prosperous plantation on Maryland's Eastern Shore and then in a similarly situated household in Baltimore.[148] Though the relatively robust situation of the slaveholders did not always guarantee him enough to eat (hence singing for supplemental bread), he had access to his young charge's schoolbooks, to white boys in the neighborhood who knew how to read and to unsurveilled time to pursue his learning in Baltimore. He later hired himself out in the Baltimore shipyards and as a result could withhold some of his pay from the Aulds. The freedom to commute to work and manage his own time also provided an additional opportunity to gain knowledge and plan his escape.[149] Jacobs's free grandmother owned property and a

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[147] Class refers to stratifications of wealth and status rather than categories of society and therefore applies to everyone, whether enslaved or free. Douglass's relationship to class modulated along with his circumstances, for example. Although enslaved in both circumstances, he experienced greater poverty in rural Maryland than while living in Baltimore. His eventual ability to hire himself out enhanced his potential for economic mobility. The money that he withheld from his earnings helped him to escape from enslavement.

[148] Douglass writes in *Narrative*, for example, "The home plantation of Colonel Lloyd wore the appearance of a country village. All the mechanical operations for all the farms were performed here. The shoemaking and mending, the blacksmithing, cartwrighting, coopering, weaving, and grain-grinding, were all performed by the slaves on the home plantation. The whole place wore a business-like aspect very unlike the neighboring farms. The number of houses, too, conspired to give it advantage over the neighboring farms. It was called by the slaves the *Great House Farm*" (*Narrative* 22-23). In *Life and Times*, however, he replaces the metaphor of village with that of nation: "These [allowance days] were gala days for the slaves of the outlying farms, and there was much rivalry among them as to who should be elected to go up to the Great House farm for the *'Allowances,'* and indeed to attend to any other business at this grand place, to them the capital of a little nation" (Douglass, *Life and Times* 501).

[149] After being badly wounded in a fight at a shipyard, Douglass changed jobs and began work with another shipbuilder. He reports that "in the course of one year from the time I left Mr. Gardner's I was able to command the highest wages given to the most experienced calkers. I was now of some importance to my master. I was bringing him from six to seven dollars per week. I sometimes brought him nine dollars per week: my wages were a dollar and a half a day. After learning how to calk, I sought my own employment,

business which provided financial backing to Jacobs's endeavors. In addition, Jacobs and her family managed fiscally without her labor during her seven years of hiding prior to her escape. Though their initiatives in obtaining it were clearly their own, did class put Douglass and Jacobs in closer proximity to freedom? Were they able to leverage class to their advantage in a way that others who worked for less well-off slaveholders or who did not have free, financially secure relatives could not?

By contrast, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman initially worked for families who were less financially comfortable than the Lloyds, Aulds or Jacobs's nemesis Dr. Flint/Norcom. Their remote, rural placements involving hard physical labor also seemed less conducive to achieving financial stability and access to educational opportunities, broadly defined.[150] Truth and Tubman struggled financially throughout their lives and neither learned to write. Whites recorded—with varying accuracy—written narratives of their experiences; however, the legendary leaders told their own stories using non-written forms of expression. Nell Irwin Painter documents Truth's reliance on her visual image for income and publicity, for instance, as she carefully crafted her photograph for *cartes de visite*.[151] In addition, she typically sang as part of her public speaking engagements.[152]

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made my own contracts, and collected the money which I earned. My pathway became much more smooth than before; my condition was now much more comfortable. During these leisure times, those old notions about freedom would steal over me again. When in Mr. Gardner's employment, I was kept in such a perpetual whirl of excitement, I could think of nothing, scarcely, but my life; and in thinking of my life, I almost forgot my liberty. I have observed this in my experience of slavery,—that whenever my condition was improved, instead of increasing my contentment, it only increased my desire to be free, and set me to thinking of plans to gain my freedom" (*Narrative* 83). Economic circumstances again play a role, but a counterintuitive one as, more than misery, greater comfort further motivates Douglass to seek freedom.

[150] Douglass, too, performed hard physical labor in a rural area. Did Baltimore, the prosperity of Colonel Lloyd's plantation and/or gender result in his different life experiences? It was in Baltimore, for example, that he earned his own money in the shipyards whose proximity to the water, an escape route, was also significant.

[151] Nell Irwin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: Norton, 1997).

[152] Biographer Carleton Mabee writes that "by the time Truth left New York City and became a wandering evangelist in New England, it was clear that her singing had become a significant part of her appeal to audiences . . . . She sang not only songs she learned from others but also songs she herself composed. She

Tubman, who sang spirituals to communicate surreptitiously with her Underground Railroad passengers, gave performances in order to tell her story, make a living and serve the poor.[153]

Of the two, Truth remains at an advantage in terms of her story being remembered historically, as photographs can be preserved similarly to written text. The quote that accompanies perhaps her most famous image deconstructs the reliability, importance and artifice of the photograph, however: "I sell the shadow to support the substance."[154] A photograph, she seems to say, truly cannot do her justice, just as the shadow of language cannot adequately represent the substance of the songs of sorrow. Tubman's limited access to text and her image differed from that of Douglass, Jacobs and Truth. Although photos of her exist (a different issue, also concerning gender), one of the most familiar images of Tubman depicts her at an advanced age looking almost skeletal and swathed in a white shawl that covers her head. Less commonly seen photos show her at a younger age where she appears robust, more easily lending a figure to the imagination of someone who could spirit away dozens of passengers from slavery. In any case, it does not appear that Tubman managed or could afford to manage her image in the same way that Truth did.[155]

Douglass gives voice to Gilroy's contention that "gender is the modality in which race is lived" in an eloquent testimonial written on behalf of Tubman that echoes his

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recalled, 'I used to make many songs'" (Carleton Mabee, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1993) 221).

[153] In her biography of Harriet Tubman, Jean Humez reprints accounts of Tubman's performances in a section entitled "Storytelling Performances Described" (Jean Humez, *Harriet Tubman: The Life and the Life Stories* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003) 198-204).

[154] Painter 197.

[155] A twentieth-century parallel to Douglass and Tubman might be the Civil Rights Movement where gender and class contrast in the upper-middle class background of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the working class situation of Fannie Lou Hamer. How do gender and class factor into their different leadership styles and presence in the national memory?

advocacy of the singers.[156] Tubman's first biographer, Sarah Bradford, solicited his letter which she published along with others in *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman*, not unlike letters from abolitionists appearing before Douglass's narratives:[157]

> ROCHESTER, August 29, 1868
>
> DEAR HARRIET: I am glad to know that the story of your eventful life has been written by a kind lady, and that the same is soon to be published. You ask for what you do not need when you call upon me for a word of commendation. I need such words from you far more than you can need them from me, especially where your superior labors and devotion to the cause of the lately enslaved of our land are known as I know them. The difference between us is very marked. Most that I have done and suffered in the service of our cause has been in public, and I have received much encouragement at every step of the way. You, on the other hand, have labored in a private way. I have wrought in the day—you in the night. I have had the applause of the crowd and the satisfaction that comes of being approved by the multitude, while the most that you have done has been witnessed by a few trembling, scarred, and foot-sore bondmen and women, whom you have led out of the house of bondage, and whose heartfelt "*God bless you*" has been your only reward. The midnight sky and the silent stars have been the witnesses of your devotion to freedom and of your heroism. Excepting John Brown—of sacred

[156] Gilroy 85.
[157] Beverly Lowry, *Harriet Tubman: Imagining a Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2007) 6. In its use of the word "scenes," the title of Bradford's book invokes the visual as well as theatrical performance.

> memory—I know of no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people than you have. Much that you have done would seem improbable to, those who do not know you as I know you. It is to me a great pleasure and a great privilege to bear testimony to your character and your works, and to say to those to whom you may come, that I regard you in every way truthful and trustworthy.
>
> Your friend,
>
> FREDERICK DOUGLASS.[158]

Do gender and agency then make a difference in attaining political subjectivity and financial stability? Douglass seems to excel at both, unlike his female compatriots, though he shows sensitivity to the difference, for example, in Tubman's strivings and his own. Are women more likely to use non-linguistic forms of expression to gain agency due to constraints that class and gender place on their access to language and political participation? Where, for example, are the women when the small group of Sabbath school members are plotting their escape? In each autobiography, Douglass records that Sabbath school enrollments sometimes exceeded forty and, in *Narrative*, he explicitly states that the students included women: "They were of all ages, though mostly men and women."[159] Are women, like Douglass's grandmother, sharing "kindness," "love" and

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[158] Lowry 6-7.

[159] Douglass, *Narrative* 71, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 298, *Life and Times* 600; *Narrative* 71. Douglass is more circumspect about gender in *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Life and Times* as he reports in duplicate passages that "I was not long in bringing around me twenty or thirty young men, who enrolled themselves, gladly, in my Sabbath school" (*My Bondage and My Freedom*, 298). However, he adds that his Sabbath school is not an anomaly in a broad reference that specifically includes women as students in similar classes though he stops short of claiming their attendance in his, unlike in *Narrative*: "Let the reader reflect upon the fact, that, in this christian country, men and women are hiding from professors of religion, in barns, in the woods and fields, in order to learn to read the *holy bible*" (*My Bondage and My Freedom*, 300).

knowledge with children, educating them for imagined freedom in the future? What of their own prospects for a free life?

Readers know that Douglass gains political subjectivity, but not what happens to the rest of the Sabbath school class—save the one unnamed member freed by Douglass's agency—or to the singers of the songs of sorrow. Douglass, however, grants enslaved African Americans rhetorical political subjectivity. Immediately preceding the songs of sorrow passage in *Narrative*, he describes allowance day on which select slaves pick up monthly allotments of supplies for themselves and others not chosen for the coveted assignment:

> Few privileges were esteemed higher, by the slaves of the out-farms, than that of being selected to do errands at the Great House Farm. It was associated in their minds with greatness. A representative could not be prouder of his election to a seat in the American Congress, than a slave on one of the out-farms would be of his election to do errands at the Great House Farm. They regarded it as evidence of great confidence reposed in them by their overseers; and it was on this account, as well as a constant desire to be out of the field from under the driver's lash, that they esteemed it a high privilege, one worth careful living for. He was called the smartest and most trusty fellow, who had this honor conferred upon him the most frequently. The competitors for this office sought as diligently to please their overseers, as the office-seekers in the political parties seek to please and deceive the people. The same traits of character

> might be seen in Colonel Lloyd's slaves, as are seen in the slaves of the political parties.[160]

The metaphorical move of portraying the singers as already possessing political subjectivity, while not altogether complimentary due to Douglass's perception of politicians, is even more subversive if it includes women as well as men.

In designating the singers as political subjects, Douglass also creates space for voices like Tubman's and, perhaps more so, those of her passengers. He recognizes the validity of non-linguistic forms of expression and knowledge not considered for canonization by the majority culture. These forms can critique capitalism, as well as gender, in their orientation toward process rather than production. The songs of sorrow play a role similar to that of the quilts in Alice Walker's "Every Day Use" and bicycles in "Is the Post- in Postmodern the Post- in Postcolonial?" by Kwame Anthony Appiah in that outsiders attempt to impose interpretation on and reify cultural objects rather than understand the meaning of the processes in "every day use"—if they detect their presence at all.

Cruz identifies a similar problem that began in the nineteenth century which he dubs "ethnosympathy."[161] He views the fact that Douglass incorporates the interpretation of the songs into the text as groundbreaking, and he claims that Douglass's *Narrative* is unique within the genre of slave narratives because it goes "beyond being a cultural indicator of how the slave narratives established an expressive black social subjectivity, it comments on the inside meanings of cultural practices."[162] Crediting Douglass with founding "the sociology of black American music," Cruz contends that "Douglass's

[160] Douglass, *Narrative* 23.
[161] Cruz, *Culture on the Margins* 3.
[162] Cruz, "Historicizing" 308.

classic text [*Narrative*] prefigured an ethnographically nuanced sociology of music that could be grasped as cultural expressions embedded in institutions, society and history."[163] However, interventions such as Douglass's inclusion, but also interpretation, of African American song in his autobiographies led to a new engagement with the interior lives of enslaved African Americans previously inaccessible to most whites. The sentimentality of nineteenth-century readers combined with eyewitness accounts of slavery created a "new interpretive ethos of pathos, the new radical ethnosympathy" that could be problematic in its unrelenting ethnocentrism, however.[164] Viewed through the lens of mirror neurons, the songs of sorrow could also bypass ethnosympathy, triggering empathy instead. Substituting emotion for sentimentality, "in black songs Douglass heard slaves framing, representing, and managing their deepest feelings of collective suffering."[165]

Douglass redirects discourse about African American music, but also about sources for human agency. Sensing freedom in non-linguistic modes saves his life: "I saw nothing without seeing it, I heard nothing without hearing it, and felt nothing without feeling it."[166] He cites "the hope for being free" as the only reason that he did not commit suicide or take another kind of action that would result in his death.[167] The songs

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[163] Cruz, "Historicizing" 314; Jon Cruz, "Nineteenth Century US Religious Crisis and the Sociology of Music" *Poetics* 30 (2002: 5-18) 15. Cruz also posits that Douglass shows "how a sympathetic attentiveness to songs could bring into focus the hitherto unappreciated inner realms of the collective consciousness of slaves" (Cruz, "Historicizing" 314, 308.) In a nod to the importance of the sociological in Douglass's work, Cruz focuses on collectivity rather than the influence of music on individual psyches. However, the distinction needs to be drawn more finely in order to revise Cruz's characterization of the existence of a "collective consciousness" because shared experience as part of a cultural community is necessarily mitigated through individuals.

[164] Cruz, "Historicizing" 310.

[165] Cruz, "Historicizing" 310, 308.

[166] Douglass, *Narrative* 43.

[167] Douglass, *Narrative* 43. Douglass writes, "I often found myself regretting my own existence, and wishing myself dead; and but for the hope of being free, I have no doubt but that I should have killed myself, or done something for which I should have been killed" (*Narrative* 43). In the first six months of

contribute to Douglass's ability to free himself from the "soul-crushing" and "death-dealing" system, and, in them, he finds "life-giving determination" that addresses his existential crisis.[168] The combination of the particular cultural strategies that the singers employ and a tradition of finding hope where there seems to be none contributes to the creation of a paradigmatic model for using non-linguistic communal expression to "make a way out of no way."

Unlike Douglass's texts which can be duplicated and reread, an analog to the songs of sorrow is lost to history; however, the songs possess longevity that rivals written texts.[169] Douglass and, later, Morrison infuse their texts with sound even though language cannot replicate either the music itself or, more importantly, the transformative experience that it facilities. Memory opens up possibilities for language to represent music in as much as that is possible. Douglass intuits the strength of memory in relation to music and believes in its power, if not as a substitute, as a second-best alternative. The materiality of texts tends to overshadow ephemeral experience as well as music yet the

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working for Edward Covey, he becomes so despondent that he "was sometimes prompted to take my life, and that of Covey, but was prevented by a combination of hope and fear" (*Narrative* 59).

[168] Douglass 73. Douglass uses the phrase when stating his desire to have his "fellow-slaves" in his Sabbath School class "participate with me in this [escape from slavery], my life-giving determination" (*Narrative* 72, 73). Again, the communal co-exists with agency. Further, Douglass cites his first six months with Covey as his worst experience while enslaved, a time in which he "was broken in body, soul, and spirit" and his "natural elasticity was crushed" (*Narrative* 58). Again, the descriptor "elasticity" seems prescient in the context of neurological findings that indicate "the brain has a capacity for reorganization that vastly exceeds what we thought before. This ability is called neuroplasticity, and in some cases, it suggests that regional specificity may be temporary, as the processing centers for important mental functions actually move to other regions after trauma or brain damage" (Levitin 87). Transforming "soul-crushing" enslavement into "life-giving determination" calls for powerful neuroplasticity. Music's geographical distribution in the brain involves multiple regions so it might be one means by which Douglass reorganizes his brain and regains his "natural elasticity."

[169] Messmer does not explicitly make the parallel between the absence of the songs' content in the text as akin to the absence of the details of Douglass's escape from slavery. However, the songs seemingly represent a kind of escape (psychological, metaphorical, figurative) best left to the realm of those who can benefit from them rather than given over to slaveholders as the widespread publicity of Henry "Box" Brown's methodology in effect eliminated that possibility for others (Messmer 14). (Henry "Box" Brown mailed himself to freedom in a crate.) Lacan's notion of "lack" pervades Messmer's concept of Douglass refusing to hint at the songs' specifics in order to keep them in a space of African American oral/aural discourse sufficient on its own terms.

power of the songs recommends them to memory. Even though Douglass did not understand the songs' meaning while he was singing them, he nevertheless grasped their power which moved him then and continued to move him, via memory, throughout his long life. Morrison embraces the inheritance of Douglass's space of remembrance for the songs and singers in her casting of characters in *Beloved* who are ordinary, though not anonymous, and rely on the agency of song rather than language to transform their lives.[170]

Drawing from personal experience, Douglass acknowledges and codifies a tradition of non-linguistic expressions of communal agency within African American literature and history.[171] Though not within the scope of this chapter, scenes that feature music as personally and socially transformative suggest that a tradition in African American texts spans centuries. Morrison's *Beloved*, published in 1987, is perhaps the preeminent example in the genre of fiction. Like Douglass, Morrison privileges sound over language, most prominently in the scene where thirty women sing Sethe back to herself and into the community with sound that "broke the back of words."[172] The

[170] The sheet music, CDs and iPods that Levitin suggests are part of the transference of mirror neurons speak to a material culture that still does not exist for some people whether for reasons of culture or finance or both. Agency comes from a combination of kinesthetic and emotional involvement not found in sheet music, CDs and iPods, but in participation and performance.

[171] Douglass's focus on the communal characterizes strategies that are borne out in future literary and historic ventures of African Americans. For example, Morrison seems to draw from Douglass's work in her novel *Beloved* to frame a fictional intervention by thirty women who use sound to release Sethe from Beloved and reinstate her to Cincinnati's African American community. In addition, the language that Douglass uses to convey the passion that he felt for and within his Sabbath school class anticipates the value placed on group process during the Civil Rights Movement. The class members build consensus not unlike activists trained by the Highlander Folk School more than a century later. The familiar mix of faith and freedom also parallels the Civil Rights Movement as does a sense of individual fates "linked and interlinked" with communal action (Douglass, *Narrative* 72). Finally, the role of education—broadly defined—plays a role as Douglass teaches his students to read as do Civil Rights workers in voter registration campaigns across the rural South. Separated by more than a century, both parties educated others at risk to their lives and, in each era, written literacy was a passport to political subjectivity yet song led the way.

[172] Morrison, *Beloved* 259.

utterance of sound is also transforming in crucial moments of psychological, physiological and sociological crisis in other novels by contemporary African American authors, such as *The Women of Brewster Place* (1983) by Gloria Naylor.[173]

Similarly, W. E. B. Du Bois locates African American history in African American song and, like Morrison, associates its transmission with women. He begins each chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, as he explains in the "forethought," with "a bar of the Sorrow Songs—some echo of haunting melody from the only American music which welled up from black souls in the dark past."[174] The combination of epigraphs—lines of poetry, many by Europeans—and staves, notes and time signatures of music visually represented on the page exemplify the trope of double consciousness that Du Bois theorizes in the book.[175] The final chapter, called and dedicated to a discussion of "The Sorrow Songs," opens with lyrics from "Lay This Body Down" whose source Du Bois identifies as "Negro Song," a source that, at last, matches the origin of the epigraph.[176] The songs remain elusive; language cannot adequately represent them nor

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[173] In "A Conversation: Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison," Naylor uses the metaphor of music for the encouragement she found in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* when struggling to find her own authorial voice: "The presence of the work . . . . said to a young black woman, struggling to find a mirror of her worth in this society, not only is your story worth telling but it can be told in words so painstakingly eloquent that it becomes a song" (189). Her choice of the word "mirror" also suggests that this might be an example of mirror neurons working as cultural messangers. Morrison's work helped Naylor imagine the possibility of bringing her own into existence. Gloria Naylor, "A Conversation: Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison" in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, edited by Danille Taylor-Guthrie, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994) 188-217.

[174] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 1. Cruz notes that Douglass did not call the songs spirituals, but neither did he coin the phrase "songs of sorrow" that Cruz uses or Du Bois's moniker, "Sorrow Songs." The songs become remembered as intimately associated with emotion though, less fittingly, with only one feeling rather than a range of emotional expression that Douglass describes.

[175] Epigraphs for all but the final chapter come from the following: Arthur Symons, Lowell, Bryon, Schiller (in German), Whittier, Omar Khayyám via Fitzgerald, Song of Solomon, William Vaughn Moody, "Mrs. Browning" (twice), Fiona Macleod, Swinburne and Tennyson. The epigraphs come from the "Western" literary tradition except for the last chapter whose its authorship is anonymous and, one might imagine, created communally rather than individually. (The other epigraph from an unspecified author is from Song of Solomon, a book of the Bible.)

[176] Du Bois 121.

can musical notation, yet they structure Du Bois's text and, he argues, African American history. They also frame his own experience and testify to the survival of African culture, transmitted through song by women and men:

> My grandfather's grandmother was seized by an evil Dutch trader two centuries ago; and coming to the valleys of the Hudson and Housatonic, black, little, and lithe, she shivered and shrank in the harsh north winds, looked longingly at the hills, and often crooned a heathen melody to the child between her knees, thus:
>
> Do ba-na co-ba, ge-ne me, ge-ne me!
>
> Do ba-na co-ba, ge-ne me, ge-ne me!
>
> Ben d' nu-li, nu-li, nu-li, nu-li, ben d' le.
>
> The child sang it to his children and they to their children's children, and so two hundred years it has travelled down to us and we sing it to our children, knowing as little as our fathers what its words may mean, but knowing well the meaning of its music.[177]

Douglass's songs of sorrow similarly contained, as he writes in *Narrative*, "words which to many would seem unmeaning jargon, but which nevertheless, were full of meaning" to the enslaved African Americans who sang them.[178] The musical tradition of the "Sorrow Songs" continues in many places, including Washington, D.C., and their persistent presence suggests that persons still manage and frame their experiences through them.[179]

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[177] Du Bois 123.
[178] Douglass, *Narrative* 23-24.
[179] For example, members of the *a cappella* group, Sweet Honey in the Rock, perform and teach songs from an African American singing tradition so that they remain in everyday use. Sweet Honey's recently retired founder Bernice Johnson Reagon combines songs that she has sung since she was a child—songs that were also sung in the Civil Rights Movement and even in the antebellum era—with spoken word in her trademark, participatory "Songtalks." Current Sweet Honey member Ysaye Maria Barnwell directs a

Douglass's ideas infuse African American texts, broadly defined, into the present. They also translate, as they do in his autobiographies, to other forms of non-linguistic expression including, but not limited to, quilting (chapter three) and dance (chapter four). These forms are remarkable in their availability as they are ordinary sometimes to the point of being overlooked; yet they, too, offer empowerment contextualized, but not proscribed, by culture. In his representation of the songs, Douglass democratizes freedom, showing that agency is available to anyone. The accessibility of agency through song, however, does not negate the uniqueness of the songs themselves, born out of cultural specificity. Douglass recognizes music's embodiment of particular sociocultural settings, spaces and times as well as its potential for transmission "across individuals and generations."[180] He subscribes to an emotional connectivity that is at once grounded in musical specificity and yet capable of conveying suffering affectively to those in another cultural context.[181] Disregarding the potential barrier of ethnocentrism, Douglass counts on something akin to mirror neurons to cross racial and

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Community Sing once a month in Washington as well as holds Community Sing workshops around the country. There is no sheet music; Barnwell lines out the music and teaches similar songs often in multi-part harmonies to whomever attends. There are no auditions nor requirements for musical ability. In a short video about the Community Sing posted on YouTube, Barnwell says, "It always works. It doesn't matter to me who walks in the room. It always works" (Ekene Okobi, "What Is the Community Sing?" *YouTube.com*, 19 March 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6E_RbWmJA8>). The songs, sometimes including improvised lyrics, often relate to current events and/or directly to political activism.

[180] Levitin 267.

[181] For example, while in Ireland during the Great Potato Famine, he hears "the same *wailing notes*" that he remembers from the songs of sorrow (Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 184). In addition to emotional connectivity, Paul Gilroy theorizes that black culture on either side of the Atlantic Ocean was mutually influential (Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*). Dating to the transatlantic slave trade, the cultural exchange continues into the present, resulting in a metaculture that holds possibility for new alliances and thereby reconciliations. Further, recent research by Willie Ruff of Yale University shows that African American gospel music counts Native American (e.g., Muscogee Creek) and eighteenth-century Scottish music among its influences, including the practice of "lining out" hymns. Lining out involves a leader singing a line and the congregation repeating it. Ruff theorizes that the roots of "call and response" come from this practice which developed in early modern Europe because the majority of congregants could not read (Ben McConville, "Black America's Musical Links to Scotland" *Scotsman.com* 4 June 2005; Chuck McCutcheon, "Indian, Black Gospel and Scottish Singing Form an Unusual Musical Bridge" *Washington Post* 21 April 2007: B09).

cultural lines. He hopes that the songs of sorrow engender empathy in his readers even as their memory continues to "quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds," and, in *Narrative*, he proposes a scenario ideal for the cross-cultural transmission of mirror neurons:

> If any one wishes to be impressed with the soul-killing effects of slavery, let him go to Colonel Lloyd's plantation, and, on allowance-day, place himself in the deep pine woods, and there let him, in silence, analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul,—and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because "there is no flesh in his obdurate heart."[182]

Through his texts, Douglass allows readers to place themselves "in the deep pine woods" and, through communal sound, learn that "the heart has no language like song."[183]

[182] Douglass, *Narrative* 24.
[183] Douglass, *Narrative* 24.

Chapter Two: "Sing the New Song:" Julia Foote's *A Brand Plucked from the Fire* as Hymn/Book[1]

Initially published in 1879, African American evangelist Julia A. J. Foote's spiritual autobiography ostensibly takes the form of written language. This chapter argues, however, that Foote supplants language with song in *A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch*. Born free in Schenectady, New York in 1823, Foote began preaching in the late 1830s, despite disapproval from the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, which excommunicated her, and her husband, who threatened to commit her to a mental hospital. She went on to travel as an "itinerant evangelist and Methodist holiness preacher" for the next fifty years, leading worship at "camp meetings, revivals, and churches" across the United States and Canada.[2] Eventually, Foote became the first woman ordained a deacon—the first level of ordained ministry in the A.M.E. Zion Church—in 1895 and the second woman ordained an elder—the Church's next ministerial level—two years before she died in 1901 at the age of 78.[3]

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[1] Julia A. J. Foote, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch* in *Spiritual Narratives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 33.

[2] Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998) 59.

[3] Collier-Thomas 59 and 287. The only higher rank in the A.M.E. Zion Church is bishop. Foote's ordination as elder sanctioned her to administer the sacrament of communion and granting her authority over other ministers. In the A.M.E. Zion Church, Collier-Thomas explains that, "unlike an unordained preacher or an ordained deacon, an elder possesses power and authority over other ordained clergy. Historically, ordained ministers in the AME Zion polity have been of two orders—deacon and elder. Deacons preach, assist in the administration of Holy Communion, baptize, administer matrimony, and try disorderly members in the absence of the elder. The eldership represents the highest of holy orders. An elder assumes all of the deacon's perquisites. An elder is one step removed from the bishop. Only an elder can consecrate the Eucharist in the church. Elders possess judicial prerogatives" (24). C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya note in *The Black Church in African American Experience* that Foote and Mary Small, who was ordained a deacon in 1895 and an elder in 1898, "became the first women to achieve the rights of full ordination to the ministry by any Methodist denomination, black or white. The A.M.E. Zion Church's ordination of women preceded similar action by the other black Methodist denominations and by the United Methodist Church by half a century" (C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990) 285).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the noun "song" as if it were a verb: "the act or art of singing; the result or effect of this, vocal music."[4] This chapter contends that Foote revises the "trope of the talking book" that makes "the white written text speak with a black voice;" she hybridizes song and text to devise a singing book that deploys music to critique language.[5] In particular, it posits that Foote's singing book emulates a hymnal, a form that proliferated in the nineteenth century. Further, it considers Foote's hymn/book in relationship to the "wandering chorus."[6] One of several distinctively African American innovations in nineteenth-century hymnody, wandering choruses served as interchangeable refrains that could be applied to one or more hymns improvisationally.

Although many scholars see Foote's story as one of empowerment gained primarily from non-hegemonic understandings of race, gender and spirituality, none challenge language as her apparent medium. Even critics who acknowledge the musicality of Foote's work refer to it in ways that instantiate it, ultimately, as solely linguistic and thereby overlook the extent and implications of Foote's use of non-linguistic expression.[7] However, Foote defies the equation of subjectivity as well as faith with either "the Word" (Logos) or "the word" (phallologos). She includes hymns throughout the text and, in effect, preaches to her audience—an activity often equated

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[4] "Song," Oxford English Dictionary Online, Gelman Library, George Washington University, 30 Nov. 2009, <http://dictionary.oed.com/>.
[5] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 131.
[6] I am grateful to Jennifer James for recognizing the theoretical potential of the "wandering chorus."
[7] See, for example, Richard J. Douglass-Chin, *Preacher Woman Sings the Blues: The Autobiographies of Nineteenth-Century African American Evangelists* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001); Crystal J. Lucky, "The Black Women's Spiritual Narrative as Sermon" in *The Experience of God: A Postmodern Response*. Perspectives in Continental Philosophy, eds. Kevin Hart and Barbara Wall (New York: Fordham Press, 2005); and, Joycelyn Moody, *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

with song in African American homiletics, both in terms of the preacher's delivery and the congregation's response. The dynamic interplay between preacher and congregation can even generate new songs in some circumstances, such as the camp meetings at which Foote preached. In effect, Foote sings to an imagined congregation through her hymn/book with the goal of eliciting a musical response that inspires others to the agency, plural personhood and faith that she finds through African American communal expression.

Music represents a theme whose reprisal in multiple nineteenth-century works by African American authors provides adumbrations of the singing book that Foote develops. Specifically, African American evangelists, such as John Jea, Jarena Lee, Maria Stewart and Zilpha Elaw, incorporated lines from hymns into their memoirs.[8] However, these autobiographers saw song more broadly as transformative. For example, Elaw's conversion and call to preach involved singing, as did Foote's, and, later, while evangelizing in England, Elaw "sang one of the American hymns" when a rainstorm detained a congregation to whom she had just preached. She reported that "many shed a profusion of tears," including two men who disrupted the service initially, but became "the last to retire from the chapel."[9] Authors of works identified as more political than

[8] Graham Russell Hodges, ed., *Black Itinerants of the Gospel: The Narratives of John Jea and George White* (Madison, WI: Madison House, 1993); Jarena Lee, 1849, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* in *Spiritual Narratives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Maria Stewart, 1835, *Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart* in *Spiritual Narratives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); and, Zilpha Elaw, 1846, *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw* in William Andrews, ed., *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986).
[9] Elaw 151.

spiritual, too, connected song with altered experience in their autobiographies, such as Frederick Douglass, as discussed in chapter one.[10]

Perhaps Jea prefigured Foote most presciently, however, with his additional publication of a book of hymns in 1816, some of which were autobiographical. Jea was "among the first of the African-American ministers to combine the sacred and the political in sermons and song," melding "individual salvation and collective solidarity" in his hymns as well as in his life story.[11] Foote merges the two forms to meet her similarly intertwined goals of evangelism and social justice.[12] Yet, Foote's approach distinguishes her in another way as well. While most of the evangelists, like Douglass, valorize African American communal expression, their work tends not to model it, but rather to be monologic. By contrast, Foote attempts to facilitate communal song via a text that is participatory. Foote seeks to move her "congregation" from a textual to an embodied experience, much as a preacher works to connect scripture with lived experience or a hymnal's lyrics become vocal music.

Foote's adoption of communal song as a format for autobiography implies that personhood can be constructed plurally and musically. The notion of the wandering chorus offers a way to conceptualize Foote's musical understanding of both plural personhood and autobiography. As itinerant worship leaders, Foote and her colleagues

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[10] The distinction here is between autobiographers whose primary focus relates to faith and those with different emphases, such as liberation from enslavement. The categories are not discreet, however. For example, while Douglass generally is considered in the latter group, he led Sunday School classes and, as discussed in chapter one, recounts his relationships with the members of one such class as among the most significant of his life. Moreover, spiritual autobiographies often promoted political agendas, such as abolition.

[11] Hodges 166.

[12] In the preface to *A Brand*, Foote connects salvation with a vision of an egalitarian society as well as a united community of faith: "Those who are fully in the truth cannot possess a prejudiced or sectarian spirit. As they hold fellowship with Christ, they cannot reject those whom he has received, nor receive those whom he rejects, but all are brought into a blessed harmony with God and each other" (3).

routinely led hymns. As an aid in conducting makeshift choirs, they often "carried handy pocket-books of verse in their travels," such as the first hymnal designed for the newly formed African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.).[13] Published in 1801, it incorporated "'wandering choruses'—unrelated choruses freely attached to one or more hymns."[14] The choruses' interchangeability meant that congregations could create new songs extemporaneously. As a theoretical concept, the wandering chorus describes the similarly improvised assemblies that the evangelists led in communal song. It also alludes to the roving preachers and, as such, doubles as a two-fold way to characterize African American autobiographies. First, it acknowledges that nineteenth-century African American authors drew on one another's works, as well as those of others; the mobility of their texts can also be described as intertextuality. Additionally, it recognizes how musically-constructed plural personhood shapes African American autobiography, or "autophylography," James Olney's term for the West African precept that an individual's story can only be told in the context of community.[15] Moreover, the wandering chorus exemplifies the experience of exilic journey that the evangelists and many of their congregants shared as members of the pan-African diaspora, a group that could itself be thought of in terms of the wandering chorus. Thus, the wandering chorus connects community, song, intertextuality and migration.[16]

In her hymn/book, Foote depicts spiritual and psychological transformation with a metaphor that illustrates a similar idea. She equates her (second) conversion and her

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[13] Hodges 165.
[14] Jon Michael Spencer, *Black Hymnody: A Hymnological History of the African-American Church* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992) 4.
[15] Douglass-Chin 13. Douglass-Chin cites James Olney's essay, "The Value of Autobiography for Comparative Studies: African vs. Western Autobiography" in *African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays* edited by William Andrews (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993) 218.
[16] Again, I am indebted to Jennifer James for her insight into the elements that the wandering chorus can encompass.

vocation with her acquisition of the ability to "sing the new song," using Biblical imagery to mark a theological shift.[17] Specifically, Foote cites Revelations 14:3 as helping to spark her (second) conversion: "And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts and the elders, and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth."[18] Despite the varying contexts in which it appears in the Old and New Testaments, Biblical representations of a "new song" consistently conceptualize change, recognizing a paradigm shift precipitated by theological reorientation. Fittingly, Foote frames the new song as spiritual redemption, yet her hymn/book suggests that her sense of psychological freedom expands, too. The new song signifies an alteration in Foote's selfhood—what Paul Radin refers to as the achievement of psychological individuation, though conceptualized as and contextualized by African American communal expression.[19] Correspondingly, Foote's spiritual autobiography becomes another way to sing the new

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[17] *The NRSV Concordance Unabridged* lists 10 references to "new song" in the Bible, among 92 references to "song" (John R. Kohlenberger, III, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991) 1233). In addition, it catalogues 39 references to "songs" (Kohlenberger 1233). The phrase "new song" appears in the following verses: Psalms 33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, 144:9 and 149:1; Isaiah 42:10; Revelations 5:9 and 14:3; and, Judith 16:13, a book that appears in the Apocrypha (Kohlenberger 1233). The "new song" generally refers to singing praise to God. For example, Psalm 96 begins: "O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth" (Psalm 96:1, New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]). The psalmists primarily advocate singing a new song to praise God, notably in a book that is itself a collection of songs. Psalm 40, however, describes God as responding to existential human need and putting "a new song in my mouth." (Psalm 40 begins: "I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord" (Psalm 40:1-3, NRSV).) In Isaiah 42, however, it is God who issues the call to "sing to the Lord a new song" (Isaiah 42:10, NRSV). Verse 14 "is embedded with a hymn of creation (42:5-17), the point of which is to celebrate both Yahweh as the creator of old and Yahweh as the author of a new creation through which the exilic community will be redeemed" (Susan Ackerman, "Isaiah" in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992) 167). The passage is also noteworthy for its female imagery for God: "For a long time I [God] have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant" (Isaiah 42:14, NRSV).

[18] Foote 32.

[19] In *God Struck Me Dead*, Paul Radin associates conversion experiences of enslaved African Americans with Carl Jung's concept of individuation (Paul Radin in "Foreword to the First Edition" of *God Struck Me Dead: Voices of Ex-Slaves*, ed. Clifton H. Johnson (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1993) xi).

song, taking on a shape and evoking sound more like a hymnal than a "prose narrative."[20] Hence, she aptly reprises the scripture-turned-metaphor in a hymn based on the same passage from Revelations. Notably, she revises the hymn, in essence confirming her ability to sing the new song by creating one.[21]

While contemporary critics now recognize that spiritual autobiographies perform political work, Foote's hymn/book also falls within a tradition of hymnals that carry similar aspirations. Publishing a hymnal became one of Richard Allen's top priorities after helping to establish the A.M.E. Church in the late eighteenth century. The African American minister and other dissenting members of Old St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia founded the A.M.E. Church in response to emergent racism in the predominantly white Methodist Episcopal (M.E.) congregation, the "culmination" of a trend in the late 1780s whereby African Americans frustrated by discrimination withdrew from Methodist churches.[22] According to music historian Eileen Southern, Allen made the publication of the hymnal in 1801 "one of his first official acts as A.M.E. minister" because he recognized "the importance of music to his people."[23] Though Allen modeled

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[20] Douglass-Chin 129.

[21] Foote 40. In a chapter about the relationship of race and the failure of formal education, she signifies on a verse from a hymn aptly entitled "The New Song" that Arthur T. Pierson (lyrics) and Philip Paul Bliss (music) published approximately four years before *A Brand* (Arthur T. Pierson and Philip Paul Bliss, "The New Song" in *Gospel Hymns and Sacred Songs*, Philip Paul Bliss and Ira D. Sankey (New York and Cincinnati: Biglow and Main, and John Church and Company, 1875) 45). Foote's version of the verse diverges from Pierson and Bliss's: "'Oh, bless the name of Jesus! He maketh the rebel a priest and a king, He hath bought me and taught me the new song to sing'" (40). The first phrase is absent from "The New Song" which uses the third person plural and "this" rather than "the" in the second line: "He hath bought *us* and taught *us this* new song to sing" (45, emphasis mine). By specifying that the pronoun "he" refers to Jesus, Foote avoids identifying God as masculine. Further, converting the plural "us" to the singular "me" emphasizes Foote's call and, coupled with the switch from "this new song" to "the new song," connects her vocation directly to scripture.

[22] Eileen Southern, *Music of Black Americans: A History*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997) 72-74. Racially integrated seating was normative at Old St. George's prior to renovation of the sanctuary, after which the congregation introduced segregated seating for African Americans (Southern, *Music of Black Americans* 73-74).

[23] Southern, *Music of Black Americans* 75.

the hymnal after that of the predominantly white M.E. Church, it also differed distinctively from its predecessors. In addition to its innovative inclusion of wandering choruses, it was the "first hymnbook to include songs of the oral tradition (pieces which Allen probably picked up while preaching on the circuit)," both characteristics contributing to its status as "a document that reflects the musical taste of early-nineteenth-century black Protestants."[24] Southern emphasizes that its "hymns represent the black worshipers' own choices, not the choices of white missionaries and ministers."[25] Revised and reprinted within a year of publication due to its popularity, the A.M.E. Church's first hymn book went on to influence the nineteenth-century's camp meeting-style song and its twentieth-century successor, the gospel song.[26]

Henry McNeal Turner compiled a similarly groundbreaking hymnal in 1876. The *Hymn Book of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* departed dramatically from the M.E. hymnal for the first time since Allen's. According to Jon Michael Spencer in *Black Hymnody*, the "social conscientiousness evident in Turner's selection of these hymns . . . was not again reflected in another A.M.E. hymnbook until after the Civil Rights

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[24] Jon Michael Spencer, *Black Hymnody: A Hymnological History of the African-American Church* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992) 4.
[25] Southern, *Music of Black Americans* 76.
[26] Though camp meeting hymnals would come later, none of their publication dates precede 1803, confirming the sway of the A.M.E. hymnal on the camp meeting-style song. The A.M.E. Church published four additional hymnals in the nineteenth century (in 1818, 1837, 1876 and 1892). Hypothetically, Foote might have grown up with an early edition of the A.M.E. Church's hymnal as she attended an A.M.E. Church prior to moving to Boston in 1839. In Boston, Foote joined an A.M.E. Zion Church after the A.M.E. Church purged Foote from its rolls due to its prohibition on female preachers. The A.M.E. Zion Church also broke away from the Methodist Episcopal Church in the late eighteenth century over issues concerning race, mainly the latter's reluctance to denounce slavery. The A.M.E. Zion Church published its first hymnal the year that Foote moved to Boston and followed it with three revised editions within Foote's lifetime (in 1858, 1872 and 1892). Although the A.M.E. Zion Church published its own hymnals, they departed less from the Methodist Episcopal Church's hymn books than the A.M.E. Church's. In essence, the 1839 and 1858 A.M.E. Zion hymnals "were abridged editions of the Methodist Episcopal (M.E.) Church hymnbook of 1831" that, Spencer notes, emphasized evangelical hymns stressing personal salvation rather than those found in an 1853 hymnal published by the Wesleyan Methodists "which synthesized the evangelical and the social" (Spencer, *Black Hymnody* 26, 27). It is possible, then, that Foote was also familiar with A.M.E. Zion hymnals.

movement."[27] A less formal, yet no less activist, hymnal emerged in between the first and second editions of Foote's hymn/book with the publication of *A Collection of Revival Hymns and Plantation Melodies* by Marshall W. Taylor, an African American Methodist minister, in 1882. Taylor's *Collection*, "intended primarily for use by Black congregations of the White Methodist Episcopal Church," included

> traditional hymns, camp-meeting hymns, spirituals, and religious songs apparently written especially for publication in the hymnal. Some of the hymns were turned into gospel hymns through the addition of choruses to time-honored texts of Watts, Wesley, and others. Few of the songs seem appropriate for use in . . . formal worship services.[28]

Importantly, Taylor incorporates a history of slavery in the preface to his hymnal and states that he compiled the hymnal to preserve the musical traditions of enslaved African Americans. His explicit goal of formalizing cultural practices and Allen and Turner's implicit actions toward the same aim advocate for recognition of African American history and cultural expression often obscured by racism in a medium that departs from rhetorical or narrative forms.

Foote's own activism supports a conception of her hymn/book as equally bold in its political intentions. She introduces race and class in the preface and opens the first chapter, "Birth and Parentage," with her parents' experiences of enslavement, especially her mother's resistance to a slaveholder's sexual advances. She also recounts her

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[27] Spencer, *Black Hymnody* 12. Spencer also notes that "the fact that Turner's work [1876 A.M.E. hymnal] was the first hymnbook published by the denomination following the Civil War is recognized by the church as having special significance: 'In the organization of the Church after the war, many thousands were sold and much good was done. The old hymns gave way to the new, and the children of freedom sang a new song from their own Church book'" (Spencer, *Black Hymnody* 9). Spencer is quoting from the essay "Methodist Hymnody" in the 1954 edition of the *AMEC Hymnal*.

[28] Southern, "Hymnals of the Black Church" 144.

mother's experience in the predominantly white M.E. church that her parents attended where African American worshippers sat in a segregated gallery and waited until all of the white worshippers took Communion before approaching the table to be served. Foote's parents eventually became among the African Americans who left M.E. churches for A.M.E. churches. These stories begin a cycle of stories that illustrate encounters with racial and gender bias as well as other obstacles to achieving personal and social well-being in the context of faith as Foote defined it, such as intemperance. Foote accompanies her accounts with soundscapes that often affirm African American communal expression, especially singing. For example, her second chapter, which chronicles her initial conversion and learning of the alphabet, features lines from the hymn that she remembered her father singing at "family worship, which was every Sunday morning."[29] As will be discussed in greater detail below, the hymn diminishes her discomfort with issues concerning race, gender and language surrounding her first conversion.

Indeed, Foote consistently connects the tempering, if not resolution, of conflict rooted in racial and/or gender discrimination with African American communal expression. For example, Foote surreptitiously appropriates a passage from the prophet Isaiah to confirm her call to "sing the new song," a call doubly threatened—first, by her disapproving husband and, second, by others (e.g. male clergy) who would deny women's calls to ministry. Through it, she redefines, rather than denies, what it means to be a woman, especially a woman with a call to preach. Foote concludes chapter fifteen, which chronicles the ongoing dissonance between Foote and her husband over Foote's preaching, with a verse from Isaiah 54. However, she alludes to the reading the whole

[29] Foote 15.

chapter "over and over again," but does not cite the rest of its content, only its liberating effect on her. The first verse of Isaiah 54 suggests its relevance to Foote's situation and also helps to explain Foote's reticence in citing it directly:

> Sing, O barren one who did not bear,
> burst into song and shout,
> you who have not been in labor!
> For the children of the desolate
> woman will be more
> than the children of her that is
> married, says the Lord.[30]

Foote not only places the Biblical message in song yet again, but also uses it to affirm that a childless woman's call can produce a legacy even more prolific than that of a childbearing woman, which can be a hegemonic indicator of heteronormativity. Attuned to Isaiah's prophecy, the opening words of Foote's next chapter follow logically: "Having no children . . . "[31] Importantly, song serves as a metaphor for responding to one's call, as does shouting, and Foote finds Biblical justification not only for a woman's call, but for that call to be expressed in song and shouting, the latter of which can be a distinctively African American element of worship. In the double entendre of "shout," Foote could also see the confirmation of call as extending to race and gender simultaneously.[32] The passage can also be interpreted in terms of music and emotion as catalysts for emotional transformation. The promise of consolation allows the "desolate"

[30] Isaiah 54:1 (New Revised Standard Version).
[31] Foote 62.
[32] Foote states her particular interest in reaching African Americans in the preface to *A Brand Plucked from the Fire*: "My earnest desire is that many—especially of my own race—may be led to believe and enter into rest . . . sweet soul rest" (Foote 3). Interestingly, "rest" is also a term to indicate a silence in music.

woman to "burst into song and shout." Foote finds the familiar transformation of emotion via expression that is communal, musical and culturally specific.

The verse that Foote quotes overtly in chapter fifteen, "For thy Maker is thine husband" (Isaiah 54:5), provides her with comfort on the day that her husband George ships out to sea, in part with respect to her anticipated loneliness, but also due to the theological separation that created emotional distance in their relationship as he did not recognize her call to ministry. God as divine husband relieves Foote of her human spouse's disapproval and likens her to the people of Israel whom God calls into a marriage-like covenant relationship in Isaiah 54. In the chapter, God addresses Israel as a woman and, specifically, as a wife, charging her with responding to God's compassion in song.[33] Foote's identification with the woman receiving and responding to God's call also equates her with a community whose spiritual journey included wandering in the desert after escaping enslavement. The exiled group—another wandering chorus that connects African American experience with the Biblical story of Exodus—also carries association with vocal expression, as the Israelites murmured their impatience with their circumstances.

Foote dedicates chapter seven to an account of her conversion that exemplifies her understanding of African American communal expression as a method of transforming experience. The event's unfolding also models a neurological role for music similar to that described by Douglass, as outlined in chapter one. Communal song stimulates her emotions which, in turn, motivate her to act. At the age of fifteen, Foote becomes greatly agitated when listening to a sermon on Revelations 14:3 at a quarterly church meeting.

[33] The prophet's encouragement to the "wife" Israel to "enlarge the site of your tent" brings camp meetings to mind.

The aforementioned verse uses communal song as a metaphor for redemption as well as belonging; the only ones who could sing the new song were those "redeemed from the earth." Foote also emphasizes the availability of redemption to women through the verse, a portion of which states that "no man could learn that song."[34] Foote specifically notes the combined effect of impassioned preaching and the portion of the text that references multiple people singing: "As the minister dwelt with great force and power on the first clause of the text, I beheld my lost condition as I never had done before. Something within me kept saying, 'Such a sinner as you are can never sing that new song.'"[35] Significantly, Foote identifies the source of her discouragement as verbal ("something within me kept saying"). Language again fails when her emotional distress surpasses linguistic description: "No tongue can tell the agony I suffered."[36] The presence of others and song remains constant, however, and facilitates her transformation. After losing consciousness and being "carried home," she states that "several [people] remained with me all night, singing and praying."[37] Ignited by emotion and in the presence of communal song, Foote's voice silences the discouraging internal speaker, and she receives a response that is initially visual and aural—specifically, musical: "In great terror I cried: 'Lord, have mercy on me, a poor sinner!'"[38] She sees "a ray of light . . . accompanied by a sound of far distant singing."[39] Eventually, she hears "the words: "This is the new song—redeemed, redeemed!" and reacts by jumping out of bed and singing.[40] "Joy and peace" replace her fear, again consistent with music's ability to

[34] Foote 32.
[35] Foote 32.
[36] Foote 32.
[37] Foote 32.
[38] Foote 33.
[39] Foote 33.
[40] Foote 33.

moderate mood, and she confidently contends that she can "sing the new song," proceeding "from house to house" to share the news with her friends.[41]

As with her call to preach that follows, Foote revises her conversion experience until it aligns with African American communal expression. In doing so, she signals that her commitment not only to Christianity but to evangelism is consistent with her experience as an African American woman who has a call to preach. Her second conversion (described above) alternately embraces and eschews elements of a conversion experience approximately seven years prior that she recounts ambivalently in chapter two. In this initial encounter with "religious impressions," another church meeting—possibly akin to the quarterly meeting of her second conversion—precedes a pastoral visit to her family's home during which one of two preachers prays for her.[42] The male preacher inspires terror that her mother assuages, in part, by giving her something that she could do: behave and say her prayers. Foote announces her first conversion after interacting with another female figure, however, "a white woman who came to our house to sew, [and] taught me the Lord's prayer."[43] Language fails to describe her "joy" upon being able to repeat the Lord's prayer, but, notably, music in a communal, African American context buffers her circuitous statement that "it has always seemed to me that I was converted at this time."[44] Along with the praying preacher, the problem of the white woman as a catalyst for conversion diminishes somewhat as she recalls her "delight" at the hymn that her father sang when he led family worship on Sunday mornings.[45] As

[41] Foote 33-34.
[42] Foote 14. Foote's chapter title might share intextuality with Sojourner Truth who "clung fast" throughout her life "to her first permanent *impressions* on *religious* subjects" (Truth 101, emphasis mine).
[43] Foote 15.
[44] Foote 15.
[45] Foote 15.

practicing Methodists, Foote's family used Methodist hymnals for one of their stated purposes: family worship, which could occur in the morning and/or evening.[46] She reprints lines from the hymn by well-known composer Isaac Watts that her father sang, which also appears in the "Family Worship" section of the 1832 edition of the Methodist Episcopal hymnal: "Lord, in the morning, thou shalt hear / My voice ascending high."[47] Nevertheless, the addition of her father's hymn-singing to her account does not avert her need to signify on her conversion.

Tellingly, Foote names family worship, defined by song, as the impulse behind her "desire to learn to read the Bible."[48] She specifies that her motivation to read is not literacy in general, but a specific interest in the Bible, which she, consistent with scriptural references, repeatedly identifies with song. (She is acutely aware of these allusions and employs them slyly throughout *A Brand*.) Further, she explains that her father was the only member of the family who could read and carefully notes that his knowledge was provisional, keeping her matrilineal heritage completely outside of language. She also distances herself from the literacy that she gained from her father, a move that mirrors his protestations to that effect: "Child, I hardly know them [the letters of the alphabet] myself."[49] Further, in titling chapter two, "Religious Impressions—

[46] Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 2001) 157. Foote's experience of family worship differs dramatically from the occasions that Frederick Douglass often used to resist Covey.
[47] Foote 15. The preface to the 1832 M.E. Hymnal proffers "this revised Hymnbook" as containing "the choicest selections of evangelical hymns, suitable for private devotion, as well as for family, social, and public worship . . . " with an equally appropriate subcategorization of "Morning and Evening" (John Wesley, Charles Wesley, et al., *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1832) 4).
[48] Foote 15.
[49] Foote 15.

Learning the Alphabet," she places spiritual concerns prior to literacy; the chapter title also makes no explicit reference to reading.[50]

Foote resolves the untenable circumstances of her first conversion with the (w)hol(l)y African American, more communal and more musical experience of her second. Rather than the vagueness of chapter two's "Religious Impressions," chapter seven's title and first line attest to her increased level of comfort with her experience; "My Conversion" begins definitively: "I was converted when fifteen years old."[51] Significantly, Foote contrasts her second conversion experience with an alternate model that relies on language and clerical authority, echoing other unpalatable aspects of her first conversion. A week after her conversion, she reports that "Satan tempted me dreadfully, telling me I was deceived; people didn't get religion in that way, but went to the altar, and were prayed for by the minister."[52] Again, she successfully challenges a discouraging voice, this time identified as male; Foote's own, female voice suffices to "get religion." In addition, Foote contrasts the minister's individual, spoken prayer with the communal song that contextualized her voice; her fellow congregants sang as she "cried" for "mercy."[53] Foote implies that she needs no intercessor, especially not a male mediary, nor does she require the formality of being in a church, establishing a precedent for her ministry as she conducted her preaching unordained for most of her life. While she credits God with granting redemption, her voice, rather than that of a male authority figure, activates the process of receiving salvation; Foote is the agent, a role that her

[50] Interestingly, the chapter title is shortened for the table of contents, becoming "Learning the Alphabet," rather than "Religious Impressions." Was there pressure to conform to an formula that made a necessary nod to an African American author's acquisition of literacy?
[51] Foote 32.
[52] Foote 34.
[53] Foote 33.

"congregants" can assume as well. They can also act on their own, even from home, as Foote did, surrounded by communal song imagined, remembered or supplied by Foote's hymn/book, if not by the presence of people singing that Foote experienced.

Foote (1823-1901) lived roughly contemporaneously to Frederick Douglass (circa 1818-1895); however, she was born into freedom in the North rather than into slavery in the South. Both of her parents experienced slavery, though; her "father was born free, but was stolen, when a child, and enslaved" and her mother was born into slavery.[54] Her father eventually purchased freedom for himself, his wife and their first child, Foote's elder sister. Her parents' religious devotion meant that Foote grew up in the church—specifically, in the A.M.E. Church primarily. As mentioned earlier, her parents attended a M.E. church and experienced racism as members of that congregation before moving to Albany, New York. Foote had some access to formal education during her childhood, attending a racially "integrated country school" for three years.[55]

Foote achieved sanctification shortly after her conversion at the age of fifteen. According to the doctrine of Methodist theologian and hymn writer John Wesley, sanctification, also know as perfection, removes one's inclination to sin.[56] Sanctification was central to the growing Holiness movement of which Foote became a part, along with many other female preachers, black and white, in part because it played an important role

[54] Foote 9.
[55] Collier-Thomas 57.
[56] According to "John Wesley and his theological heirs, [sanctification] is a distinct second work of grace following conversion in which the heart is cleansed of inbred sin and filled with God's love" (Susie Stanley, *Holy Boldness: Women Preachers' Autobiographies and the Sanctified Self*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002) 2). Foote clarifies that she is "not teaching absolute perfection, for that belongs to God alone. Nor do I mean a state of angelic or Adamic perfection, but Christian perfection—an extinction of every temper contrary to love" (Foote 120).

in justifying women's calls to preach.[57] Perfection did not remain solely a personal spiritual encounter for most, however. Like "other early-nineteenth-century feminists touched by perfection, Foote attacked the evils of racism and male authoritarianism, as well as other societal issues."[58] Shortly after her sanctification, Foote recounts hearing and responding to a call from God to preach. Nevertheless, she began her ministry as a teenager while her husband, George, was alive, though he did not approve of her preaching and threatened to commit her to "the crazy house" if she did not cease her activities.[59] She persisted, even when the A.M.E. Zion Church to which she belonged in Boston excommunicated her over the issue of her preaching. After her husband's death, she embarked on a career as a traveling evangelist rather than serving as a pastor of a local church, a position which she could not hold due to the church's refusal to ordain her.

Although Foote often preached in churches, her ministry also took her outside of the A.M.E. Zion's organizational structure as well as that of other denominations due to the opposition to ordination that she encountered from church leaders. In addition, her convictions about sanctification connected her with a religious community that crossed

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[57] Collier-Thomas notes that "it was of utmost importance to preaching women such as Foote to ensure that the doctrine of Christian perfection did not fall into disrepute among the Methodists and other prominent denominations, for it was this doctrine—that all may be sanctified in order to do God's work of love—that legitimized the ministry of preaching women. Foote is thus meticulous in building her argument that the doctrine of perfection, which Luther and Wesley upheld, is central to the message of the gospel" (63). Catherine Wessinger, among others, contends that the Holiness movement doubled as a women's movement and COGIC, for example, continues to be known for its overwhelmingly female membership (Catherine Wessinger, ed., *Women's Leadership in Marginal Religions: Explorations Outside the Mainstream*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993) 10. However, Stanley argues somewhat differently that African American and white female preachers in the Holiness movement saw themselves first as Holiness and second as groups of women in ministry (201). Although Foote allies herself with the Holiness movement, she also advocates for women in ministry. For example, she encourages women to heed calls to ministry throughout her hymn/book, dedicating a chapter to "my Christian sisters" (Foote 112).

[58] Collier-Thomas 59.

[59] Foote states that her husband "said I was getting more crazy every day, and getting others in the same way, and that if I did not stop he would send me back home or to the crazy house" (59).

lines of denomination, race and gender. While the Holiness movement could be found within certain denominations, most notably Methodism, Holiness also was marginalized, especially prior to the late nineteenth century, such that adherents sometimes found spiritual homes apart from mainstream congregations. (Eventually, Holiness would organize into different denominations, such as the Church of God in Christ, or COGIC, [predominantly black] and the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) [predominantly white].)[60] In parallel with the "Sanctified Church," so to speak, Foote's ministry existed both across and outside of denominational lines.

While preaching was predominantly associated with men at the time, women also preached, though often without the formal recognition of standing behind a pulpit or of ordination. In particular, "legions of black women have preached for almost two hundred years."[61] Foote does not settle for delivering sermons in spaces deemed permissible for women to "preach without preaching," however, i.e. standing beside the pulpit or exhorting at a prayer meeting so that the church would not have to recognize the activity as preaching per se and, thus, women as preachers. She engages in preaching acknowledged as such throughout her life, and her ordination late in her ministry finally formalized her claim to the title of preacher. By asserting herself into the role of preacher, she modeled the potential for other women to join her in responding to their own calls, whether recognized by the organized church or not.

Foote's struggle with her call to preach emphasizes how essential she finds communal African American expression to subjectivity, faith and her full acceptance of

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[60] Susie Stanley notes in *Holy Boldness* that she "found references to Julia Foote in an unpublished journal of D. S. Warner, the founder of the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana). They preached together at least twice" (xxxiii).

[61] Collier-Thomas 37. Collier-Thomas also asserts that "black women who preach have not been as scarce as the historical literature on women, religion, and African Americans has suggested" (11).

her vocation. Foote tries mightily to hear and accept God's call to preach, but does not succeed until she has a vision that includes participating in an African American worship experience. Visions were common elements in many nineteenth-century African American spiritual autobiographies, including those of "Old Elizabeth," Zilpha Elaw and Jarena Lee. Foote's journey toward acknowledging her call begins with a vision that revises Elaw's experience of having words "written on . . . [her] heart" by a woman praying for her recovery from grave illness, which confirm her call to preach.[62] Foote eventually distances language's impact on her body as she reworks her own call to preach in a series of four visions. Beginning with chapter seventeen—entitled "My Call to Preach," Foote sees a vision that involves language written on her body. Reminiscent of her first conversion, she couches her descriptions reservedly. The words on a scroll held by "what seemed to be an angel . . . appeared to be printed on my heart" at "the moment my eyes saw it."[63] However, this initial vision leaves her "in agony."[64] She receives some relief from her emotional anguish ("my appetite failed me and sleep fled from my eyes. I seemed as one tormented") by "partially open[ing] her mind" to a group to which she "belonged . . . a band of sisters whom I loved dearly."[65] She sees a different sentence in a second vision whose words are on the chest of the angel rather than on her body. She again becomes ill. Two months later, she verbally accepts God's call after seeing the angel from her previous two visions once more. The angel delivers yet another sentence, though in what form is unclear. Foote makes no mention of seeing the message in writing as before. Like the others, this third vision involves only Foote and the angel,

[62] Elaw 129.
[63] Foote 66.
[64] Foote 66.
[65] Were these women Holiness preachers like herself? Was the group racially integrated such that she still withheld part of her concerns? Why did or could she not fully open her mind?

whom she identifies as male. After a brief feeling of "joy and peace," her emotional state declines precipitously yet again.[66] Foote then connects the timing of a fourth vision—a more elaborate, populated and musical vision—with that of her second conversion, to which it is also most structurally similar.[67] This vision begins and ends with embodiment. As Foote "engaged in fervent prayer, the same supernatural presence . . . took me by the hand," and, at the angel's transporting touch, Foote "became lost to everything of this world."[68] In addition to the presence of others bookending her vision, she also sees "God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, besides many others whom I thought were angels."[69] Following a baptism-like bath by Christ, Foote hears "the sweetest music I had ever heard," a similar response to her cry for mercy that precipitated her conversion.[70] Foote then becomes an angel and joins the group as a participant:

> The whole company looked at me in delight, and began to make a noise which I called shouting. We all marched back with music. When we reached the tree to which the angel first led me, it hung full of fruit, which I had not seen before. The Holy Ghost plucked some and gave me, and the rest helped themselves. We sat down and ate of the fruit, which had a taste like nothing I had ever tasted before. When we had finished, we all arose and gave another shout.[71]

At her fourth vision's conclusion, Foote eventually "found herself once more on earth" after being embraced by "the whole company" with whom she had shouted, marched and

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[66] Foote 68.
[67] Notably, both occurred on Sunday evenings, in counterpoint to the Sunday mornings of Foote's family worship.
[68] Foote 69.
[69] Foote 69.
[70] Foote 70.
[71] Foote 70.

eaten. Plural personhood accompanies Foote's ultimate acceptance of her call to preach, and music and movement help to qualify this group as yet another iteration of the wandering chorus.[72] Notably, Foote envisions becoming part of a community through music, sharing food and physical contact. As a preacher, she would later facilitate these harbingers of her vocation, using song and the symbolic meals of the lovefeast and Communion to create community.

Among the elements of her fourth vision, the shout stands out. A shout can signal a distinctively African American worship event in which ecstatic expression conveyed communally transforms experience. (Shout also has non-religious definitions.) Foote's insertion of shouting into the story of her call as well as into the lyrics of her hymn draws attention to the integral role of African American communal expression in Foote's faith journey, particularly as a catalyst for life-altering transformation in the event of her call to preach. Foote melds race and faith together within a vision that confirms her vocation and again links her work to that of other nineteenth-century African American evangelists. Maria Stewart and Jarena Lee, for instance, also included shouting in their autobiographies, as well as other details that identified and affirmed their involvement in African American styles of worship.

While contemporary definitions of shout can incorporate a variety of music associated with the blues, shouting in contexts more overtly associated with religious practice "refers interchangeably to praising the Lord with a loud voice and holy dancing."[73] Whether connoting movement or sound, shouting does not rely on language for its efficacy and represents ecstatic expression manifested simultaneously in multiple

[72] Foote 71, 70.
[73] Spencer, *Protest and Praise* 194.

individuals. Zora Neale Hurston acknowledges shouting in her essay by the same name as an "emotional explosion, responsive to rhythm" rather than language, noting that "the hearers can follow the flow of syllables without stirring the brain to grasp the sense."[74] Shouting can also correlate with the improvisational mixture (mixtery) of individual and communal expression that Douglass identified at work in the songs of sorrow. According to Hurston, shouting "is absolutely individualistic. . . . [and] the shouter may *mix* the different styles to his liking, or he may express himself in some fashion never seen before."[75] At the same time, Hurston states, "shouting is a community thing. It thrives in concert. It is the first shout that is difficult for the preacher to arouse. After that one they are likely to sweep like fire over the church. This is easily understood, for the rhythm is increasing with each shouter who communicated his fervor to someone else."[76] Through the presence of shouting in her vision, Foote demonstrates that her call is structurally and culturally consistent with African American worship styles. Specifically, her call occurs "within the circle" (another version of the wandering chorus), that is, in the context of African American communal expression. Further, as in her conversion, she participates in her call rather than receiving it passively, suggesting—or perhaps confirming—that her audience can also embrace spiritual engagement as communal and participatory; akin to the one in her vision, her congregation can become a wandering chorus.

Shouting as movement arose as a way that enslaved African Americans could maintain the practice of dancing despite pressure from whites to abandon it. The ring shout developed in response, a circle in which participants moved while singing. If one's feet stayed on the ground, the movement did not count as dance and therefore remained

[74] Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church* (New York: Marlow, 1981) 91.
[75] Hurston, *The Sanctified Church* 91, emphasis mine.
[76] Hurston, *The Sanctified Church* 91.

sanctioned. Although Foote opposes dancing, her hymn/book associates movement with music and religious activity, as Nettl suggests is consistent with most of human history. For example, while Foote specifies that the shouting in her fourth vision is "a noise," she confirms next that music and movement remain yoked: "We all marched back with music."[77] The form of communal movement is notable as Elisha Albright Hoffman, the composer of the hymn "Holy Is the Lamb" that Foote co-authored and included in full in *A Brand*, also composed the hymn "Are You Washed in the Blood of the Lamb?" in 1878 which became "a marching song for the Salvation Army," a group known for its vigorous singing.[78] In addition, Foote's last chapter is essentially an altar call which can involve movement as congregants make their way to the front of the church to confess or reaffirm their faith.

Foote's awareness of movement within the context of African American worship informs her critique of language. For example, she translates language into movement in her fourth vision. After receiving verbal instructions from God and Christ, the latter of whom gave her a document written "with a golden pen and golden ink, upon golden paper," the band of angels "all went with me to a bright, shining gate, singing and shouting. Here they embraced me, and I found myself once more on earth."[79] She describes the letter first as a visual object and then understands it as embodied and an activity to be performed. Notably, the text's transformation occurs in process and community; written language vanishes while she is talking with friends. In parallel to her heavenly cohorts, Foote notes that "several friends had been with me all night," again

[77] Foote 70.
[78] According to Stanley, another nineteenth-century African American evangelist, "Emma Ray remembered conducting street meetings, singing like the [Salvation] Army" (xxviii). Stanley notes that the Salvation Army "influenced Wesleyan/Holiness women and their ministries" (xxviii).
[79] Foote 70, 71.

similarly to the presence of those on the night of her conversion. In talking with "several friends" who "were in during the day," she states, "I would, without thinking, put my hand into my bosom, to show them my letter of authority."[80] She quickly resolves the issue of the missing letter which morphs from written language to physical object to ephemeral process: "it was in my heart, and was to be shown in my life, instead of in my hand."[81] However, it is not ordinary written language that Foote subsumes into her body and integrates into her life as deeds. Foote removes race from language whose source was divine—the pen, ink and paper are gold. She replaces language's hegemonic association with race, specifically whiteness, with an association, albeit also hegemonic, with worth. Foote incorporates this indication of value into her body, symbolically internalizing a worthiness as a person and a preacher conferred and confirmed by God. Foote's reworking of the letter supplies a precedent for her treatment of a letter that she wrote. Her letter to the Conference (a regional association of churches in Methodist denominations) asking for "an impartial hearing" and a written response following her excommunication from the church "was slightingly noticed and then thrown under the table" by male clergy, leading Foote again to connect language with masculinity and hegemonic power.[82]

Foote also dissociates herself from hegemonic forms of knowledge, linking trauma with formal education and literacy. For example, the hanging of her first teacher disrupted her initial schooling and left her with both temporary and permanent distress. Specifically, she "was just commencing to read"—again she affiliates her eagerness to

[80] Foote 71. Could this also refer to her body as that of a woman? If so, it foreshadows Morrison's detail in *Beloved* about what the women brought to the intervention in front of 124 that also specifies the particular presence of women's bodies (see chapter three).
[81] Foote 71.
[82] Foote 76.

learn with her desire to read the Bible—when her teacher committed murder.[83] She notes that she could not remember her teacher's speech on the scaffold; however, she reprints the chorus of the hymn that he sang, "clasping his hands, and rejoicing all the while."[84] The chapter closes with her transformation of the incident into both a theological and political lesson. Citing scripture, she encourages love rather than revenge, as exhibited by the husband of the woman whom the teacher killed. The man visited the jailed teacher and prayed for his conversion, prayers that eventually "were answered;" Foote attributes his happiness on the scaffold to his conversion, and her reporting of his emotion as well as his song, again correlates music and mood.[85] She then urges "Christian men" to vote for abolition of capital punishment as well as for prohibition of alcohol.[86] Her gendered identification of eligible voters is a subtle reminder of women's *de jure* exclusion from that group.

Foote's worship service-like fourth vision offers an alternate source of power, however. In it, a group shares a meal reminiscent of both Communion and the eating of fruit in the garden of Eden, an activity preceded by shouting and marching and succeeded by more shouting.[87] Foote places a key moment and sacrament in the Christian tradition within the context of African American communal expression. Further, she frames her call to preach within this mixtery in which she is a full participant. She also revises the role of a woman in the garden to invited guest rather than disobedient creation-turned-trespasser. While Eve and then Adam gain knowledge illicitly in Eden, resulting in their

[83] Foote 21.
[84] Foote 22.
[85] Foote 22.
[86] Foote 23.
[87] In the Protestant tradition, Communion consists of a congregation sharing a symbolic meal of grape juice or wine and bread understood to represent Jesus sacrificing his life (blood and body, respectively) for the remission of all human sin.

expulsion, the Holy Ghost offers unfamiliar fruit to Foote, again reinforcing her status as chosen by God and as the legitimate recipient of special knowledge. Foote finds this kind of inclusion rather than condemnation throughout her vision. Spatially, she remains within the "garden," a reflection of her status as part of the group, whose literal embrace immediately before she returns to earth reinforces her presence as welcome.

After her fourth vision, Foote again undercuts formal knowledge, this time in the guise of her pastor whose coldness contrasts with the warmth of the water with which Christ washed her. She names him and identifies him as "a scholar and a fine speaker" who accuses her of mistakenly hearing a call to preach, telling her in a "sneering, indifferent way" that "you don't know anything."[88] She responds that "my gifts are very small, I know, but I can no longer be shaken by what you or any one else may think or say," using "I know" seemingly benignly yet affirming her knowledge beyond that considered scholarly.[89] This also marks the turning point in her autobiography; resolving her internal turmoil leaves her available to focus on external challenges to her ministry. The rest of the book maintains an outward orientation that addresses the situation of women called to preach and attends to the spiritual struggles of her audience. Notably, Foote's psychological resolution differs from that of some African American female evangelists who equivocate about their calling throughout their lives and autobiographies.

Foote's self-acceptance materializes into externalized freedom. She travels extensively, for example, though she encounters racism and, in the South, risks enslavement. In *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women*, Joycelyn Moody stresses that Holiness preachers were far

[88] Foote 71-72.
[89] Foote 72.

from wealthy, yet Foote can support herself financially after the death of her husband.[90] In effect, empowerment accompanies her call. Challenges such as discrimination remain real, yet external to her internal sense of confidence, and she often uses them to reveal social ills and advocate for their eradication. She marshals her resources for her ministry and encourages others considering a similar path without returning to the painful doubt about her own identity and purpose.

Foote presents music as marking a route to salvation and sanctification in which all can participate as individuals and, concurrently, as members of a community. Foote encourages participation in song as a mode of spiritual engagement and, potentially, a means of transformation. She lines out hymns throughout her hymn/book, "whereby a song leader intones a line of text and the congregation repeats this in song."[91] By deploying an oral tradition practiced by many African American congregations, Foote places the hegemonic form of writing into the vernacular of hymn-singing, thereby increasing its accessibility.[92] Foote extends autophylography, a variation on plural personhood, to song, creating a musical form that understands one's story and,

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[90] Joycelyn Moody, *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001) x. Moody contends that "while literacy itself, like the access to means by which narratives could and would be published, signifies a certain class distinction and social prominence above others less empowered, the women I focus upon in this book represent the lowest economic class in their society. They were poor. *None* of the women had any money; indeed, each makes it plain that a primary impetus for publishing her autobiography—perhaps the strongest motivation after religious proselytizing itself . . . was to earn money for survival. Also . . . they overtly state that they lived fundamentally on the charity and benevolence of others" (x). She goes on to argue that "blacks' participation in organized religion was as much about class mobility as the quest for literacy indisputably was. However, Stewart, Lee, Elaw, Prince, Jackson, and Foote, though aspiring to a quality of life greater than that they possessed at the time of their writing, do not advocate the acquisition of material wealth" (Moody xi).

[91] John Bealle, "Introduction" to *Benjamin Lloyd's Hymn Book: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition*, ed. Joyce H. Cauthen (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Folklife Association, 1999) 3.

[92] Some white congregations in the United States also lined out hymns, a tradition that can be traced to Scotland and Ireland. In addition, "the Dutch Reformed church of . . . [John Jea's] youth used 'lining out'. . . . Worshippers learned the songs by rote and often altered the tunes a little each time they sang. A significant advantage of this was that it used popular airs and tunes. Itinerants could be certain that their new congregations knew a specific melody" (Hodges 166).

specifically, faith journey, as song mutually constructed in the company of others. Fittingly, Foote's work falls within a tradition that began corporately. In 1783, Belinda, an enslaved woman in Massachusetts, sent a petition to the legislature requesting freedom not only for herself, but also on behalf of numerous enslaved African Americans. Her petition, followed by others, also set a precedent for linking African American autobiography with liberation and, in many cases, music.

Keeping Foote's hymn/book solely within the realm of language becomes one, but not the only, way of holding her work to a dialectic in which written language is the "standard" medium for perceiving and analyzing it. Moody, for example, remains most wedded to thinking of Foote's text as a profoundly linguistic one. Her overarching argument hinges on seeing Foote's primary mode of resistance as verbal, albeit orally as well as in written language. Moody observes moments in the text unreconciled to this perspective, however, as when Foote "ambivalently reports her mother's oral expressions" and "ambiguously represents . . . [her] mother as the wellspring of her daughter's self-affirming verbal power and as an antagonist who sometimes separates Foote from true piety."[93] In addition, she notes "instances where her [Foote's] own verbal self-defense proves as ineffectual as her mother's" and recounts Foote's twice-repeated statement that her mother "did not say very much about" about her daughter running away from the Primes after being unjustly accused of and then whipped for stealing pound cakes.[94] Foote uses these moments to demonstrate language's failure, particularly in relation to empowerment.

[93] Moody 130, 131.
[94] Moody 132, 139. Foote writes, "When I reached home, I told my mother all that had happened, but she did not say very much about it. In the afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Prime came to the house, and had a long talk

Further, few scholars remark on Foote's hymn "Holy Is the Lamb," which appears on the penultimate page of the last chapter and therefore the book. Those who do note its presence mark it only as one of many musical insertions in the text that structure a "congregational atmosphere."[95] Even as language, the lyrics are largely ignored, especially given that Foote clearly claims authorship of them in the editions of *A Brand Plucked from the Fire* published in 1879, 1886 and, in facsimile, 1988. The 1986 text-only reproduction of *A Brand Plucked from the Fire* represents Foote's hymn differently, eliminating its musical setting along with its standard notation of author and composer and thereby distorting its title and order in the chapter.[96] By contrast, the stereotype edition published in 1988 shows Foote's hymn in a musical setting: verses and chorus between parallel staves, treble and bass.[97] Foote's name appears above the hymn on the left, a place usually reserved for the composer of a hymn's lyrics. Correspondingly, the name of the composer of the tune ordinarily appears above a hymn on the right, as is the case with E.[lisha] A.[lbright] Hoffman (1839-1929), a white evangelical preacher and prolific hymn writer.[98] Isolated from the rest of the work, the page could be taken for a leaf from a hymnal. The erasure of music and of the names of the its creators in the 1986

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with us about the affairs. My mother did not believe I had told a falsehood, thought she did not say much before me. She told me in after years that she talked very sharply to the Primes when I was not by" (26).

[95] Douglass-Chin 129. Douglass-Chin writes, "In the specific case of Foote, the sermonic, oratorical nature of her autobiography combined with her numerous hymn excerpts create a congregational atmosphere that is not found in the autobiographies of Whitefield, Palmer, Livermore, White, or Allen" (129).

[96] In the text-only reprint of *A Brand* in 1986, the hymn's lyrics begin chapter thirty, and its title, author, composer and music are absent (William Andrews, ed., *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986) 233). This distortion carries over into criticism. For example, Crystal J. Lucky likely used the 1986 edition as the sole source for her chapter, "The Black Women's Spiritual Narrative as Sermon," as she does not acknowledge that Foote authored the hymn and uses the title of the chapter for the title of the hymn, as the 1986 edition seems to suggest.

[97] To see Foote's hymn in the 1879 edition (on which 1988 facsimile edition is based), visit <http://digilib.nypl.org/dynaweb/digs-t/wwm978/>. Click on Chapter XXX and scroll down.

[98] W. K. Mc Neil, "Hoffman, Elisha Albright," *Encyclopedia of American Gospel Music* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

edition provides another example of the hegemony of language that Foote seems intent on disrupting by placing the hymn visually/spatially and musically on the page. In view of the chapter as a worship service, the order of the hymn is critical liturgically, as is the music that Foote designates to enliven the lyrics. Unconsciously, the assumption that *A Brand's* importance rested only in its language preempted musical as well as visual aspects of the text despite their placement by Foote. Their omission can reinforce an inaccurate view of the 1986 text as standard written English.

Language can also occlude an understanding of Foote's text as song. Crystal J. Lucky and Richard Douglass-Chin refer to spiritual autobiographies such as Foote's as "preacherly" and "sermonic," respectively; however, these designations remain only linguistic rather than also musical.[99] Lucky and Douglass-Chin recognize that Foote's inclusion of hymns, emulation of African American oral traditions and direct addresses to an audience result in her "entire autobiography read[ing] like a long sermon or perhaps a series of sermons in which Foote as preacher encourages her 'congregation' to join her in lining, shouting, call-and-response, and dialogic patterns."[100] Moody similarly observes that "Foote's . . . formulaic chapter ending[s]" resemble elements of a worship service and feature "inclusive theology addressed to an inscribed readership; a meditation on the religious state of an individual or group; a prayer or appeal; [and,] finally, a call to conversion or sacred conscientiousness. Moreover, the exhortation at the end of each chapter invariably disrupts the linearity of the autobiography."[101] Moody does not pursue the speakerly text's disrupted "linearity," though, and Lucky does not reconcile "the oral

[99] Lucky 179; Douglass-Chin 127.
[100] Douglass-Chin 130.
[101] Moody 141.

and the literary" in a way that imagines them hybridly.[102] Douglass-Chin does venture that Foote's "extensive use of song turns her narrative into something more than traditional English autobiographical prose."[103] He stops short, however, of reconceptualizing Foote's form, and, like other commentators, he diminishes efforts to see Foote's work as also outside of language by referring to it in linguistic terms, such as "narrative prose."[104] Rather, Foote rejects the presumed dominance of language in favor of (co)constructing a musical text.

Importantly, Foote's sermons might also qualify as song. Preaching in an African American tradition can be so musical as to be considered song. Further, a sermon can be a song co-created by preacher and congregation. Spencer posits, for instance, that although enslaved African American preachers likely composed spirituals, antebellum "spirituals more frequently developed from extemporaneous sermonizing that crescendoed little by little to intoned utterance."[105] Some improvisations between preacher and congregation proved "evanescent, while favorable creations were remembered and perpetuated through oral transmission."[106] Spencer's book *Sacred Symphony* reproduces sermons transcribed as songs. Hence, after a brief introduction, it resembles a hymnal. The collection of "100 spirituals by 16 ministers representing various Baptist, Methodist, Holiness, and Pentecostal denominations" demonstrates that the existence of a "close correlation" similar to that "between black preaching and the antebellum spiritual" continues and crosses not only centuries, but denominational

[102] Lucky 186.
[103] Douglass-Chin 128.
[104] Douglass-Chin 129.
[105] Spencer, *Protest and Praise* 225.
[106] Spencer, *Protest and Praise* 225.

lines.[107] Spencer contends that listening for the musicality of entities previously recorded only linguistically could "also allow us to return to prayer and sermon excerpts documented in nineteenth century diaries and correspondences, as well as in twentieth century folklore journals and books, to provide those textual transcriptions with provisional musical setting."[108] In one sense, Foote's provision of hymns supplies a musical setting for her "text," although it would be intriguing to apply Spencer's methodology to her sermon(s) as well as the remainder of her autobiography. For example, *A Brand* could be imagined as performed musically or as akin to the theatrical setting of James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones*, a collection of poems inspired by some of the "greatest hits" of African American folk sermons. These examples of "favorable creations" are like folk tales whose stories remain the same though delivered slightly differently by each teller/preacher, or "trombone" in Johnson's metaphor of a preacher's body as a musical instrument.[109] (They could also be likened to the similar continuity of folk songs.)

As song, sermons can be transformative. William C. Turner, Jr. calls on Mircea Eliade's conception of "kratophany" as a "manifestation of power" to characterize African American preaching.[110] Kratophany plays on the term, theophany, a physical manifestation of God, such as the burning bush that appeared to Moses in Genesis. Power, rather than God, appears in a kratophany though the context remains one

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[107] Spencer, *Sacred Symphony*, xiii; Spencer, *Protest and Praise* 225. A revised version of Spencer's introduction to *Sacred Symphony* became chapter ten, "Sermon and Surplus: Musicality in Black Preaching; The Chanted Sermon" in his book *Protest and Praise*.
[108] Spencer, *Sacred Symphony* xiv.
[109] Spencer, *Protest and Praise* 225; James Weldon Johnson, *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990) 7.
[110] William C. Turner, Jr., Foreword to *Sacred Symphony*.

affiliated with religious experience. Sound and movement often signal a kratophany in African American worship services in which,

> replete with drama and musicality, the performatory power of preaching is expected to move people and cause reaction. Nodding the head, shedding a tear, holy dancing, speaking in tongues, singing or humming aloud, and saying "amen" are responses to the power manifested in effective black preaching.[111]

Spencer cites Turner, among others, in tracing the foundation and power of black preaching to rhythm: "without it [rhythm] there would be no kratophany."[112] Again consistent with music's historically inseparable relationship with movement discussed in chapter one, Spencer notes that "the kratophany is not only in the spoken word but, as Turner has said, in rendered gesture," and, hence, African American communal worship locates "release, not only in the singing of the sermon, but in the rhythmic dancing of it."[113] For example, Johnson describes a preacher who, upon his audience's waning interest in his "formal sermon from a formal text," switched to "the old-folk sermon that begins with the creation of the world and ends with Judgment Day. . . . [He] strode the pulpit up and down in what was actually a very rhythmic dance."[114] The preacher's shift transformed both himself and the congregation, including Johnson, who witnessed the

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[111] Spencer, *Sacred Symphony* x.
[112] Spencer, *Protest and Praise* 229. Spencer supports his claim "that rhythm lies at the base of black preaching" by citing research conducted by Bruce Rosenberg who "deduced that rhythm is probably the most vital part of the black preacher's musical art" and William Pipes who "found that black preachers customarily fit sentences into metrical units by squeezing together and stretching out words, while simultaneously accompanying their delivery by striking the lectern or stomping the foot" (Spencer, *Protest and Praise* 229).
[113] Spencer, *Protest and Praise* 233. Spencer notes that "sermonic intoning does not necessarily result in the creation of song. . . . It is in song that the kratophany is concretely captured, with the possibility of its surplus being perpetuated in the oral tradition" (*Protest and Praise* 238).
[114] Johnson 6.

"electric current that ran through the crowd" and "was, perhaps against my will, deeply moved; the emotional effect upon me was irresistible."[115] Johnson's portrayal of "congregations moved to ecstasy by the rhythmic intoning of sheer incoherences" parallels Spencer's description of African American preaching, and both bring the agency and non-linguistic qualities of Douglass's songs of sorrow to mind. Foote's autobiography, likewise, might appear to be a "formal text" and at times a "formal sermon;" however, she embeds music within it that indicates her similar valorization of African American communal expression. She places singing, shouting and movement in her hymn/book that can elicit an emotional response similar to Johnson's, transforming the congregation's experience.

The sermonic process that employs non-linguistic expression also exemplifies plural personhood. The wandering chorus becomes manifest

> during this call and response or responsorial event, [where] worshipers . . . actually preach back. Therefore, there is reciprocity through which preacher and congregation commune in the spontaneous creation of song.
>
> This reciprocity is important, for seldom is song spontaneously produced by a preacher during the sermon without the participation of the congregation. . . . Correspondingly, it has been proven repeatedly that the black preacher who "lectures" to an unresponsive congregation is the one who "sings" in a responsive setting. Spontaneous intoning takes courage, so a preacher will not "let go and let God" before a comatose congregation.[116]

[115] Johnson 6, 7.
[116] Spencer, *Protest and Praise* 234.

Spencer's distinction between "lectures" and "sings" recalls the Kentucky woman's differentiation between "notes" and "mixtery" in an article originally published two years before Foote's death.[117] She explains her perspective on the difference between African American and white singing in terms of communal improvisation, and, in parallel, by framing her own spiritual journey musically, Foote proffers a model for subjectivity—specifically, plural personhood—as mixtery. As hymnals could trace an individual's Christian journey within the context of community, Foote structures her story to reflect her experience; both emerge out of communal song.[118] Again, Foote's subjectivity, like her autobiography, can be conceptualized as a wandering chorus, a specific type of mixtery.

Likewise, Foote's hymn "Holy Is the Lamb" can be thought of encapsulating mixtery in microcosm. Foote reappropriates an existing hymn, "Mixture[s] of Joy and

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[117] Jeanette Robinson Murphy, "The Survival of African Music in America," *Popular Science Monthly*, Vol. 55, 1899: 660-672. Rpt. in *The Negro and His Folklore in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals*, Ed. Bruce Jackson (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1967: 327-339) 328-329. Zora Neale Hurston recounts a story that contrasts African American and white preaching styles similarly. Of the staid stereotype often associated with the latter variety, she reports, "'They say of that type of preacher, "Why he don't preach at all. He just lectures.' And the way they say the word 'lecture' make it sound like horse-stealing" (Hurston, *The Sanctified Church* 106).

[118] Contemporary hymnals in the Methodist tradition "followed the shape of the Wesleyan *via salutis*," or way of salvation, and were "thereby organized 'according to the experience of real Christians,' beginning with an invitation to repentance, and concluding with integration into the community of faith" (Tucker 157). Foote's chapter titles, for example, show thematic commonalities with the subject headings of a contemporary Methodist hymnal structured in this way. Tucker stresses that "the purpose of the hymn books was not to encourage an individual piety divorced from a corporate expression of faith. . . . The condition and decision of the individual was set within a broader context. . . . Growth in personal holiness was inextricably linked with social holiness" (Tucker 158).

In addition to structure, size and affordability were other reasons that hymnals were thought of as personal study guides, according to Tucker. Although hymnals increased in size throughout in the nineteenth century, they still remained portable and relatively affordable, the latter being a consideration that Foote mentions in her introduction. Tucker contends that "pocket-sized books of hymns were intended simultaneously to stimulate growth toward personal holiness and to provide a resource for singing at the multiple settings expected for worship" (157). Foote's reference to her book as "little" in her introduction hints at a material similarity between her autobiography and a hymnal. The first edition of her autobiography measured 4.5 x 7 inches, slightly larger than the landmark hymnal published by the AME Church in 1801. Southern notes that "like many other hymnals of the time, Allen's [1801] hymnal belongs to the genre of the "pocket hymnal," measuring slightly larger than 5x3 inches in size" ("Hymnals of the Black Church" 138).

Sorrow," that begins with a word remarkably close to and sometimes pronounced as "mixtery," a process that she engages in the hymn's creation. For example, in one of three recordings made of "Mixture[s] of Joy and Sorrow" in 1976, the congregation of Spoon Creek Primitive Baptist Church in Critz, Virginia clearly sings "Mixtery of joy and sorrow . . . " in their rendition of the hymn from the Goble hymnal.[119] As mixtery informs the hymn's construction, it can also play a role in the performance of the hymn. If sung—or imagined as being sung—in an African American improvisational style, the hymn could sound like the "mixtery" that it is rather than "notes." Foote's hymn/book might seem similarly immutable, yet Foote infuses it with song that places it in process. Co-composed in the spirit of mixtery, her hymn and hymn/book, like her life, emerge out of interdependence and improvisation.

Though Spencer refers primarily to mid- to late-twentieth century African American preaching, he contends that a congregation's critical role in the effectiveness of sermonic call-and-response is "historically normative," citing nineteenth and early-twentieth century examples as well as exploring its roots in African folk song.[120] A responsive community comprises the crucial element that transforms a linguistic, individually-oriented and static event into a non-linguistic, communal and process-

[119] "Mixtures of Joy and Sorrow," Spoon Creek Primitive Baptist in Critz: Service led by Brother Joyce, Elder Clifton, Larry Crotts and Buddy Crotts; Selections from the Goble Hymn Book, Rec. 11 April 1976, Audiotape, from the Brett Sutton and Peter Hartman Collection (#20042), Southern Folklife Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, FT-633, Tape 1 of 3. The congregation of Long Branch Primitive Baptist also sings from the Goble hymnal, while that of Greasy Creek Primitive Baptist sings from the *Old School Hymnal* ("Mixture of Joy and Sorrow," Long Branch Primitive Baptist Service, Rec. 31 Jan. 1976, Audiotape, from the Brett Sutton and Peter Hartman Collection (#20042), FT-594, Tape 1 of 2; "Mixtures of Joy and Sorrow," Greasy Creek Primitive Baptist Church: Selections from the Old School Hymnal #9, Rec. 12 March 1976, Audiotape, from the Brett Sutton and Peter Hartman Collection (#20042), FT-616, Tape 1 of 3). The above recordings are on file along with this dissertation with permission from Brett Sutton. According to Jamie Nathaniel Vermillion of the Southern Folklife Collection, a preliminary review of the accompanying documentation by Sutton and Hartman indicates that these congregations are likely white rather than African American (Jamie Nathaniel Vermillion, e-mail to the author, 30 Sept. 2009).

[120] Spencer, *Protest and Praise* 236, 234.

oriented one. Spencer emphasizes process as pivotal to catching the Spirit, stating that "the structure of a performed sermon is actually the result of the antistructural element of improvisation."[121] If Foote envisions sermons to be co-creations of preacher and congregation that produce new songs, her hymn/book can also become a medium facilitating that process. She is the preacher who "sings" to an audience who "preaches back," also in song. Together, they form wandering choruses; in generating new songs, the wandering chorus also generates plural personhood.

Call and response, also known as call and recall, was vital to the camp meetings at which Foote preached and out of which a new genre of hymns emerged through musical exchanges between preachers and congregants. The Holiness movement found its center in form of the camp meeting, where improvisational singing in an African American style flourished. Camp meetings, or worship services held in wooded areas, provided a venue for several thousand people who subscribed to the Holiness movement to gather and worship together. The meetings were notable, in part, for their ecumenism; however, they also supplied pulpits open to women and African Americans.[122] Collier-Thomas notes that camp

> meetings, which included holiness revivals, differed from other revivals in their ecumenical attendance and in their outdoor locations, which made them accessible to people of all walks of life and all faiths. The

[121] Spencer, *Protest and Praise* 242.
[122] Stanley notes in *Holy Boldness* that, while frequently sponsored by Methodists, camp meetings often included members of other mainline Protestant denominations, "such as Baptists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians" (3).

> egalitarianism of the holiness camp meetings provided a stimulus for women and Blacks to speak, shout, and testify.[123]

According to Southern, singing was "one of the most impressive aspects of camp meetings" which were "primarily interracial . . . indeed, sometimes there were more black worshipers present than white."[124] Formerly enslaved African Americans and visitors from abroad "provided descriptions" of the meetings' preeminent feature—"the songs of black folk"—resembling White and White's documentation of the distinctiveness of the song of enslaved African Americans from similar sources.[125] Indeed, Southern recounts "some of the practices of black campers" in terms of mixtery, practices that also inspired protest by church leaders.[126] For example, some African Americans sang "songs of their own composing," a taboo in the Methodist church, creating these songs by "stringing together . . . isolated lines from prayers, the Scriptures, and orthodox hymns, the whole made longer by the addition of choruses or the injecting of refrains between verses."[127] Further worrying church leaders, they continued singing away from the larger group, sometimes all night long, and "used tunes that were dangerously near to being dance tunes in the style of slave jubilee melodies;" however, "from such practices emerged a new kind of religious song that became the distinctive badge of the camp-meeting movement."[128] Out of this genre grew gospel music, a tradition whose name simultaneously describes song, text and the Biblical message. To imagine Julia Foote preaching at a camp meeting could also mean imagining her

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[123] Collier-Thomas 14.
[124] Southern, *Music of Black Americans* 84, 83.
[125] Southern, *Music of Black Americans* 83.
[126] Southern, *Music of Black Americans* 85.
[127] Southern, *Music of Black Americans* 85.
[128] Southern, *Music of Black Americans* 85. Notably, Foote's (second) conversion also involved all-night communal song.

invigorating a responsive congregation into song and/or shouting through her hymn/book, especially as Foote refers to camp meetings and the ecstatic expression often associated with them in the lyrics of her hymn.

Like a hymnal, Foote's hymn/book can structure not only Foote's own spiritual journey, but also offer spiritual direction for others. It conceptualizes spiritual journeys as simultaneously individual and communal song, emphasizing song over language as emblematic of plural personhood and holding greater transformative potential culturally as well as neurologically. Foote's approach acknowledges, as John Bealle notes regarding the use of Benjamin Lloyd's hymnal (*Primitive Hymns*) by enslaved African Americans, that,

> more important than theology of the text was congregational singing itself, which was saturated with African stylistic traits and performance practices. Hymn singing preserved key elements of African worship, and thus provided a more deeply compelling experience than other aspects of Christianity. In Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian slave congregations, hymn books were in great demand, where hymn singing played a central role in conversion.[129]

Building on their modeling of a Christian journey toward faith, Methodist hymnals eventually began to use a revised organization such that they could "function as primers of systematic theology, not only for congregations, but also for the training of pastors."[130] A hymnal-like format permits Foote to provide direction for lay persons' spiritual journeys while serving as a guide in preparing women for ministry. Foote offers

[129] Bealle 3.
[130] Tucker 162.

her spiritual journey as an example and an encouragement to others, especially to women who believe themselves to be called to preach. Though hymnals came to be a way to reify the established church in the antebellum United States, the "hymn book was also a religious instrument that stood at an unprecedented distance from ecclesiastical authority. It was a companion to the lay preacher, who extended salvation far beyond the reach of orthodoxy."[131]

As aforementioned, Foote also orders her hymn/book similar to a worship service. Common to many sermons, it recounts stories in her life without taking the diary-like form of some of her predecessors, such as Lee. In Chapter 26, Foote blends accounts of her travels with a sermon that she delivered while in Michigan. She reproduces the sermon as part of the chapter whose title reflects her integration of her life and work: "Further Labors—A 'Threshing' Sermon." She folds into the chapter issues of gender and race that arise in the course of her life and ministry. For instance, she declines to speak at the white Methodist church in Chillicothe, Ohio in 1851 due to the pastor's opposition to female clergy and the church's unwillingness to allow African Americans to attend the service. Foote contrasts this congregation with services that she held at a white Methodist church in Zanesville, Ohio which "opened their house for the admission of colored people for the first time. Hundreds were turned away at each meeting, unable to get in; and, although the house was so crowded, perfect order prevailed."[132] The chapter's conclusion could be the conclusion to a sermon or congregational prayer:

[131] Bealle 1.
[132] Foote 103.

"Reader, have you this salvation—an ever-flowing fountain—in your soul? God grant it. Amen!"[133]

Notably, Chapter 26 precedes Foote's concluding chapter (Chapter 30) which functions like an altar call. An altar call typically follows a sermon, and during and/or after the altar call, the congregation sings a hymn. Foote begins her last chapter by transforming the chapter's title, "How to Obtain Sanctification," from self-help instruction to catechism-like question: "How is sanctification to be obtained?"[134] Rather than in the omniscient third person of the Westminster Catechism whose format is similarly dialogic, Foote responds in the first person, "I answer, by faith."[135] Foote then issues an invitation to be sanctified and supplies the lines that the supplicant can say in response. In essence, she provides a liturgy, like some hymnals at the time that included various rites, such as baptism.[136] Working on the assumption that sanctification has occurred, she then includes the chorus of the hymn "Hallelujah! 'Tis Done!" by Philip Paul Bliss (1838-1876).[137] The hymn, according to *The Story of the Hymns and Tunes* published in 1906 by Theron Brown and Hezekiah Butterworth, "is one of the spontaneous thanksgivings in revival meetings that break out at the announcement of a new conversion," which fits its precise location in Foote's chapter.[138] Foote's hymn,

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[133] Foote 107.
[134] Foote 122.
[135] Foote 122.
[136] The 1878 edition of the Methodist Episcopal hymnal, for example, includes orders of service for baptism, marriage, communion and reception of new members, scripting out roles for the minister and elder(s) and responses by participants and/or congregants. The A.M.E. Zion Church's hymnal was virtually a facsimile of the ME hymnal until Turner's 1876 revision.
[137] Bliss and Hoffman, who wrote the tune to Foote's hymn, teamed up to write and compose, respectively, "Abundantly Able to Save." In their article "Elisha Albright Hoffman," Robert S. Wilson and Mel R. Wilhoit name Bliss, Ira Sankey and Fanny Crosby, as "luminaries of the early gospel song movement," yet it is "Hoffman's contributions . . . [that] have remained surprisingly resilient a century later (Robert S. Wilson and Mel R. Wilhoit, "Elisha Albright Hoffman," *The Hymn* 35.1 (Jan. 1984: 35-39) 38).
[138] Theron Brown and Hezekiah Butterworth, *The Story of Hymns and Tunes* (New York: American Tract Society, 1906) 422.

"Holy Is the Lamb," ensues on the penultimate page of the chapter and hymn/book. After this congregational hymn, she gives a benediction and thus ends her hymn/book with the traditional closing of a worship service. The hymns, as well as the scripted responses, help to replicate the sense of an interactive worship service and her provision of the liturgy reinforces her clerical role.

The Making of "Holy Is the Lamb"

Foote's hymn, like her hymn/book, is a mixtery. To create "Holy Is the Lamb," Foote combined verses of an existing hymn with a new chorus that she created. Specifically, she selected portions of verses from "Mixture[s] of Joy and Sorrow," a hymn that first appeared in print in 1841, revising them and also adding new lines of her own. Benjamin Lloyd, a white Baptist minister in Alabama, included the yet-untitled hymn in *Primitive Hymns*, an immensely popular—with African American and white congregations—compilation that has remained continuously in print and virtually unchanged since its inception. Typical of most hymnals at the time, Lloyd's nine-verse version of "Mixtures of Joy and Sorrow" consists of lyrics only, though a metrical guide indicates which tunes might fit the words according to their rhythm. (Such hymnals could reinforce conceiving of words as music.) Foote's hymn/book appears to be the second instance in which a version of the hymn exists in print. Her seven verses largely parallel those in Lloyd's hymnal; however, Foote customizes each one to varying degrees. Though none of Foote's lines are exactly identical to Lloyd's, she changes some dramatically, and the last two lines of the sixth verse and the entire seventh verse appear to be Foote's unique invention. While many similarities clearly reveal a correspondence between Lloyd and Foote's verses, it is possible that Foote is working from an oral

tradition rather than using Lloyd's hymnal as a guide or that she is drawing from both sources. Still, it is useful to compare some of the specific changes that distinguish Foote's version from Lloyd's. The hymn was not in the nineteenth century, nor has it become, a mainline Protestant hymn. In any case, Foote clearly claims authorship of the hymn, which suggests that she intentionally crafted the piece, signifyin(g) on it beyond its existence in the public domain.

More importantly, however, Foote shapes the hymn into a style that reflects African American worship practices in both form and content. The attachment of a wandering chorus to a popular hymn serves as the most apparent example of the former. In addition, this technique is a harbinger of the gospel song. Further, she breaks from the common practice of a hymn's first line serving as its title, such as "Mixture[s] of Joy and Sorrow" in more recent hymnals. Foote instead privileges African American communal song by titling the hymn after the chorus rather than the first line; the hymn's name, "Holy Is the Lamb," venerates the wandering chorus.[139]

Form and content converge in the third verse of Foote's hymn:

> Sometimes I am in doubting,
>
> And think I have no grace;
>
> Sometimes I am a-shouting,
>
> And camp-meeting is the place.[140]

Rhyming the first and third lines, Foote tailors the stanza to her particular experience and evokes the ecstatic expression of communal worship in a context dominated by African American musical styles (Sometimes I am a-shouting, / And camp meeting is the place").

[139] I thank Jennifer James for bringing the implication of the title's emphasis on the chorus to my attention.
[140] Foote 123.

By contrast, the following lines from the second verse in Lloyd's hymnal include one set of rhyming lines to Foote's two and no overt references to African American forms of expression or locations where such expressions might occur:

> Sometimes I'm full of doubting,
>
> And think I have no grace;
>
> Sometimes I'm full of praising,
>
> When Christ reveals his face . . .[141]

Although, as aforementioned, "Mixture[s] of Joy and Sorrow" presumably has a history in oral tradition distinct from that documented in print and by recordings, its publication history following Lloyd's and Foote's editions suggests that some printed versions could be traced to Lloyd's rendition, while others to Foote's. Further, race could play a role in the hymn's genealogy. Hymnals in which Foote's version of the hymn appear suggest that her musical sensibilities lie with the substantially African American-influenced camp meeting style of song rather than formal worship services.[142] For example, Foote's version of "Mixture of Joy and Sorrow" can be found in Taylor's 1882 *A Collection of Revival Hymns and Plantation Melodies*. Southern notes that this hymnal was among those that, "after Emancipation . . . began to appear that obviously were not intended for use in the formal worship service, but rather for revival meetings, Sunday Schools, and informal gatherings."[143]

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[141] Benjamin Lloyd, *The Primitive Hymns, Spiritual Songs, and Sacred Poems* (Rocky Mount, NC: The Primitive Hymns Corporation, 2006) 297.
[142] Southern, *Music of Black Americans* 127.
[143] Southern, "Hymnals of the Black Church" 144. Like Lloyd's, Taylor's hymnal was reissued due to its popularity, first in 1883 and again in 1888, a year after Taylor's death. Part of Taylor's project in producing the hymnal involved preserving songs sung by enslaved African Americans, and he states in the preface that the songs in the collection were "gathered from every direction" with the help of "publishers, ministers, members, male and female" (Marshall W. Taylor, 1883, *A Collection of Revival Hymns and Plantation Melodies* (Cincinnati: Marshall W. Taylor and W. C. Echols, 1888) 5, 7. In addition, as Du

In addition to the two aforementioned collections, "Mixture[s] of Joy and Sorrow" also appears in the following three Primitive Baptist hymnals: *Hymn and Tune Book for Use in Old School or Primitive Baptist Churches* compiled by D. H. Goble (1886); *The Good Old Songs* compiled by Elder C. H. Cayce (1913); and, *The Old School Hymnal* compiled by Elder Lee Hanks (1920; now published by the Old School Hymnal Company and in its twelfth edition [2004]).[144] The lyrics of "Mixture of Joy and Sorrow" in the Taylor and Goble hymnals parallel Foote's version more closely, while "Mixtures of Joy and Sorrow" in *The Good Old Songs* and *The Old School Hymnal* reflect greater loyalty to Lloyd's. According to Primitive Baptist Elder Joe Hildreth, northern churches typically used the Goble hymnal which could help to explain its greater correspondence with Foote's version.[145] Namely, Taylor and Goble include "Sometimes I am in

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Bois would after him, he credits a matrilineal tradition, stating that it was his mother "from whom in childhood I learned many of the songs" (Taylor 7). While he aimed to venerate a tradition, he also edited lyrics for clarity, explaining that "verses apparently meaningless have been given an interpretation which render them not less beautiful, but far more useful" (Taylor 6-7). One wonders if Taylor altered songs that originally had lyrics "which to many would seem unmeaning jargon, but which, nevertheless, were full of meaning to themselves," as Douglass noted about the songs of sorrow, although Taylor professes his intention to preserve African American song. His view of the songs as transformative and empathy-producing seems to mirror Douglass's, however. He asserts that his "work is to rescue them" as "their influence is not done. The race is free, an era of light and culture has dawned, but ere all the fruits of freedom be gathered these melodies have many a mighty task to perform, in lifting up bowed hearts to Jesus and overturning the prejudices against color, which are so ruinously wide-spread. Whoever will learn and sing these melodies, drinking from the same spring whence they flow, will of necessity grow warmer in feeling for those whose fathers sang them first" (Taylor 4-5).

[144] In addition, "Mixture of Joy and Sorrow" appears in the Library of Congress's "Spirituals Index" in the Performance Reading Room. It is cross-referenced to Marshall Taylor's hymnal. "Mixtures of Joy and Sorrow" also is among hymns collected in the mid-1970s by Brett Sutton and Peter Hartman. Sutton writes about the hymn in his chapter, "In the Good Old Way: Primitive Baptist Tradition in an Age of Change" in *Arts in Earnest: North Carolina Folklife* edited by Daniel W. Patterson and Charles G. Zug, III. Beverly Bush Patterson also discusses the hymn in her book on Primitive Baptist singing, *The Sound of the Dove: Singing in Appalachian Primitive Baptist Churches*. She reprints the lyrics from the Goble hymnal and transcribes a tune to which Union Primitive Baptist congregation in Whitehead, North Carolina sang "Mixture of Joy and Sorrow" on July 3, 1982 (Beverly Bush Patterson, *The Sound of the Dove: Singing in Appalachian Primitive Baptist Churches* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995) 149). The tune is one of two to which a group of hymns can be sung. According to Patterson, "to an outsider, both tunes sound reminiscent of 'Wayfaring Stranger,'" but "to the singers . . . they are two separate and unrelated tunes" (Patterson 147).

[145] Elder Joe Hildreth, telephone conversation with author, 20 July 2009. Elder Hildreth is one of the editors of *The Old School Hymnal*, and he graciously shared knowledge and resources about "Mixtures of

doubting . . . Sometimes I am a-shouting" and retain the structure of the last line of Foote's verse, "And camp-meeting is the place," substituting "Bethel" for "camp-meeting." They also repeat her lines, "Rising above Mount Pisgah, / I almost reach the sky," which differ from Lloyd's "I rise above my troubles, / And hope to reach the sky." Taylor also uses the singular "mixture" as does Foote. Further, the length of verses distinguishes Foote's version from all of the others. Foote's verses are four rather than eight lines; however, the sequence of verse and chorus makes eight lines.

Music can also set the various arrangements apart. Each hymnal that specifies a tune (like Lloyd's, Goble's does not) provides a different musical setting. For example, Josephine Robinson provided original musical settings for many of the hymns in the Taylor hymnal, including "Mixture of Joy and Sorrow."[146] Music criticism is generally beyond the scope of this study, save for a few observations about Foote's hymn. At points, the lyrics by Foote and musical setting by Hoffman converge artfully. For example, the first six verses include an emotional or spiritual high and corresponding low, each verse proffering a different juxtaposition that reflects the hymn's first phrase, "mixture of joy and sorrow." Musically, the verse begins in a major key, but the third chord introduces a minor note, generating a mixture of major and minor sounds that mirror the lyrics as, traditionally, "Western" music associates major keys with happiness and minor keys with sadness. In addition, there are other instances where the music

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Joy and Sorrow," noting, for example, that "Mixtures" does not appear in any hymnals that he has that were published in England. His sense is that the hymn originated in the mountains of North Carolina. "That's a very old hymn," he said when initially asked about "Mixtures" (Elder Joe Hildreth, telephone conversation with author, 16 July 2009). He added, "It was my mother's favorite hymn." Its origin includes a tune called "Mixture;" however, he believes that it was sung to different tunes over the years. The tune in the current edition of *The Old School Hymnal*, for instance, was arranged by Elder Roland Green who is 85 years old and still living.

[146] The musical concern parallels the lyrical editing that Taylor might have done. Robinson, too, could have ignored prior tune(s) to which it was sung in the manner of Taylor's discarding of "apparently meaningless" verses (Taylor 6-7).

follows the lyrics, though the movement of the tune does not match every verse equally. The notes go up the scale, for instance, on the word "exalted" and "Mount Pisgah" and down the scale on "sinking down." The tune can reproduce the mixtery of the lyrics.[147]

Hoffman's sensibilities as a composer could also influence "Holy Is the Lamb" stylistically. An evangelical zeal drove Hoffman, who pastored Congregational and Presbyterian churches and "composed over 2000 hymns and edited about 50 hymnals."[148] Of his approximately 1,000 published hymns, he is probably best known for writing the lyrics to "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms."[149] It, among several of his other compositions remain in circulation, such as "Is Your All on the Altar?" featured in the 1982 film documenting the origins of gospel music, *Say Amen, Somebody*. However, in an article about Hoffman, Robert R. Ebert parallels Hoffman's own devaluing of his hymns, basing his critique on a Eurocentric canon whose aesthetics derive from equally ethnocentric notions of language and music:

> They were Gospel hymns, and as such do not consist of the great literary merit of writers such as Martin Luther, John and Charles Wesley, Isaac Watts, John Greenleaf Whittier, and others. Gospel hymns do tend to be imaginative and picturesque and are strong in *emotional appeal*. They are

[147] A recording of "Holy Is the Lamb" is on file with this dissertation. Eric Armstead, who assembled and directed the choir that recreated Foote's hymn, fittingly noted that he found improvisation necessary to coordinate the chorus's lyrics to the tune, as their respective rhythms differed.

[148] Robert R. Ebert, "The Reverend Elisha A. Hoffman: Ministry, Music and German Heritage," *Journal of German-American Studies* 13.4 (1978: 87-98) 91. Hoffman's middle name, "Albright," exemplifies the evangelical tradition that he was born into as the son of a preacher who admired "Jacob Albright, founder of the Evangelical Movement" (Ebert 88). He was apparently "a man of boundless energy and evangelical enthusiasm" whose "preaching style must have been similar to that of evangelist clergymen today [1976]. He held frequent revivals for his congregations. He was also a crusader in the Temperance hymns" (Ebert 88).

[149] Another testament to Hoffman's rousing melodies and lyrics is his aforementioned hymn "Are You Washed in the Blood?" that became the Salvation Army's "marching song." Wilson and Wilhoit note that "Hoffman wrote the words and/or music for about 17 songs still current in hymnals. For all but one of these, he supplied the words. He also supplied the majority with tunes, relying on various other composers for about half-a dozen musical settings. Of the songs still current, about one-third are widely known" (38).

> usually light in character, rhythmic, easily singable, but lacking in rich harmony found in the better hymn tunes and chorales.[150]

Hoffman similarly acknowledged without chagrin that his hymns "are not of a high literary order. No such claim has ever been made for them. Only this can be said of them . . . they interpret well the Spiritual phrases of the soul's experience."[151] Yet Ebert and Hoffman recognize that the strengths of gospel hymns do not fit into a more orthodox definition of hymnody. Rather, they express emotion and the "soul's experience." Additionally, their singability potentially offers greater possibilities for participation. "Holy Is the Lamb" combines these features in a hymn whose dual emphasis, musically and lyrically, on emotion and an individual's faith journey suggest that Foote and Hoffman saw hymns—and, by extension, hymnals—as tools for transformation.[152]

Hoffman's lyrical influence can perhaps be felt in the chorus of "Holy Is the Lamb" and the concluding lines of its sixth verse, which are among the six completely original lines by Foote. These lines and the chorus strike a theme common to one another and to several hymns by Hoffman. They also recall Foote's bath by Christ in her fourth vision. The verse concludes:

> Because the blood of Jesus

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[150] Ebert 91, emphasis mine.
[151] Ebert 92.
[152] Geography might have played a role in Foote and Hoffman's interracial collaboration as both lived in Cleveland for many years. Foote notes that she unexpectedly settled in Cleveland in 1851, calling it home for "more than twenty years" by the time she published *A Brand* in 1879 (Foote 107-108). Hoffman's tenure in Cleveland ranged from 1868 to 1889, interrupted with a sojourn in Napoleon, Ohio from 1872 to around 1875 (Ebert 93). According to newspaper reports, a woman named Julia Foote was one of nineteen who founded Cleveland's Mt. Zion Congregational Church (United Church of Christ) in 1864 (Anita Polk, "Mt. Zion Reaches Centennial in Spirit of Pride; Reverence" *Call and Post* 3 Oct. 1964: 10B; Margaret Williams, "Mt. Zion Congregational Celebrates 115th Anniversary" *Call and Post* 6 Oct. 1979: 7A). The evangelist Foote moved to California in 1884, two years after Hoffman began his first of two terms as pastor of Rockport Congregational Church (now West Park United Church of Christ) in Cleveland (Collier-Thomas 59; Ebert 93). More research is needed to determine whether the Mt. Zion founder could be Julia A. J. Foote.

Hasn't washed me white as snow,

and the chorus follows:

Holy, Holy, holy, holy is the Lamb,

Who saves me from all sin, from all my sin!

Holy, holy, holy is the lamb,

Whose blood doth make me clean![153]

In 1883, Hoffman and co-editor J. H. Tenney published *Spiritual Songs No. 2 for Gospel Meetings and the Sunday School*, a slim volume that featured hymns by both editors as well as many others. Among the hymns by Hoffman is "Wash Me in the Blood of the Lamb," the chorus of which is as follows:

Then wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow,

Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow,

Wash me in the blood of the Lamb,

And I shall be whiter than snow.[154]

Anthologized in *New Spiritual Songs*, as elsewhere, the chorus of the aforementioned Salvation Army hymn written by Hoffman poses a nearly identical sentiment in the form of a question:

Are you washed in the blood, In the soul-cleansing blood of the Lamb?

Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow?

Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?[155]

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[153] Foote 123.
[154] Elisha A. Hoffman and J. H. Tenney, *Spiritual Songs No. 2 for Gospel Meetings and the Sunday School* (Cleveland: Samuel Barker, 1883) 94-95.
[155] Elisha A. Hoffman and J. H. Tenney, *New Spiritual Songs* (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1887) 15.

The graphic metaphor for salvation also appears frequently in other hymns by Hoffman, such as "Washed and Cleansed," and raises the issue of race. Turner, who compiled the aforementioned 1876 edition of the A.M.E. Church's hymnal, "forbade his congregation to sing 'Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow'—explaining to them that washing is meant to make one clean, not white."[156] For all of Foote's anti-racist activism, she does not eliminate the metaphor in her hymn or in her hymn/book more broadly. For example, the last line of chapter eleven sounds almost like a line from one of Hoffman's hymns: "Jesus' blood will wash away all your sin and make you whiter than snow."[157] By comparison to some contemporary hymns, however, Foote minimizes whiteness in her hymn, making no mention of it in the chorus, and, unlike the examples by Hoffman, Foote emphasizes holiness more so than blood. Even in the appearance of "whiter" in the sixth verse, there is a hint of resistance, as the supposedly desired transformation has not occurred:

> O, why am I thus tossed—
>
> Thus tossed to and fro?
>
> Because the blood of Jesus
>
> Hasn't washed me white as snow.[158]

As the verse takes the negative, the singer has not (yet) been "washed white as snow." The completely original seventh verse then refigures cleansing in the context of water, rather than color:

> Oh, come to Christ, the Savior,
>
> Drink of that living stream;

[156] Spencer, *Black Hymnody* 11-12.
[157] Foote 48.
[158] Foote 123.

Your thirst he'll quench forever

And cleanse you from all sin.[159]

Foote's hymn helps to demonstrate that she belongs to a distinctive musical and theological lineage out of which gospel music emerged. While Douglass-Chin argues that Foote and other nineteenth-century African American female evangelists employ "oral strategies of African American folk sermonizing" in their autobiographies, he anachronistically connects the women's use of the vernacular with the blues.[160] In addition, the title of his book uses the singular to characterize the female evangelists in his study: *Preacher Woman Sings the Blues*. However, Foote and her colleagues represent a less visible "sacred" rather than "secular" tradition that grew out of communal song.

Much of the intertexuality among Foote and other spiritual autobiographers involves strategies that downplay written language. Foote takes cues from predecessors, such as Sojourner Truth, who devised alternatives to telling their stories solely through narrative. As discussed in chapter one, for example, Truth carefully crafted her photograph for *cartes-de-visite* that she sold to support herself financially.[161] Decades earlier, David Walker designed his *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829,

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[159] Foote 123.

[160] Douglass-Chin 121. Gospel music and the blues remain distinct, though not strictly discreet, forms. Interestingly, Southern distinguishes between the blues and some spirituals that were predecessors to gospel music in terms of their individual and communal orientations, respectively. For example, she notes that blues singers do not necessarily "need an audience for their singing" and, correspondingly, that spirituals tend to be "more expressive of group feelings than individual ones" (Southern, *The Music of Black Americans* 333). This characteristic of the blues, along with its general disrepute "by 'respectable,' church-going people" can misdirect attention from Foote's commitment to perfection and endorsement of communal song (Southern, *The Music of Black Americans* 333).

[161] Nell Irwin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996) 185-199. Although modern reproductions of Foote's work do not include her frontispiece portrait, the original edition of *A Brand* features an image of Foote standing and holding an open book. Like the elimination of her hymn's musical setting in *Sisters in the Spirit*, however, her photograph disappears in twentieth-century editions.

1830) to "be read aloud to large groups" in order to reach African Americans who could not read.[162] As visual and oral cues, Walker frequently inserted a symbol of a pointing hand and numerous exclamation points.[163] Although Walker was not a member of the clergy, he "structured the work so that it was much more the inspired pronouncements of a black preacher filled with God and righteous anger against America's brutal racism than a closely reasoned and grammatically consistent treatise arguing coolly for the same point of view."[164] Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that Maria Stewart's autobiography published five years later begins with the word "feeling" and proposes "to arouse you to exertion."[165]

In addition, the "wandering choruses" that Foote borrows from nineteenth-century African American women's autobiographies often depict situations that are outside of language. For instance, Stewart presages Foote when referring obliquely to Revelations 14:3 in her fifth meditation. She anticipates "join[ing] with the hundred and forty-four thousand, in singing the song of Moses and the Lamb" and follows immediately with the lines of a hymn that bring Foote's chorus to mind:

> Worthy the Lamb that died, they cry,
>
> To be exalted thus!
>
> Worthy the Lamb, our lips reply,
>
> For he was slain for us![166]

[162] Walker xxxviii.
[163] In his introduction to *David Walker's Appeal*, Peter Hinks states that it "was carefully constructed to persuade by its vocal ardor and jarring images and to be readily accessible to the unlettered" (xxxviii).
[164] Walker xxxviii.
[165] Stewart 3.
[166] Stewart 31.

In addition, her eighth meditation mentions "the new song," and, structurally, her *Productions* also foreground Foote's insertion of worship elements, including the aforementioned meditations and hymns as well as prayers. Furthermore, Elaw describes her memoirs in terms of visual art, including portraiture "drawn and coloured by the skill of the pencilling artist," reminiscent of Foote's subtitle and conception of her work as an "autobiographical sketch."[167] Elaw's attunement also compels her to see a sermon at a dance, where she "never heard a sermon that preached more impressively to me than the display I witnessed there."[168] Similarly, Foote reworks her parents' traumatic experience of nearly drowning after attending a dance into a sermon. Perhaps even more important is her inheritance of Elaw's conception of sermons as visual, rather than verbal.

The insertion of hymns remains the most prominent example of non-linguistic intertexuality among Foote and her predecessors. Walker closes his *Appeal* with a Wesleyan hymn as does Jea. Truth's first autobiography also ends with a hymn. Like Foote, Truth claims authorship of her concluding hymn's lyrics. (Both revise and add to existing songs.) Hymns offer the authors a variety of options in performance as well as in their autobiographies. Lee, for instance, uses a hymn to evoke emotion; she "resorted to the Hymn Book for something to suit my feelings" and reprints five verses from her chosen hymn.[169]

Foote invokes a hymn to express embodied emotion and reinforce her call to preach that holds particular resonance in multiple autobiographies. Shortly after her excommunication, she works to organize the first set of services in Philadelphia at which

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[167] Elaw 51.
[168] Elaw 63. Old Elizabeth and Stewart also discourage dancing in their autobiographies (Old Elizabeth, *Memoir of Old Elizabeth, a Coloured Woman* in *Six Women's Slave Narratives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 11; Stewart 67).
[169] Lee 46.

all the preachers were women. In response to the anticipated challenge, she reiterates her commitment to the controversial project and her calling musically, drawing on lyrics from a hymn: "The language of my heart was:

Only Thou my Leader be

And I still will follow Thee."[170]

Interestingly, Jea uses a parallel construction in his autobiography, also in the context of adversity. He attributes his ability to sustain himself while deprived of food by his enslavers to his faith, which he expresses in lines from a hymn: " . . . and all the language of my heart was—

Wealth and honour I disdain,

Earthly comforts all are vain;

These can never satisfy,

Give me Christ or else I die."[171]

He repeats the phrase "this was the language of my heart" elsewhere, associating it with the book of Psalms and with another hymn.[172] The expression also appears in Truth's as-told-to narrative, and its combination with hymns exemplifies Douglass's declaration that "the heart hath no language like song."[173]

Additionally, a source earlier than Jea and Truth uses a similar turn of phrase and the same hymn that Foote selects to follow it. Foote appears to signify on a hymn in a letter written on November 27, 1753, by British evangelist George Whitefield. Whitefield portrays music as an embodied language of emotions and uses lines from the

[170] Foote 83.
[171] Hodges 102.
[172] Hodges 101, 129.
[173] Douglass, *Life and Times* 502.

hymn "Children of the Heavenly King" to encourage "Mrs. C—", the recipient of his letter, in her faith. He writes:

> This, even this is the language of my heart,
>
> Lord, obediently I'll go,
>
> Gladly leaving all below;
>
> Only Thou my Leader be,
>
> And I still will follow Thee.[174]

Context increases the meaningfulness of an apparent convergence more than a century later. Foote's similar declaration strives to encourage not just one woman in her faith, but "three sisters who believed they were called to public labors" and encountering significant resistance to their calls.[175] Foote's support of the women parallels Whitefield's encouragement to Mrs. C— who seems to be facing disapproval regarding a religious pilgrimage that she seeks to undertake.

Renowned for his preaching, Whitefield ignited the Great Awakening in the United States and, in this sense, could be thought of as the Billy Graham of the eighteenth century.[176] However, while Whitefield declaimed against the cruel treatment of enslaved African Americans and counted African Americans among his converts, he owned slaves himself and did not oppose slavery.[177] Notably, Foote and Whitefield use a slightly different version of the hymn than appears in the 1832 M.E. and 1912 A.M.E. hymnals,

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[174] George Whitefield, *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield*, Vol. III (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771) 40.
[175] Foote 82.
[176] Frank Lambert also makes this comparison of Whitefield "as the father of modern revivalism whose innovations influenced evangelists from Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham" (Frank Lambert, *"Pedlar in Divinity:" George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). Notably, however, Graham's views on race differed from Whitefield. For example, Graham opposed segregation in the 1960s.
[177] Lambert 207.

respectively, not to mention in Whitefield's own hymnal. Foote emphasizes her individual call with the first person singular in her lines, whereas these variations feature the first person plural, i.e. "Only Thou *our* leader be / And still *we* will follow Thee."[178] Hymns were changeable enough that this could be merely a variant on versions recorded in print; however, the singular reiterates that Foote's call to ministry came from God and was thus ineligible for earthly disparagement, that is, by men. However, she proactively directs these lines to a group of women, unlike Whitefield who responds to an individual, Mrs. C—. The wandering chorus reprises in the 1893 autobiography of African American evangelist Amanda Berry Smith, Foote's junior by fourteen years, who, like Foote, uses the hymn to confirm her call to ministry, though she cites all four lines, like Whitefield.[179]

Unsurprisingly, Foote leaves out the lines of the hymn that refer overtly to obedience and a disregard for the loss of human relationships occasioned by death (Lord, obediently I'll go, / Gladly leaving all below).[180] Rather than equivocate on the meaning of obediently going, she revises Whitefield, reminding her audience that her cues come from God and also reconfirming her own call that, again, originates with God (Only Thou my Leader be / And I still will follow Thee). Keeping only the third and fourth lines also dissociates her from the obedience demanded by enslavement and some men. The notion of God as leader also corresponds to another non-gender specific term for preacher:

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[178] John Wesley, Charles Wesley, et al., *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1832) 328; African Methodist Episcopal Book Concern, *The African Methodist Episcopal Hymn and Tune Book*, 5th ed. (Philadelphia: African Methodist Episcopal Book Concern, 1912) 159.

[179] Amanda Smith, *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Colored Evangelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 246.

[180] Instead of "obediently go," the lyric in Lloyd's hymnal is the even more subservient "submissively go."

worship leader. Further, she accomplishes this through the embodied, musical expression of emotions.

In signifyin(g) on Jea and Whitefield, among others, Foote places herself in the tradition of renowned preachers, spiritual autobiographers and hymn writers. Whitefield, for example, preached so stirringly that even those who did not speak English, such as a German woman who "'understood nothing of his English sermon, but from his gestures, expressions, looks and voice,' . . . gained the "'vivid impression that he was serious and sincere in what he said.'"[181] The outdoor settings for some of his sermons and the sheer numbers of attendees suggest a similarity between Whitefield's *modus operandi* and the camp meetings held in the woods in the following century at which Foote frequently preached, though the numbers at Whitefield's sermons—20,000 in Philadelphia and Boston—often exceeded even the several thousand congregants at camp meetings.[182] The woods were also the appropriate backdrop for Jea's hymns which "are chants, best suited to African-American 'hush harbor,' or secret ceremonies, which Jea led during his years in America."[183] Like Jea, Whitefield published his spiritual autobiography (in the latter's case, autobiographies) and a hymnal which included hymns that he wrote as well as those by others.

Foote could also be signifyin(g) on another prominent preacher and hymn writer, Charles Wesley, who, along with his brother John Wesley, founded Methodism. The title of Foote's autobiography, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire*, comes from a Biblical text, Zechariah 3:2. However, it also invokes a hymn that Charles Wesley wrote upon his

[181] Lambert 154. Lambert quotes here from *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, trans. Theodore Trappert and John Doberstein, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1942), 2:696.
[182] Lambert 3. Crowds in London were even larger, exceeding 30,000 (Lambert 3).
[183] Hodges 166.

conversion in 1738, whose lyrics include the line. After Charles was rescued from a fire as a young child, the verse served as a lifelong touchstone for the Wesley brothers. Foote, like the two evangelists from her own traditions of Methodism and Wesleyan/Holiness, employs it as a metaphor for selection and salvation. (Whitefield also uses the reference in a postscript to a 1755 letter to Mrs. C—, the conclusion of which hints at orality: "I hope that one of the players is snatched as a brand out of the burning. Grace! Grace!"[184])

Foote's citation of her predecessors could reflect audacious aspirations to impact her listeners, moving them to conversion and building her reputation as a powerful preacher while transforming the American landscape more broadly. Stanley states that "the sanctified self was not humble" nor "inferior."[185] She posits that sanctification emboldened the Wesleyan/Holiness women like Foote such that "self-confidence exuded from the[ir] narratives. . . . They rejected the societal construction of a weak female self and posited, in its place, a strong sanctified self."[186] Stanley carefully clarifies that Foote and her colleagues did not equate selfhood with language or attribute agency to writing. Rather, Stanley argues that the "women credited the Holy Spirit for empowering them and described a sanctified self that was in existence prior to their writing. They did not intend to create a self through the act of writing."[187] Similarly, while Chanta Haywood cites the Bible as the "language base" for these "prophesying daughters" in her book by the same name, she states that she

[184] Whitefield 117.
[185] Stanley 158, 203.
[186] Stanley 203.
[187] Stanley 203.

> do[es] not intend to privilege the technology of writing . . . or to suggest that these women did not exist unless or until they wrote or spoke in public. They are accessible to us—and may have been accessible to their audiences—through writing and speaking, but they already existed outside of writing and speaking.[188]

Foote's use of orality, including song, models a strategy for reminding her audience that neither her subjectivity nor their own depended on language, but could be communally constructed through non-linguistic forms of African American expression and, in particular, the blend of musicality and emotion of African American worship.[189]

The titles of several contemporary books refer to nineteenth-century African American female evangelist autobiographers relationally and gender-specifically, as daughters and sisters.[190] How might reconsidering their relationships to one another and to their heirs in terms of the wandering chorus change discourse about them? Could it, for example, shift focus away from—without erasing—gender-laden identities to reflect on expression that resists hegemonic forms? Does Foote's deployment of song in ways that resemble, yet expand on, her predecessors' strategies further remove her from the strictures of language? Does resistance to hegemonic expression help to render lives that resist hegemony?

Foote and her colleagues—evangelists who published autobiographies and many more who did not—can claim a multifaceted legacy that includes African American women singer/evangelists as well as authors. The mixtery of preaching and singing that

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[188] Chanta M. Haywood, *Prophesying Daughters: Black Women Preachers and the Word, 1823-1913* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003) 77, 16.
[189] Foote's ministry already extended almost four decades when she published her autobiography.
[190] These titles include Betty Collier-Thomas's *Daughters of Thunder*, Chanta Haywood's *Prophyesing Daughters* and William Andrews's *Sisters of the Spirit*.

mirror neurons can convey tends to be less visible in hegemonic discourse than an autobiography; however, it remains observable in musical continuities and as well as in a tradition of black women preachers. For example, to watch *Say Amen, Somebody* is to imagine twentieth-century wandering choruses led by singer/evangelists such as Willie Mae Ford Smith, Zella Jackson Price and DeLois Barrett Campbell. Like Foote, Smith developed a hybrid genre, combining singing and preaching in the "sermonette."[191] Foote and the wandering chorus of evangelist autobiographers worked to place the seemingly undocumentable into a format that evoked the ineffable. As a result, she and other nineteenth-century African American female autobiographers also influence twentieth-century authors, including Toni Morrison. As chapter three argues, Morrison's novel *Beloved* continues the tradition of the wandering chorus with another singing book that emulates communal song.

[191] William Thomas Dargan and Kathy White Bullock, "Willie Mae Ford Smith of St. Louis: A Shaping Influence upon Black Gospel Singing Style" in *This Far by Faith: Readings in African-American Women's Religious Biography*, eds. Judith Weisenfeld and Richard Newman (New York: Routledge, 1996) 32-51. Smith became known for the sermonette, which gospel performers widely imitated and eventually canonized as standard protocol. Like Foote, Smith carries the dual heritage of A.M.E. Zion and Holiness preacher (Smith was first ordained in the A.M.E. Zion Church and later in the Lively Stone Apostolic Church). She states that, prior to gospel's coalescence, she was known as a "spiritual singer" and "revival worker" (Dargan and Bullock; *Say Amen, Somebody*, dir. George T. Nierenberg, DVD, GTN, 1982).

Chapter Three: "Threading Together Her Need and Her Needle:" Quilting in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*[1]

The word "quilt" appears on the first page of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, portending its integral, though seldom discussed, role in the novel.[2] Distinct from literary criticism that understands quilting in *Beloved* as strictly textual, this chapter contends that quilting empowers characters through a communal activity that does not require language for its efficacy.[3] Rather, quilting evokes emotion that arouses agency, transforming individuals and community simultaneously, a dynamic process that conceives of personhood as plural, or as implying the company of others for its interdependent existence. Morrison, like her characters, uses quilting to assert the authority of non-linguistic communal expression, especially that of African American women. Indicting language in tandem with enslavement, Morrison deploys quilting to model how power, redefined, looks and functions in the lives of persons excluded from established paradigms of power, crafting *Beloved* akin to a non-linguistic form of communal expression in order to, in her own prescient words, "urge the reader into active participation in the non-narrative, nonliterary experience of the text."[4] This chapter argues that, like the novel itself, quilting in *Beloved* emerges from African American

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[1] The chapter title is from the epigraph, Lucille Clifton's poem "quilting" (Clifton 3).
[2] Two book chapters and a single journal article discuss quilting in *Beloved*: Janice Barnes Daniel, "Function or Frill: The Quilt as Storyteller in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" *Midwest Quarterly* 41.3 (2000: 321-329); Margot Anne Kelley, "Sisters' Choices: Quilting Aesthetics in Contemporary African American Women's Fiction" in Cheryl B. Torsney and Judy Elsley, eds., *Quilt Culture: Tracing the Pattern* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1994); and, Cathy Peppers, "Fabricating a Reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as a Quilt of Memory and Identity," also in Torsney and Elsley's *Quilt Culture*.
[3] Daniel, Kelley and Peppers each offer insightful readings of quilting in *Beloved*. Daniel contends that the quilt in *Beloved* is a narrative device that helps to tell the story, and therefore serves a useful purpose in the novel similar to the historical role of quilts as household necessities rather than decorative objects. Kelley argues that an alternative quilt aesthetics—in African American quilting and in *Beloved*—links women across generations and also informs literary practices of African American women. Peppers presents the quilt as a site of memory and as a metaphor for the importance of maintaining relational, yet distinct identities, both among Sethe, Beloved and Denver and with the larger African American community.
[4] Toni Morrison, "Memory, Creation, and Writing," *Thought* 59.235 (Dec. 1984: 385-390) 387.

cultural practices that advocate a communal, rather than individual, orientation toward creativity as well as affect. Through the vernacular, quilting integrates African American resistance, selfhood and community into everyday experience and democratizes not only art, but agency.

In *Beloved*'s opening paragraph, the reader learns that Sethe's teenage sons, Howard and Buglar, left 124 Bluestone Road "in the dead of winter" to escape the house's ghostly hauntings: "first one brother and then the next stuffed quilt packing into his hat, snatched up his shoes, and crept away from the lively spite the house felt for them."[5] Ten years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the spectre of slavery troubles not only the house known as "124," but also a quilt inside it. The quilt first appears in the novel the day after Paul D arrives, reemerges on the day that Beloved arrives and returns in the penultimate scene with Sethe and Paul D, framing and propelling the narrative as Janice Barnes Daniel posits in "Function or Frill: The Quilt as Storyteller in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*."[6] It is the key, though not the only, quilt in the novel as quilts appear in ordinary guises throughout the text.[7] In a different way than the speculative

[5] Morrison, *Beloved* 3.
[6] Daniel does not go so far as to assign the quilt agency; however, she does deem it "an integral part of the *process* of moving a story from teller to receiver" (Daniel 323). Daniel conceives of a functional role for the quilt rather than "simply a readily available metaphor or a realistic surface detail," or "frill" (Daniel 323, 328). Yet she refers to the quilt as "an inert object" and, like Kelley and Peppers, an "image," designations that diminish the activities that the quilt facilitates (Daniel 323). While Daniel astutely observes that the quilt materializes at critical turning points in the narrative, her assessment of the quilt's functionality leaves room for expansion.
[7] For example, though often overlooked, quilts appear in the scene after Sethe, Beloved and Denver go ice skating: "Wrapped in quilts and blankets before the cooking stove, they drank, wiped their noses, and drank again" (Morrison, *Beloved* 175). In addition, Sethe also mentions Mrs. Garner's request for quilts when she is feverish with illness at Sweet Home: "Hot as blazes and she wanted quilts" (Morrison, *Beloved* 202).

Underground Railroad quilt code, quilting is "hidden in plain view" in the novel as in everyday life.[8]

As Howard and Buglar flee 124, their grandmother Baby Suggs lies dying under the quilt in the keeping room where, caught in a kind of disillusioned purgatory, "she used the little energy left her for pondering color."[9] Her daughter-in-law Sethe assuages her appetite for color "with anything from fabric to her own tongue," and her granddaughter Denver joins her mother in doing "what they could, and what the house permitted, for her."[10] Meditating in the keeping room after Baby Suggs's death, Sethe sees the room from her mother-in-law's perspective, gaining insight into her craving for color through the quilt:

> Kneeling in the keeping room where she usually went to talk-think it was clear why Baby Suggs was so starved for color. There wasn't any except for two orange squares in a quilt that made the absence shout. The walls of the room were slate-colored, the floor earth-brown, the wooden dresser the color of itself, curtains white and the dominating feature, the quilt over

[8] In 1999, Jacqueline Tobin and Raymond Dobard published *Hidden from Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* which claims, based on a singular oral history, that certain quilt patterns created a secret code that helped slaves escape to the North via the Underground Railroad. According to the narrative of Ozella McDaniel Williams, a quiltmaker from Charleston, South Carolina, fugitive slaves looked for symbolic quilts displayed on clotheslines, sometimes used in conjunction with song and even the rhythmic hammering of blacksmiths, to provide clues about where and when to travel north. Although Tobin and Dobard's book carries forwards from well-respected quilt and art historians, many scholars dispute its claims including independent scholar Laurel Horton. In a paper presented at the International Quilt Research Center in 2006, Horton said that details of the quilt code do not correspond to the history of quilts or slavery. For example, several of the quilt patterns are anachronistic. In addition, as aforementioned, her research suggests that it is impossible to generalize about slave bedding because it varied by location, slave owner and other factors. Despite historical evidence to the contrary, belief in the code continues to launch books—especially books for children—and grade school curricula throughout the country. The persistence of this belief invites inquiry into its strength and origin, as Horton explored in a 2006 paper and will revisit in a forthcoming article in *Western Folklore*. South African author Zakes Mda incorporates the quilt code in his novel *Cion* and provides an alternate reading of antebellum African American quilts. He acknowledges Tobin and Dobard's theory, but does not reinscribe it as many fictional works have done since the publication of *Hidden in Plain View*.

[9] Morrison, *Beloved* 4.

[10] Morrison, *Beloved* 4.

> an iron cot, was made up of scraps of blue serge, black, brown and gray wool—the full range of the dark and the muted that thrift and modesty allowed. In that sober field, two patches of orange looked wild—like life in the raw.[11]

Blackness and forced silence coexist within the quilt, forming a palette proscribed by slavery: "the full range of the dark and the muted that thrift and modesty allowed."[12] The vestiges of enslavement still circumscribe Baby Suggs's identity, and she does not survive under the quilt tinged with their toxicity. The two orange patches on the quilt sound an alarm warning against the lack of color—they "made the absence shout"—color for which Baby Suggs is "starved," but does she hunger for color in a racial sense, also?[13] In the absence of color that doubles for a vital mixture (mixtery) of individual and communal identity, Baby Suggs can no longer access her sense of self. The "two patches of orange" cannot counterbalance the rest of the quilt that weighs on Baby Suggs as she lies alone underneath it, estranged from Cincinnati's African American community.[14] Though their shape suggests the sufficiency of a meal, only when the orange squares intersect with the communal do they become satisfying.

Sethe recognizes that the two orange patches offer neurological nourishment. Like anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's assessment of natural species, they are "'good to think.'"[15] According to Lévi-Strauss, so-called "natural" species hold value as humans assign worth to them; they do not necessarily have an inherent biological purpose, such

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[11] Morrison, *Beloved* 38.
[12] Morrison, *Beloved* 180, 38. I am grateful to Jennifer James for her insights into the quilt's composition.
[13] Morrison, *Beloved* 38.
[14] Morrison, *Beloved* 38.
[15] In *Totemism*, Lévi-Strauss writes, "We can understand, too, that natural species are chosen not because they are 'good to eat' but because they are 'good to think'" (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963) 89).

as being "'good to eat.'"[16] Yet, conceptually, they offer imaginative potential powerful enough to deem them "natural," establishing their cultural importance. Similarly, the "two patches of orange" are good to think because they stand outside of enslavement. Representing resistance, they offer the promise of a vibrant existence untainted by slavery, embracing "life in the raw."[17] They also attest to the possibility of human agency *in extremis*. The quilt's makers place the orange patches intentionally—consciously selecting them as "'good to think,'" and, consequently, they serve as an antidote to enslavement embedded in the quilt's design. In making the absence of color "shout," the orange squares break the silence of "the dark and the muted" non-linguistically. They locate African American identity within a quilt that also contains its denial, finding freedom amidst repression.[18]

Neuroscience, too, suggests that quilts are "good to think" but, more importantly, "good to feel," in the novel. To build on prior discussion, mirror neurons can activate the same regions of the brain involved in making a movement not only when a person watches movement, but also when observing residual evidence of movement, like stitches on a quilt or brush strokes on a painting. Human-made objects that carry remnants of intentionality can trigger mirror neurons that, in turn, provide observers with non-linguistic understanding. Importantly, mirror neurons permit humans to bypass language and achieve empathy since "no previous agreement between individuals—on arbitrary

[16] Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism* 89.
[17] Morrison, *Beloved* 38
[18] The double-entendre of "shout" also invokes its association with African American musical as well as religious expression, the latter of which can imply sound.

symbols . . . is needed for them to understand each other."[19] Rather, emotion is "often a key contextual element that signals the intent of an action."[20]

Freedberg and Gallese address mirror neurons' specific relationship to "everyday images and works of art" in the paper "Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience."[21] They argue that the "observation of manipulable objects like tools, fruits, vegetables, clothes . . . leads to the activation of the ventral premotor cortex, a cortical region that is normally considered to be involved in the control of action and not in the representation of objects," again rendering a semiotic intermediary unnecessary.[22] Put differently, simply looking at motion depicted in a painting or sculpture can activate mirror neurons, stimulating the same regions of the brain as if the movement were being performed rather than only illustrated. As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four, the expertise of the viewer can increase this effect. If, for example, a painter knows how to make the brush strokes in a painting at which she is looking, her brain can register recognition due to her kinesthetic skills and produce an even stronger response. Further, works of art can, but need not, depict action realistically to initiate the firing of mirror neurons, such as showing people dancing. Abstract images can also provoke an empathic response because "the marks on the painting or sculpture are the visible traces of goal-directed movements; hence, they are capable of activating the relevant motor areas in the observer's brain."[23]

By extension, quilts could activate mirror neurons. As handmade objects, they retain "visible traces of goal-directed movements" that can trigger analogous quilting in

[19] Rizzolatti, Fogassi and Gallese 60, 61.
[20] Rizzolatti, Fogassi and Gallese 61.
[21] Freedberg and Gallese 197.
[22] Freedberg and Gallese 200.
[23] Freedberg and Gallese 202.

the brain, especially if the viewer knows how to quilt. Watching quilting and, even more so, making one, could also be motivational, a harbinger of agency. Merely gazing at the keeping room quilt, however, perhaps prolongs, but does not save Baby Suggs's life.[24] The reader only learns after her death that she lay under a quilt that could potentially hint at the movements involved in its creation. Baby Suggs sought color, but seemed unaware of residual marks of motion in the orange squares, suggesting that she felt little emotion and therefore agency despite its presence. However, nine years later, the quilt infuses Denver and Beloved with empathy as they reconstruct Sethe's escape narrative from "scraps" of information that Denver collected from Sethe and Baby Suggs.[25] Evidence of movement becomes manifest along with the "duet" that Denver and Beloved co-create in imagining Sethe's story: the quilt "was . . . feeling like hands—the unrested hands of busy women: dry, warm, prickly."[26]

In addition to the potential conduit of mirror neurons, a variation on "intersubjectivity" serves as a medium through which quilting facilitates the simultaneous construction of one's self and that of others. A brief overview of intersubjectivity for the purposes of this argument should not be interpreted as an exhaustive survey of the divergent perspectives within the fields of phenomenology and psychoanalysis, respectively, whose theorists and practitioners have begun to integrate their understandings with neurological research. (Mirror neurons, for instance, can

[24] The colorlessness of the Ohio winter also contributes to her difficulties: "Winter in Ohio was especially rough if you had an appetite for color. Sky provided the only drama, and counting on a Cincinnati horizon for life's principal joy was reckless indeed" (Morrison, *Beloved* 4).
[25] Morrison, *Beloved* 78.
[26] Freedberg and Gallese 202; Morrison, *Beloved* 78.

complement theories of intersubjectivity.[27]) Generally, intersubjectivity describes how persons relate to one another, including through methods of communication such as speech, but, particularly, in ways unaccounted for by more overt modes. For example, psychoanalytic theory can (but does not always) characterize intersubjectivity as the dynamic, unspoken exchange in the relationship between analyst and analysand out of which psychological insight can emerge and, indeed, on which it depends. In *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life*, psychoanalyst and developmental psychologist Daniel N. Stern expands intersubjectivity's scope to groups rather than limiting it to dyadic relationships, such as mother and child or therapist and client. Advocating for its social significance, he posits that intersubjectivity functions as a "primary motivational system" critical to human survival, and thus "it promotes group formation, it enhances group functioning, and it assures group cohesion by giving rise to morality."[28]

Like mirror neurons, intersubjectivity does not require language for its existence. Rather, intersubjectivity necessarily precedes language. Once acquired, language can aid in achieving it; however, Stern asserts that "without intersubjectivity, language could not develop."[29] Quilting, for example, could be an ideal site for generating a kind of intersubjectivity through non-linguistic means, and Stern contends that "group ritual and activity," such as "group dancing, moving, [and] singing," can lead to a sense of

[27] See, for example, Matthew Ratcliffe, "Phenomenology, Neuroscience, and Intersubjectivity" in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006: 329-345).
[28] Daniel N. Stern, *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004) 97, 98.
[29] Stern 100.

"psychological belonging."[30] Unsurprisingly, historians document antebellum African American quilting as a communal activity intimately associated with song and dance. Gladys-Marie Fry notes in *Stitched from the Soul* that quilting by African Americans on southern plantations took many forms, but its most notable incarnation was the quilting party held in the slave quarters.[31] On these occasions, quilting became inseparable from community, talk, song and dance.[32] Like song and dance, quilting calls for communal participation that expresses as it affirms individual and community identities. In this framework, an ongoing process of improvisation interweaves personal and group identity, and individual subjectivity implies the presence of the communal. Because of the multiplicity of definitions surrounding intersubjectivity and the distinctiveness of African American subjectivities, this chapter integrates Stern's socially-oriented sense of intersubjectivity into the related, but distinct notion of plural personhood, the interdependence of persons on one another for the constitution of their individual subjectivities, also known as mutually constructing subjectivity.

In concert with mirror neurons and plural personhood, qualities shared with music and movement also imbue quilting with the impetus to spark emotion that leads to agency. As noted in chapter one, some scientists theorize that music's evolutionary purpose involved stimulating emotion that, in turn, prompted action oriented toward survival. Also previously discussed is the indivisibility in most cultures of music and dance as well as the assumption of group participation in their creation and, in turn, its connection to cultural identity. Similarly, quilting entails movement often performed in a

[30] Stern 100, 102. Stern also cites storytelling and chanting among the group actitivities that can yield intersubjectivity.
[31] Fry, *Stitched from the Soul* 69.
[32] Fry, *Stitched from the Soul* 69.

communal setting, and movement's close relationship with music implies that the latter can—metaphorically or actually—accompany quilting. For example, Gee's Bend quilter Nettie Young describes quilting as "mostly singing."[33] History and folklore can confirm a correspondence that sets the stage for the expression of emotion that can eventually awaken agency.

In addition, quilting might also parallel music's ability to improve one's mood as suggested by neurological research.[34] Quilting shares in the transformative power of music that, as discussed in chapter one, alters experience in every human culture.[35] Like music, quilting can transform in a manner akin to religious activity. To wit, quilter Pecolia Warner (1901-1983) remembers sitting under the quilt frame as a child while her mother and women from the community quilted and talked. Quilting could replicate the ecstatic experience of being in church for the group:

> While they'd be sitting there, they'd get to gossiping, and talking about religion, and the Bible, and what happened at church, and all like that. And they'd get happy and commence to crying sometimes. I'd be laying up under there watching them, and I'd say, "Now if they get happy and shout, I don't want them to stomp me!" Because I was lying down there on the floor, see.[36]

Quilting can harness a multiplicity of non-linguistic cues that can provoke the expression of emotion in a communal context, illuminating identity and igniting agency.

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[33] Paul Arnett, Joanne Cubbs and Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr., eds., *Gee's Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt* (Atlanta, GA: Tinwood Books, 2006) 217.
[34] Levitin 191.
[35] Nettl 47.
[36] William Ferris, ed., *Afro-American Folk Art and Crafts* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1983) 102.

Sethe's rescue by thirty women exemplifies Morrison's embrace of non-linguistic communal expression as a vehicle for plural personhood, agency and change.[37] When the thirty women gather at 124 to save Sethe from Beloved, they use language at first, though indistinct initially and characterized as "mumbling," "murmuring and whispering."[38] Ella's non-linguistic "holler," however, rejects language in favor of sound that prompts a powerful response: "Instantly the kneelers and the standers joined her. They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like."[39] This sound, made by African American women, liberates Sethe:

> For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash.[40]

Does the quilt not function similarly? The singing women provide the paradigmatic example of a non-linguistic communal expression of agency in *Beloved*; however, the quilt serves as another case.

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[37] Morrison's choice of medium also affirms Levitin's claim that music stores cultural heritage that mirror neurons can transmit (Levitin 267).
[38] Morrison, *Beloved* 258.
[39] Morrison, *Beloved* 259.
[40] Morrison, *Beloved* 261. Morrison connects the power generated by the thirty women to Baby Suggs's calling in the Clearing as well as Sethe's memory of it nine years later: "In the Clearing, Sethe found Baby's old preaching rock and remembered the smell of leaves simmering in the sun, thunderous feet and the shouts that ripped pods off the limbs of the chestnuts. With Baby Suggs's heart in charge, the people let go" (Morrison, *Beloved* 94).

In *Beloved*, quilting begins to lay a foundation for agency when Sethe notices the quilt in the keeping room, her emotions reawakened by Paul D along with her sexual desire—a contrast to the quilt's constraining "modesty" accented by Baby Suggs's hunger for color.[41] Unlike Baby Suggs, Sethe does not yearn for color because she ceased to see it after the Misery, Sethe's attempt to prevent the reenslavement of her children by ending their lives, an effort that resulted in the death of her two-year-old daughter by her own hand. The traumatic colors that Sethe associates with the Misery, particularly red, make seeing a complete spectrum of color—a metaphor for full participation in life—seem inaccessible. In the keeping room, she psychoanalyzes herself as having become intentionally numb to color, which Morrison adopts as a synonym for emotion.[42]

Sethe's ability to perceive color and, correspondingly, emotion returns with the arrival of Paul D, an arrival, not coincidentally, accompanied by song. Music's ability to elicit emotion helps to explain Paul D's effectiveness in reviving Sethe's emotions, as well as those of Denver and the manifest, but not yet embodied, ghost:

> So, kneeling in the keeping room the morning after Paul D came, she was distracted by the two orange squares that signaled how barren 124 really was.
>
> He was responsible for that. Emotions sped to the surface in his company. Things became what they were: drabness looked drab; heat

[41] Morrison, *Beloved* 38.

[42] "Sethe looked at her hands, her bottle-green sleeves, and thought how little color there was in the house and how strange that she had not missed it the way Baby did. Deliberate, she thought, it must be deliberate, because the last color she remembered was the pink chips in the headstone of her baby girl. After that she became as color conscious as a hen. . . . 124 was so full of strong feeling perhaps she was oblivious to the loss of anything at all" (Morrison, *Beloved* 38-39).

> was hot. Windows suddenly had view. And wouldn't you know he'd be a singing man.[43]

The quilt's orange squares throw the barrenness of 124 into relief, in the dual senses of landscape and fecundity. The clarity that Paul D brings to Sethe, Sethe reciprocates equally unknowingly and powerfully. Paul D "had shut down a generous portion of his head" after the trauma of being on a chain gang, but upon seeing Sethe in Ohio, "the closed portion of his head opened like a greased lock."[44]

The keeping room quilt plays a more active role in the physical presence of more than one person, however. It appears with two or three persons throughout the rest of the book, signaling the necessity of others for the gradual garnering of agency. The quilt stirs Beloved and Denver's imaginations, for example, after Beloved arrives at 124 and convalesces in the keeping room where "Denver removed her hat and put the quilt with two squares of color over her feet."[45] She slept primarily on arrival, and "it took three days for Beloved to notice the orange patches in the darkness of the quilt."[46] In the nine years after Baby Suggs's death, the "scraps of orange" become "faded," though they nonetheless motivate Beloved and Denver:

> Denver was pleased because it kept her patient awake longer. She [Beloved] seemed totally taken with those faded scraps of orange, even made the effort to lean on her elbow and stroke them. An effort that

[43] Morrison, *Beloved* 39.
[44] Morrison, *Beloved* 41.
[45] Morrison, *Beloved* 53.
[46] Morrison, *Beloved* 54.

> quickly exhausted her, so Denver rearranged the quilt so its cheeriest part was in the sick girl's sight line.[47]

The narrative associates happiness with the orange scraps that diverge from the rest of the dark quilt—"its cheeriest part."[48] Studying the orange squares flush with affect strengthens Beloved, gratifying Denver and inspiring her to "rearrange" the quilt—the first inroad into the quilt's metamorphosis that is also emblematic of the characters'.[49] The evidence of movement in the squares inspires Beloved to move ("to lean on her elbow and stroke them"), prompting Denver to act as well (she "rearranged the quilt"). Along with Sethe's shift in perception after Paul D's arrival, the scene indicates that human agency can shape the quilt and so, too, experiences of enslavement.

The orange squares again evoke emotion when Denver tells the story of her birth to Beloved, vividly imagining Sethe's perspective for the first time:

> Denver was seeing it now and feeling it—through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother. Seeing how it must have looked. And the more fine points she made, the more detail she provided, the more Beloved liked it. So she anticipated the questions by giving blood to the scraps her mother and grandmother had told her—and a heartbeat. The monologue became, in fact, a duet as they lay down together, Denver nursing Beloved's interest like a lover whose pleasure was to overfeed the

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[47] Morrison, *Beloved* 54.

[48] As the sound made by the thirty women recalls the rich harmonies of the Clearing, the two orange patches as the "cheeriest" part of the quilt summon up 124 before the Misery when it "had been a cheerful, buzzing house where Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed" (Morrison, *Beloved* 86-87).

[49] The orange squares also seem to provide impetus for the novelist. In a 1987 interview published in *The New York Times*, Morrison chooses Baby Suggs's quilt as one of two examples of "a controlling image" that "is useful [in the act of writing] . . . because it determines the language that informs the text. . . . [O]nce I know that there are two patches of orange in that quilt, then I can move" (Mervyn Rothstein, "Toni Morrison, in Her New Novel, Defends Women" *The New York Times* 26 August 1987: C17).

> loved. The dark quilt with two orange patches was there with them because Beloved wanted it near her when she slept. It was smelling like grass and feeling like hands—the unrested hands of busy women: dry, warm, prickly."[50]

The animate property of the colorful shapes increases with the double entendre of "patches"—a sewing term as well as a word for a group of plants that the added detail "smelling like grass" enhances.[51]

The presence of the quilt facilitates the transformation not only of Denver's perspective, but also of the narrative itself. Denver breathes life into the story by using "scraps" provided by Sethe and Baby Suggs, making a narrative quilt that nourishes Beloved just as the quilt itself seems to provide comfort to her. Like the quilt, the narrative is a work in progress in the novel, verifying its living quality, its possession of "blood . . . and a heartbeat."[52] The transition from the quilt to its narrative double (another duet) rests within language, though language leads to "seeing" and "feeling" the story unfold non-linguistically—visually and affectively.[53] Language metaphorically becomes song as the spoken "monologue became, in fact, a duet."[54] Notably, the shift from language to non-linguistic expression occurs in a communal context as Denver and Beloved "sing" together, rather than speak singly as Sethe does when she "talk-thinks" in the keeping room.[55] In addition, although no material has been added to the quilt yet, the potency of its life-giving qualities increases along with the narrative's revision of slavery.

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[50] Morrison, *Beloved* 78.
[51] Morrison, *Beloved* 54, 78.
[52] Morrison, *Beloved* 78.
[53] Morrison, *Beloved* 78.
[54] Morrison, *Beloved* 78.
[55] Morrison, *Beloved* 38. In a sense, Denver and Beloved speak sing-ly.

The quilt's embodiment of African American creativity, identity and resistance becomes more apparent as it helps to tell the story of Sethe's escape and Denver's birth. The keeping room quilt carries the heritage of quilting as a catalyst for plural personhood, retaining the presence of "the unrested hands of busy women."[56] Fittingly, the quilt does not appear in a scene with the larger African American community as *Beloved* takes place primarily during the eighteen years in which the community remains mired in the Misery, interdependence dissipated in its wake. Nevertheless, the quilt facilitates the production of subjectivity between persons that culminates in the restoration of relationships. As the quilt models plural personhood in its very construction—individual pieces in relation to a whole—and recalls the women who made it, it aids Denver and Sethe in practicing mutually constructing subjectivity, exercises that eventually lead to their reunion with the larger community.

After Sethe learns Beloved's identity (through song), Denver witnesses them "tacking scraps of cloth to Baby Suggs' old quilt."[57] Akin to the "busy women" with "unrested hands,"[58] they endeavor to infuse the quilt with renewing color and feeling.[59] Sethe attempts to remake her relationship with Beloved as they remake the quilt together, transforming it into "a quilt of merry colors."[60] She begins to recognize the possibility of recovering from slavery, in part, by re-covering the quilt. In doing so, she communicates

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[56] Morrison, *Beloved* 78.
[57] Morrison, *Beloved* 241.
[58] Morrison, *Beloved* 78.
[59] Morrison, *Beloved* 78; Peppers 87; Morrison, *Beloved* 271. Morrison writes, "Sometimes coming upon them making men and women cookies or tacking scraps of cloth on Baby Suggs' old quilt, it was difficult for Denver to tell who was who" (Morrison, *Beloved* 241). One way to understand Denver's difficulty in distinguishing between Sethe and Beloved as they work on the quilt or make cookies is as a nod to women's knowledge and practices that transcend generational boundaries. Peppers offers the more generally accepted reading of unclear identities as indicative of the need for differentiation between mother and daughter.
[60] Morrison, *Beloved* 271.

a strategy for reconstructing relationships, as well as representations of slavery, non-verbally.[61] Watching Sethe and Beloved quilt prepares Denver for future action that will take a quilt-like form.[62] Denver combines her observation of the process of quilting with her knowledge of how the quilt helped to create a story-song that she and Beloved gave "a heartbeat." Her subsequent effort to secure food for the family leads to a kind of narrative quilt of stories that enfolds her—rebuilding her relationship with the community—and to a rescue that tacks her mother back into the fabric of the community through a musical version of quilting.

Denver co-creates a multi-vocal story similar to the "duet" that she and Beloved conjured out of "scraps" after she ventures into "the world beyond the edge of the porch" for help.[63] In returning dishes to the women that Lady Jones organizes to supply meals to the residents of 124, Denver begins "her life in the world as a woman" and "the trail that she followed to get to that sweet thorny place was made up of paper scraps containing the handwritten names of others."[64] Quilt-like, the process of thanking her benefactors reintegrates Denver into the community.[65] The scraps of paper lead to scraps of oral

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[61] Quilting, like Hélène Cixous's claim about writing cited by Judy Elsley, "is a way to replace the misrepresentation of others with self-creation" (Judy Elsley, "*The Color Purple* and the Poetics of Fragmentation" in Torsney and Elsley, *Quilt Culture* 70). Elsley paraphrases from Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" reprinted in *Critical Theory Since 1965*, Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, eds. (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986).

[62] Morrison, *Beloved* 241. The double entendre of the verb "tack" suggests another goal-directed action, as one might tack a sail.

[63] Morrison, *Beloved* 243.

[64] Morrison, *Beloved* 248. The "sweet thorny place" of womanhood that Denver achieves through other women recalls a similar paradox in Morrison's description of the "unrested hands" of the women who made Baby Suggs's quilt: "dry, warm, prickly" (*Beloved* 248, 78).

[65] "Every now and then, all through the spring, names appeared near or in gifts of food. Obviously for the return of the pan or plate or basket; but also to let the girl know, if she cared to, who the donor was, because some of the parcels were wrapped in paper, and though there was nothing to return, the name was nevertheless there. Many had X's with designs about them, and Lady Jones tried to identify the plate or pan or the covering towel. When she could only guess, Denver followed her directions and went to say thank you anyway—whether she had the right benefactor or not. When she was wrong, when the person said, 'No, darling. That's not my bowl. Mine's got a blue ring on it,' a small conversation took place (Morrison, *Beloved* 249).

narrative as every woman tells her a different story about her family—"all of them knew her grandmother and some had even danced with her in the Clearing."[66] Sewing and healing figure prominently in the women's divergent memories, which serve to distinguish among individuals even as they converge in a commentary on the formerly close-knit community:

> Others remembered the days when 124 was a way station, the place they assembled to catch news, taste oxtail soup, leave their children, cut out a skirt. One remembered the tonic mixed there that cured a relative. One showed her the border of a pillowslip, the stamens of its pale blue flowers French-knotted in Baby Suggs' kitchen by the light of an oil lamp while arguing the Settlement Fee.[67]

The women's identities do not necessarily depend on language, and the stories that they tell are as unique as their signatures, which range from linguistic to non-linguistic, including "handwritten names," "X's with designs about them" and distinctive housewares.[68] Through scraps of paper, memories and even fabric ("covering towel[s]"), Denver maps the community and her family history into an imagined quilt that welcomes her to womanhood and helps her to understand her contextualized identity; Denver becomes a woman through other women.[69] Uniting many voices, the quilt facilitates the community reimagining itself and opens up the possibility that Sethe will rejoin its ranks. Without crafting this oral quilt, would the community have been willing to come together

[66] Morrison, *Beloved* 249.
[67] Morrison, *Beloved* 249.
[68] Morrison, *Beloved* 249.
[69] Morrison, *Beloved* 249.

and rescue Sethe with a sonic one? Would Denver have achieved "sweet," "thorny" womanhood?[70]

In parallel, Morrison strives for an organic quality to the novel that grows out of African American lived experience, especially that of African American women. Quilting and other activities principally affiliated with women, such as cooking, structure a book often described as fragmented by critics; however, the text might be reconceived as scraps pieced together like a quilt. The text differs as various pieces of fabric that make up a quilt diverge in myriad ways, including texture, content and style; Morrison's text even varies visually, for example, in the "Middle Passage" and "fugue" sections where Beloved, Sethe and Denver's voices are heard most directly. The typesetting that distinguishes Beloved's voice, for example, is akin to a piece of fabric distinct from its neighbor on a quilt—words separated by many spaces and without punctuation.[71] Still other processes primarily associated with women frame the text. A span of a menstrual cycle—twenty-eight days—separates Sethe's arrival and the Misery that initiates Baby Suggs's heartbreak: "Her faith, her love, her imagination and her great big old heart began to collapse twenty-eight days after her daughter-in-law arrived."[72] Likewise, eighteen years—a child-rearing cycle—pass between Beloved's death and her reemergence and Sethe's contemporaneous estrangement from the community.

Morrison crafts her text from "life in the raw," in the sense of suffering as well as in the sense of using lived experience as "found object." In the latter, Morrison functions as a *bricoleur* just as her characters do, a strategy that she locates within an African American tradition. The term *bricoleur* derives from the French word for

[70] Morrison, *Beloved* 248.
[71] Morrison, *Beloved* 210-213.
[72] Morrison, *Beloved* 89.

handywoman/man; a *bricoleur* can "fix something ingeniously," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.[73] As noted in the Introduction, Lévi-Strauss borrows the related concept of *bricolage* and applies it to situations in which he observes people building cultural knowledge—specifically, "mythical thought"—from divergent sources at hand rather than materials tailored to the task, like a brick used in place of a hammer.[74] Lévi-Strauss explains that:

> A "bricoleur" is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with "whatever is at hand", that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous . . .[75]

Many enslaved African Americans ingeniously used whatever resources were "at hand" —whether to compose songs, concoct meals or create quilts—in order to counteract the often limited availability of materials due to slavery. The trope of *bricolage* across many areas of slave life continues to gain recognition through historical

[73] "*Bricolage*," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Gelman Library, George Washington University, 7 July 2008, <http://dictionary.oed.com/>.
[74] Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* 17.
[75] Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* 17. Scholars continue to employ Lévi-Strauss's theory to analyze ethnographic data as well as literary texts, and *bricolage* also describes a method of creating formal art from found objects. An apt metaphor for quilting, Cathy Peppers acknowledges the intersection of textile and textual *bricolage* in her chapter on the novel, "Fabricating a Reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as a Quilt of Memory and Identity:" "Within the world of traditional women's work, the cultural work of the theoretical *bricoleur*, who fashions meaning from the fragments of discourse at hand, finds powerful embodiment in the figure of the quiltmaker" (Peppers 86).

research.[76] Both distinct and pervasive, it warrants a culturally specific marker denoting African American practices similar to, yet distinct from, *bricolage*. For example, Shane White and Graham White characterize music made by enslaved African Americans in terms of *bricolage* in *The Sounds of Slavery* and a companion chapter that appears in *The Slavery Reader* edited by Gad Heuman and James Walvin. However, they also observe a unique quality to the combining of sounds stemming from "a sense in which, because slaves recognized more things *as* bricks [materials], their pile of bricks was larger [than that of whites], and was composed of bricks of sharply contrasting colors and odd-seeming designs."[77] In their chapter, White and White cite a statement by a formerly enslaved woman that offers a theoretical term for the *bricolage*-like strategy frequently found in a range of African American contexts, including quilting:

> In explaining to Jeanette Robinson Murphy how spirituals were created, one of the former slave women, to whose singing Murphy had listened appreciatively, pointed to a significant difference between the religious

[76] For example, enslaved African Americans employed *bricolage* in preparing food. According to archeologist Anne Yentsch, the "egregious" scarcity of food led slaves "to highly value ingenuity, creativity, independence, and self-reliance" that "remain part of black ideology" (Anne Yentsch, "Excavating the South's African American Food History," in Anne L. Bower, ed., *African American Foodways: Explorations of History and Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007) 70).

[77] In *The Sounds of Slavery*, White and White write: "Forced into a degree of intimacy on southern plantations, both slaves and their owners borrowed from each other; functioning as *bricoleurs*, they built their cultural products from what they or their forebears brought with them and from what they found about them in the New World. . . . What we see in slave cultural creations, for the most part musical ones in this instance, is a playful sampling and rearrangement of what to whites seemed unexpected elements. At times this process is strikingly obvious: the creators of a slave work song draw apparently indiscriminately on biblical texts, lines from secular songs, and contemporary references from everyday life; a slave musical creation incorporates yells, moans, complex rhythmic patterns, and sharply differing tone colors; a slave clothing ensemble mixes items in ways that whites see as bizarre. At other times, the mixing of disparate elements seems more muted. But despite the inevitable advance of acculturation, slave *bricoleurs*, exhibiting a sensibility that seems close to what might now be called postmodern, continued to create cultural products that drew components from unexpected sources and arranged them in surprising ways" (White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery* 37).

> music of African Americans and that of whites. "Notes is good enough for you people," the woman declared, "but us likes a mixtery."[78]

Mixt[h]e[o]ry

"Mixtery" could be considered an African American incarnation of *bricolage*, the word itself embodying the concept of combining fragments to yield new meanings. Understood on its own terms, the combination of "mix" and "mystery" retains the sense of both words and gives voice—in African American Vernacular English—to the transformative power of African American communal expression. Notably, the statement was made by a woman who invokes the communal in her use of the term "us" and in her commentary on the community's preference for a "mixtery" rather than "notes." The present tense of the verb ("likes") reinforces the importance of both process and the vernacular.

The term appears a second time within the chapter that takes its title from her observation—"'Us Likes a Mixtery'"—suggesting that it could be common parlance, an intrinsic part of African American culture and a sensibility applying to multiple subject areas.[79] While a Kentucky woman described African American "sacred" music as a

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[78] White and White, "'Us Likes a Mixtery'" 420-421. The unnamed Kentucky woman recounts the process of creating spirituals, citing their African heritage in the original article by Murphy: "'Us ole heads use ter make 'em up on de spurn of de moment, arter we wrassle wid de Spirit and come thoo. But the tunes was brung from Africa by our granddaddies. Dey was jis 'miliar songs. Dese days dey calls 'em ballots, but in de ole days dey call 'em spirituals, case de Holy Spirit done revealed 'em to 'em. Some say Moss Jesus taught 'em, and I's seed 'em start in meetin'. We'd all be at the 'prayer house' de Lord's Day, and de white preacher he'd splain de word and read whar Ezekial done say—Dry bones gwine ter lib ergin. And, honey, de Lord would come a-shining' thoo dem pages and revive dis ole . . . heart, and I'd jump up dar and den and holler and shout and sing and pat, and dey would all cotch de words and I'd sing it to some ole shout song I'd heard 'em sing from Africa, and dey'd all take it up and keep at it, and keep a-addin' it, and den it would be a spiritual. Dese spirituals am de best moanin' music in de world, case dey is de whole Bible sung out and out. Notes is good enough for you people, but us likes a mixtery" (Murphy 328-329).

[79] The terms "mixtry" and "mixtery" occur in several recent publications concerning African American music. Most stem from the quote that White and White use, although sometimes referencing to the source obliquely and/or inaccurately. For example, in "Hollow Rock and the Lost Blues Connection," Martha Bayles erases both the gender and emancipated status of the Kentucky woman when she writes

mixtery, a formerly enslaved man from South Carolina applied the term to color and

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unchronologically, "As a slave musician remarked to a white visitor in the 1830s, 'Notes are . . .'" (Martha Bayles, "Hollow Rock and the Lost Blues Connection" *Wilson Quarterly* 17.3 (Summer 1993: 10-20) 13). Citing Nathaniel Mackey's use of the statement in his poetry, Paul Hoover renders the speaker's gender as male in his review "Pair of Figures for Eshu:" "Mackey quotes an ex-slave on one of the Georgia Sea Islands, circa 1894, as he spoke to a white folklorist" (Paul Hoover, "Pair of Figures of Eshu: Doubling of Consciousness in the Work of Kerry James Marshall and Nathaniel Mackey" *Callaloo* 23.2, *Nathaniel Mackey: A Special Issue* (Spring 2000: 728-748) 744). Mackey's text, *Bedouin Hornbook*, does not convey gender. Graham Lock provides, perhaps, the most thorough and faithful adaptation of mixtery in his introduction to *Mixtery: A Festschrift for Anthony Braxton* which notes that Murphy did not name the woman to whom she credited the quote. Anthony Braxton, an African American composer, musician and music professor, named his recording label after the tribute published in honor of his career: Mixtery Records.

"Mixtry" also appears in texts unconnected to the Kentucky woman's story, yet also linked with African American vernacular English, such as Charles Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* published in 1899—the same year as Murphy's article (Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Conjure Woman* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993). In addition, folklorist John Harrington Cox recounts the story of "John Hardy," a song about "a Negro, whose prowess and fame are sung far and wide among his own race, and to a less extent among white folk" in "Three American Authors as Semi-Folk Artists" (John Harrington Cox, "'John Hardy'" *Journal of American Folklore* 32.126 (Oct.-Dec. 1919: 505-520) 505). Cox reprints a letter in which the Honorable W. A. McCorkle, the governor of West Virginia from 1893-1897, writes, "'The killing in which he [John Hardy] made his final exit was a "mixtery" between women, cards and liquor; and it was understood that it was more of a fight than a murder'" (Cox 505). Similarly, folklorist Donald M. Winkelman published his conversation with one of his "informants, a Chicago blues singer who performs on the streets of southside Chicago" (Donald M. Winkelman, "Three American Authors as Semi-Folk Artists" *Journal of American Folklore* 78.308 (Apr.-June 1965: 130-135) 131). Like the Kentucky woman, the singer "with the help of a companion" told Winkelman "how he composes 'new' blues:"

Winkelman:	How would you do it? Would you take bits of songs you'd heard before, or. . . .
B:	Yeh, it's just like he said. . . .
G:	You know, kinda twist the words around. You know. To fit the music. . . .
Winkelman:	Would you take a new tune to fit it or. . . .
B:	Well now, I might would or I may not. I may use my own tune or I may [make up] a new tune.
G:	But when he play the blues, it kinda' runs into a kind of mixtry, like it you was mixin' a cocktail, you know. . . .
B:	That's right. Anything. Yeh.
G:	An they kinda' mix it all up an it's his own style of playin'. (Winkelman 131)

The sense of the latter usage seems closer to that documented by numerous linguists in the early twentieth century who record "mixtery" or "mixtry" as a vernacular pronounciation of "mixture" in the "Southern Appalachian and Ozark mountains," for example (See Josiah Combs, "Language of the Southern Highlanders" *PMLA* 46.4 (Dec. 1931: 1302-1322) 1316; Joseph Sargent Hall, "The Phonetics of Great Smokey Mountain Speech" *American Speech* 17.2, Pt. 2 (April 1942: 1-110) 79; and Vance Randolph and Anna A. Ingleman, "Prounounciation in the Ozark Dialect" *American Speech* 3.5 (June 1928: 410-407) 406). (A *Saturday Evening Post* article published in 1964 hints at ongoing usage in the southern Appalachians. Beverly Smith, Jr. quotes "an old farmer near Steeles Tavern, Va." who responds to his non-musical question, "'I ain't agin progress,' he said. 'But she's a mixtry of fair and foul. She's like them new miracle remedies. She cures up a sight of old miseries, but ever' now and then she fires up some fresh ones'" (Beverly Smith, Jr., "The Change in the Mountains," *Saturday Evening Post* 237.12 (28 March 1964: 61-62) 60).) In addition, the *Oxford English Dictionary* inserted a draft entry for "mixtry" in June 2008. Identifying it as "U.S. regional (south)," it lists "mixtery" as an alternate spelling and defines the term as "a mixture" ("Mixtry," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Gelman Library, George Washington University, 11 Nov. 2009, <http://dictionary.oed.com/>). However errantly cited, those who quote the Kentucky woman when writing about African American music consciously repeat her definition of the term, suggesting continuity not only in recognition of her insight, but also in its veracity.

clothing: "Charlie Meadow explained to his WPA [Works Progress Administration] interviewer that, whereas the slaves' winter clothing had been 'drab and plain', 'for our summer clothes we plaited de hanks to make a mixtry of colors'."[80] This alternate transliteration of the term evokes experimentation and effort as the word forms from "mix" and "try." The spelling of the word diverges like the music it also describes: improvisational and elusive of language. Meadow's winter clothing is reminiscent of Baby Suggs's quilt that debuts as "dark and . . . muted" in a season of frozen emotion and, by summer, becomes "a quilt of merry colors" under the transforming hands of Sethe and Beloved.[81] The quilt is a mixtery by the end of the novel, a novel that is itself a mixtery.

In *Beloved*, Morrison attempts to avoid essentialization of African American quilting, music and women while acknowledging a cultural tradition of "making a way out of no way."[82] For example, she does not name any pattern to which quilts in the book might conform and therefore keeps them outside of language (mixterious). Baby Suggs's quilt resembles songs of the same period that, according to White and White in "'Us Likes a Mixtery,'" were "virtually impossible to score" due to "thicker sonic textures and a . . . complex interweaving of rhythms," a description also reminiscent of songs sung in the Clearing in *Beloved*.[83] The singing eluded musical notation as well as verbal

[80] White and White, "'Us Likes a Mixtery'" 421. Note: The punctuation reflects the original text.
[81] Morrison, *Beloved* 38.
[82] Essentializing, or thinking of persons as members of homogeneous groups rather than as unique individuals, sometimes functioned as a divisive source of contention in the history of African American quilt studies. Initially, art historians traced African American quilting styles to African textiles ahistorically, a move since corrected by research; however, a stereotype of African American quilts as visually identifiable due to an improvisational style and unorthodox use of color persists in popular culture.
[83] White and White, "'Us Likes a Mixtery'" 417. Morrison writes of music in the Clearing: "Saying no more, she stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music. Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh" (Morrison, *Beloved* 89).

language, akin to the sound made by the thirty women and to the unnamed "merry colors" of the quilt.[84] White and White even liken such songs to quilts: "In the manner of slave quilters, slave musicians pieced their compositions from different, often provocatively juxtaposed elements."[85] Before Sethe and Beloved rework the quilt's "dark and . . . muted" colors into unspecified "carnival colors," the orange squares represent mixtery by virtue of their placement on the quilt.[86] They are the "juxtaposed elements," contrasting starkly with the quilt's "sober field" and thereby bearing witness to African American expression within a system that strove to silence enslaved African Americans.[87] Sethe and Beloved cultivate the element of mixtery embedded in the quilt—"the faded scraps of orange"—until it yields a full-fledged mixtery—"a quilt of merry colors"—by the end of the novel.[88]

The women in the community also represent a mixtery in the novel. Distinct individuals unify to exert considerable power, expressed communally and complexly, while retaining their individual identities. Morrison distinguishes among them in the scene leading up to as well as during their musical intervention, as she does earlier in the text when Denver reconnects with many of the same women out of gratitude for providing food for her family.[89] For example, as the intervention begins, half of the women kneel while half of them stand and, during the rescue, "some [of the "rapt faces of

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[84] Morrison, *Beloved* 272.
[85] White and White, "'Us Likes a Mixtery'" 415, repeated in *The Sounds of Slavery* 34. Interestingly, William T. Dargan likens the "aesthetic tension" among regional African American singing styles to that of quilts in the chapter he contributed to Cauthen's book on Benjamin Lloyd's hymnal (William T. Dargan, "Texts from Lloyd's Hymn Book in the Quiltwork of African American Singing Styles" in *Benjamin Lloyd's Hymn Book: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition*, ed. Joyce H. Cauthen (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Folklife Association, 1999: 29-47) 29).
[86] Morrison, *Beloved* 271, 38.
[87] White and White, "'Us Likes a Mixtery'" 415; Morrison, *Beloved* 38.
[88] Morrison, *Beloved* 54, 271.
[89] Morrison, *Beloved* 249, 257, 261.

thirty neighbor women"] had their eyes closed; others looked at the hot, cloudless sky."[90] The group of thirty women does not include every woman in Cincinnati's African American community (though many women in the community seem to know about the intervention, not all participate for various reasons), nor does it represent women holding a monolithic point of view. All participants concur only that the situation calls for a mixtery and trust that they can figure it out improvisationally: "They had no idea what they would do once they got there. They just started out, walked down Bluestone Road and came together at the agreed-upon time."[91] The thirty women intuitively and interdependently discover the "how" together in the planning as well as in the execution of the "rescue."[92]

Once the women "group"—Morrison uses the noun as a verb—and begin to pray, Ella's galvanizing "holler" becomes a cue understood by all assembled: "Instantly the kneelers and the standers joined her."[93] They use various resources at hand, accessing them spontaneously, though the intervention itself was intentional and organized: "Some brought what they could and what they believed would work. Stuffed in apron pockets, strung around their necks, lying in the space between their breasts. Others brought Christian faith—as shield and sword. Most brought a little of both."[94] Each woman brings her "best thing:" herself, resulting in a potent mixtery of what Baby Suggs lost after the Misery—"faith," "love" and "imagination."[95] Like a sonic quilting bee, thirty

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[90] Morrison, *Beloved* 258-259, 261.
[91] Morrison, *Beloved* 257.
[92] Morrison, *Beloved* 256.
[93] Morrison, *Beloved* 258, 259.
[94] Morrison, *Beloved* 257. Details such as "stuffed in apron pockets" align with images of women and thereby reinforce gender as important to the intervention. In addition, the "little bit of both" speaks to the syncretism, or mixtery, of African American religious practices.
[95] Morrison, *Beloved* 273, 89. Morrison writes of Baby Suggs: "Her faith, her love, her imagination and her great big old heart began to collapse twenty-eight days after her daughter-in-law arrived" (*Beloved* 89).

women gather and piece together "the sound that broke the back of words."[96] The women prevent Sethe's attack on Mr. Bodwin, whom she mistakes for schoolteacher, through a creative, participatory act rooted in non-linguistic African American expression. The reenactment of the events of eighteen years earlier leads to freedom rather than tragedy, in part, because of the presence of the "loving faces" that patch Sethe back into the community through layers of sound that momentarily blanket her like a quilt.[97]

After the musical rescue, Paul D finds Sethe in the keeping room "lying under a quilt of merry colors."[98] Looking at the quilt floods him with emotion and sparks a memory that clarifies his relationship with Sethe:

> Paul D sits down in the rocking chair and examines the quilt patched in carnival colors. His hands are limp between his knees. There are too many things to feel about this woman. His head hurts. Suddenly he remembers Sixo trying to describe what he felt about the Thirty-Mile Woman. "She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me all in the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind.
>
> He is staring at the quilt but he is thinking about her wrought iron back. . . . He wants to put his story next to hers.[99]

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[96] Morrison, *Beloved* 261.
[97] Morrison, *Beloved* 262. Do the women themselves form a quilt with their bodies, covering Sethe? Beloved sees a "pile of people out there" who "make a hill. A hill of black people falling" (Morrison, *Beloved* 262). The word "pile" carries the double entendre of textile, as in "the raised surface or nap on a fabric (such as velvet, plush, etc., or esp. a carpet) formed by weaving a secondary warp in loops which are either cut or left intact" ("Pile" *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Gelman Library, George Washington University, 13 August 2008, <http://dictionary.oed.com/>).
[98] Morrison, *Beloved* 271.
[99] Morrison, *Beloved* 272-273.

The Thirty-Mile Woman quilted Sixo together, giving him a holistic view of himself.[100] She uses mixtery to co-create Sixo's subjectivity that is also a mixtery. Notably, Sixo associates her with emotion, with "what he *felt* about the Thirty-Mile Woman."[101] Paul D reflects similarly that there are "too many things to feel about" Sethe while, tellingly, "staring at the quilt."[102] The quilt models a way that Paul D can similarly piece together a plural personhood with Sethe in which he can "put his story next to hers." Sethe wants a relationship with Paul D for a reason strikingly parallel to his desire of the same: "Her story was bearable because it was his as well—to tell, to refine and tell again."[103] Like a story or a relationship, a quilt can be created, "refined" and made again. The triple conception can withstand and even invites constant revision.

At the close of the book, "pieces" stand in for "scraps"—the former term more respectfully applied to people than the latter. Though scraps can attain value, pieces imply selection; they already belong to a larger whole, as the Thirty-Mile Woman demonstrates to Sixo by gathering the pieces that he is and giving them back to him "in all the right order."[104] Morrison critiques the equation of persons with language by portraying people as non-linguistic, yet non-objectified, entities whose subjectivities actively form through non-verbal engagement with others. In addition to Sixo's quilted consciousness, Paul D epitomizes both emotional and musical subjectivities; a kind of therapist specializing in women's emotions, he is "the kind of man who can walk in a

[100] The term "gather" keeps the Thirty-Mile Woman's technique within the realm of sewing, as gathering means to stitch folds of fabric together. Gather also resonates with plural personhood in its definition as an assembly of people.
[101] Morrison, *Beloved* 272, emphasis mine.
[102] Morrison, *Beloved* 272, 273.
[103] Morrison, *Beloved* 99.
[104] Morrison, *Beloved* 272-273.

house and make the women cry" as well as "a singing man."[105] Sethe and her children also come into being musically. In identifying Beloved, Sethe recognizes herself by the song that she sang exclusively to her children. Her moment of revelation mixes sound with the language of quilting: "Sethe recalled the click—the settling of pieces into places designed and made especially for them."[106] These non-linguistic subjectivities are process-oriented; Morrison sees quilting and singing as proxies for, as well as facilitators of, plural personhood.

After Paul D arrives, Sethe wants to "piece it all back together;" she understands quilting as a way to use fragments to make sense of fragmentation.[107] The community seems to share her understanding as they eventually patch Denver and then Sethe back into the community; the wave of sound made by the thirty women remakes relationships "muted" like the colors in the quilt.[108] Morrison makes it clear that it is not only Sethe that needs to be restored, but also members of the community who spitefully turned away from Sethe just as they perceived her to be pridefully turning away from them. The restoration of individuals and the community are interwoven. In the novel's conclusion, the quilt is no longer divided into a dark portion distinguished from the two orange

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[105] Morrison, *Beloved* 17, 39.
[106] Morrison, *Beloved* 175-176. The song with which Sethe and her children identify one another and the sound that the thirty women make conform to a "multiple-trace memory model" in which the brain encodes memories with unique cues, also discussed in chapter one (Levitin 165-167). Sethe's singular song results in a "click—the settling of pieces into places designed and made especially for them" (175-176). Likewise, "the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words." A multiple-trace memory model similar to that associated with music also applies to the quilt. Sixo's description of the Thirty-Mile Woman giving him "the pieces I am . . . back to me in all the right order" could encompass memory as well as subjectivity (Morrison, *Beloved* 272-273).
[107] Morrison, *Beloved* 22.
[108] Morrison, *Beloved* 38. Notably, gender does not pose a barrier for conceptualizing selfhood in terms of quilting. Sixo and Paul D may not quilt with fabric in the novel, but they share an understanding with the Thirty-Mile Woman and Sethe, respectively, of quilting as a technique for facilitating intersubjectivity. In some ways, this is consistent with quilt historians who emphasize the divergence from the stereotype of women as quilters to the exclusion of men and children as well as the unfounded notion that black and white women did not sew together.

patches, but is wholly described as a "quilt of merry colors" reunited like the community.[109]

Baby Suggs's quilt is a meditation on value—who values whom and what, but also a measure of utility. Its composition of "scraps" mirrors people judging whether or not others are "throw-away people."[110] In addition to the inclusive language of scraps and pieces, the damning language of "junk" persists for those misjudged to be unsalvageable.[111] When the word appears in the text, however, the person condemned to uselessness is reclaiming herself or being reclaimed by those who condemned her in the first place. For example, Sethe is taking "Baby Suggs' advice: *lay it all down, sword and shield"* and preparing to go ice skating with Denver and Beloved, who found a pair of skates.[112] She refuses to accept "an unlivable life" as inevitable and, instead, decides to play: "Anybody feeling sorry for her, anybody wandering by to peep in and see how she was getting on (including Paul D) would discover that the woman junkheaped for the third time because of the way that she displayed that she loved her children—that woman was sailing happily on a frozen creek."[113] Framed in this way, her valuing of her children leads to her devaluation as a person by the African American community after the

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[109] Morrison, *Beloved* 271.
[110] Morrison, *Beloved* 84. Morrison writes that "a pateroller passing" Sethe and Amy Denver tending to newborn Denver "would have sniggered to see two throw-away people, two lawless outlaws—a slave and a barefoot whitewoman with unpinned hair—wrapping a ten-minute-old baby in the rags they wore" (*Beloved* 84-85).
[111] Morrison, *Beloved* 256.
[112] Morrison, *Beloved* 173. The lyrics from the spiritual "Down By the Riverside"—"lay it all down—recur in the text as advice from Baby Suggs that continues to resonate with Sethe after Baby Suggs's death and as symbols of the faith that some of the thirty women bring to the rescue. The song begins with the following verse (a version of which appears in *Beloved* on page 86), then lends itself to improvisation: "Gonna lay down my sword and shield / Down by the riverside (repeat three times) / Gonna lay down my sword and shield / Down by the riverside / Ain't gonna study war no more."
[113] Morrison, *Beloved* 173, 174. "Happily on a frozen creek" aptly describes Sethe's emotional state. She playfully enjoys the company of her daughters; however, an untapped river of emotion lies beneath her consciousness. Some of those emotions seep to the surface while she skates, and she breaks down out on the ice.

dehumanization of slavery. Sethe, "junkheaped," does not junk herself or the one ice skate that she finds "in that heap"—the language strikingly parallel—but solves the dilemma with mixtery: "We'll take turns. Two skates on one [the pair Beloved found]; one skate on one; and shoe slide for the other."[114]

Though similar language is not applied to Baby Suggs, Stamp Paid identifies the notion of "junkheaped" as part of what caused Baby Suggs's death. "Junkheaped" is almost a euphemism when contextualized by the horrific acts that are now weakening Stamp Paid's marrow as they had Baby Suggs's.[115] He realizes, too late, that she believed that "the heart that pumped out love, the mouth that spoke the Word, didn't count."[116] Baby Suggs became an invalid because she thought that the Word that she preached, and more so, that she herself, was invalid. The violence of slavery and racism appeared to trump love exhibited by African Americans, including—and especially—for one's own children. When she called in the Clearing, Baby Suggs carried a message encouraging African Americans to resist the designation of "throw-away." She translated another version of reclaiming those "junkheaped"—the novel's epigraph from Romans—"I will call them my people which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved"—into deeply felt affirmation of the inherent worth of those gathered who translated her call into embodied emotion expressed communally. After the Misery, however, she could no longer deliver her message because her own strong faith finally destructed; "the whitefolks had tired her out at last."[117]

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[114] Morrison, *Beloved* 174.
[115] Morrison, *Beloved* 180-181.
[116] Morrison, *Beloved* 180.
[117] Morrison, *Beloved* 180.

Baby Suggs succumbs to the "cogitation" that Ella deems dangerous while Ella retains the ability to act despite her abuse by white men whom she calls "'the lowest yet.'"[118] Baby Suggs's belief that resistance to devaluation is futile makes her fate worse than Beloved's.[119] The removal of self-worth, memory and imagination can take away one's "whole self," destroying traits that, arguably, most comprise one's individuality and humanity.[120] As Baby Suggs seeks only color and not emotion as she lies in the keeping room, the quilt does not offer up memory and imagination that Denver and Beloved later access through it. In addition, isolation from the community prevents Baby Suggs from receiving the balm that she formerly gave to the community before the Misery. As noted in chapter one, Levitin argues that "without memory there would be no music," and Sacks observes that music can restore selfhood to persons with memory disorders, such as aphasia and dementia, reconnecting them with others.[121] The community abandons the family, providing neither succor nor song to Baby Suggs or Sethe in her time of need. Baby Suggs's stillness and relative silence underneath the quilt's coarse fabrics contrast dramatically with her calls in the Clearing that advocated self-love and encouraged communal expression—emotional, musical and kinesthetic. Like quilting, the idea of making a way out of no way calls for imagination and, deprived of imagination, Baby Suggs can no longer find empowerment for herself or others.

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[118] Morrison, *Beloved* 256.

[119] ". . . [F]ar worse—was what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble. That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up" (Morrison, *Beloved* 251). Beloved retains her memory, and Sethe showed her love for Beloved by shielding her from enslavement, as death seemed to be an act of valuing rather than devaluing at the time.

[120] Morrison, *Beloved* 251.

[121] Levitin 166-167. Sacks recognizes the social aspect of music as fundamentally important. When his patients experience music therapy in a group setting, "a sense of community takes hold, and these patients who seemed incorrigibly isolated by their disease and dementia are able, at least for a while, to recognize and bond with others" (Sacks 344-345).

The root word "junk" reappears, again in relation to Sethe, later in the novel. Ironically, it is Ella, the woman who "junked" Sethe after "she got out of jail and made no gesture toward anybody, and lived as though she were alone," that "more than anyone . . . convinced the others that rescue was in order. She was a practical woman who believed there was a root either to chew or avoid for every ailment. Cogitation, as she called it, clouded things and prevented action."[122] Initially, Ella does not perceive Sethe as a piece worth tacking back into the quilt of the community after Sethe seems to shun the community from the jail wagon. Like Ella, the community passes judgment on Sethe,

> otherwise the singing would have begun at once, the moment she appeared in the doorway of the house on Bluestone Road. Some cape of sound would have quickly been wrapped around her, like arms to hold and steady her on the way. As it was, they waited till the cart turned about, headed west to town. And then no words. Humming. No words at all.[123]

Notably, Morrison likens the unmade singing to a "cape," a piece of clothing designed, like a quilt, for warmth. Ella bases her discarding of Sethe more on behavior that seemed to indicate Sethe had no need of the community than on the Misery. Emotion and empathy eventually change Ella's mind, and she responds by acting. She begins the non-linguistic expression of communal agency first by organizing the "rescue" and, once the women assemble in front of 124, "then Ella hollered."[124]

The residents of 124 and Cincinnati's African American community become estranged, in part, because of slavery's mutually *destructing* subjectivity, which, like mutually *constructing* subjectivity, functions regardless of race or gender. Morrison

[122] Morrison, *Beloved* 256.
[123] Morrison, *Beloved* 152.
[124] Morrison, *Beloved* 256, 259.

contends that the poison of slavery distorts the minds of whites as well as blacks. The remedy for escaping its grip requires dispelling its misrepresentations. Sethe, for example, eventually understands that protecting her children against enslavement means targeting her defensive actions against her oppressors, not herself or her children. In parallel, members of the community revise their perspectives, which permits them to act in solidarity with Sethe, reunited with one another and against the forces of racism that threaten to divide them from within. Anger directed at Sethe becomes refocused on Beloved as a manifestation of slavery's evil, starting with Ella who abandons her irritation at Sethe's pride in favor of channeling her rage at white men who similarly caused her misery. Through song, the thirty women banish the spectre of enslavement and reestablish the equilibrium of plural personhood. Again, non-linguistic, communal African American expression supplies a potent antidote to slavery.

Ella believes in non-linguistic action, an approach that Sethe and Beloved also deploy as they jointly give meaning to "Baby Suggs' old quilt."[125] A narrative slight-of-hand does not transform the quilt passively; Sethe and Beloved actively transform it by "tacking scraps of cloth" to it.[126] The scraps seem to come from the leftover fabric and decorative ribbon that Sethe walked four miles to purchase and then sewed into carnival dresses.[127] Sethe used "life savings" to buy the dry goods that she employs in a

[125] Morrison, *Beloved* 241.
[126] Morrison, *Beloved* 241. Of Baby Suggs's quilt, Kelley contends that "although Beloved and Sethe rework the quilt, adding bright, lively fabrics, the new colors do not change the quilt's literal and symbolic significance, simultaneously connecting them to one another and marking the place where members of this family of women choose between life and death" (58). Morrison's nuanced language suggests otherwise. For example, in distinguishing between "bright"—a quality of light—and "merry"—a feeling, the quilt leaves behind its silent sobriety and regains a sense of the liveliness of 124 before the Misery.
[127] "The thirty-eight dollars of life savings went to feed themselves with fancy food and decorate themselves with ribbons and dress goods, which Sethe cut and sewed like they were going somewhere in a hurry. Bright clothes—with blue stripes and sassy prints. She walked the four miles to John Shillito's to

lifesaving activity. The colorful scraps—among them yellow and blue—become the "merry" and "carnival colors" cited at the close of the book.[128] According to Denver, Sethe and Beloved patch the quilt so the joint effort to remake it is on a smaller scale, but it is no less significant that the patching does not happen individually, unlike the dress-making which Sethe accomplishes alone.

Throughout the text, quilting facilitates feeling. The emotional importance of quilts cannot be underestimated historically, according to Fry, who contends that

> quilting . . . provided an outlet for slaves—a means of developing hidden talents and establishing a kind of emotional stability and independence. Quilting offered time for introspection and reflection, and a means of gaining perspective and control. Denied the opportunity to record their thoughts on paper, slaves unconsciously left careful records of their emotional and psychological well-being on each surviving quilt.[129]

Similarly, folklorist William Ferris notes that "by placing 'feeling on materials' the artist shapes a symbolic statement about life and frames his or her culture into recognizable units."[130]

Fry succinctly puts the significance of the "powerful record" of quilts left by enslaved African American women another way: "It is a record to be read as it was written, not in words, but in feelings."[131] One might say the same about Baby Suggs's quilt in *Beloved* as well as about the novel itself. Though written in words, the text, like

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buy yellow ribbon, shiny buttons and bits of black lace. By the end of March, the three of them looked like carnival women with nothing to do" (Morrison, *Beloved* 240).

[128] Morrison, *Beloved* 271, 272.

[129] Fry, *Stitched from the Soul* 1.

[130] Ferris 4.

[131] Fry 83.

the key quilt in it, testifies to emotional journeys. Morrison places "feeling on materials" as if the novel were a quilt. Viewed as such, Judy Elsley's application of literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel to the AIDS Memorial Quilt also characterizes Morrison's project:

> The quilt allows us to play with horrifying ideas, making an amalgam of fear of death, with the material pleasure of color and fabric. Like the novel, the quilt brings us into "a zone of direct and even crude contact . . . where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it."[132]

As a non-linguistic forum for Freudian free association, the quilt in *Beloved* is a remnant of the process involving plural personhood that Sethe undergoes in facing the ghost of Beloved.[133] Sethe can begin to "piece it back all together" by quilting with Beloved.[134] As discussed in chapter one, free association requires that "whatever comes into one's head must be reported without criticizing it," an antiphonal activity.[135] "Tacking scraps" to the quilt enlists this therapeutic process which differs substantially from the harsh judgment of "the dark and the muted that thrift and modesty allowed."[136] Sethe can project onto the quilt both in the Freudian sense of displacing her feelings and

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[132] Judy Elsley, *Quilts as Text(iles): The Semiotics of Quilting* (Washington, D.C./Baltimore: Peter Lang, 1996) 50. She cites page 23 in Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*.
[133] As discussed in chapter one, Freud found that free association disinhibited patients from suppressing thoughts and feelings in their unconscious that needed to be expressed to facilitate healing, thus becoming essential to the therapeutic process (Freud, *The Dynamics of Transference* 107).
[134] Morrison, *Beloved* 22.
[135] Freud, *The Dynamics of Transference* 107.
[136] Morrison, *Beloved* 241, 38.

in the cinematic sense of creating visual images.[137] The release of repressed emotions results in "a quilt of merry colors."[138] As with the thirty women singing, the antidote to the Misery involves mixtery.

Sewing consistently appears in the novel as a source of agency and mixtery. When Mrs. Garner denied Halle and Sethe a wedding, Sethe borrowed pieces of cloth—including pillow cases that needed mending and a scorched dresser scarf—to make a "bedding dress" as one might make a quilt out of scraps.[139] Although sewing did not release her from bondage, Sethe sewed herself out of slavery in a sense by claiming a marriage ritual deemed superfluous to persons for whom marriage was, at best, not recognized and, at worst, prohibited. After she and Halle married, she took the dress, a mixtery, apart and returned all of the pieces to where they belonged.[140] Morrison's language hints at the subversiveness of this act of agency; Sethe tells Paul D upon his arrival at 124 that she "sew(s) a little on the sly" which prompts his memory of the

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[137] Lynda Koolish discusses *Beloved* as a cinematic text in her article, "Fictive Strategies and Cinematic Representations in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Postcolonial Theory/Postcolonial Text" (*African American Review* Vol. 29 (3), Autumn 1995: 421-438).

[138] Morrison, *Beloved* 271.

[139] The "b" and shift in meaning signify on wedding. "Bedding" also connects the dress with quilts (bedclothes) and the remarkably parallel construction processes. Sethe tells Beloved the story of her bedding dress, including this exerpt: "Well, I made up my mind to have at the least a dress that wasn't the sacking I worked in. So I took to stealing fabric, and wound up with a dress you wouldn't believe. The top was from two pillow cases in her mending basket. The front of the skirt was a dresser scarf a candle fell on and burnt a hole in, and one of her old sashes we used to test the flatiron on. Now the back was a problem for the longest time. Seem like I couldn't find a thing that wouldn't be missed right away. Because I had to take it apart afterwards and put all the pieces back where they were. Now Halle was patient, wating for me to finish it. He knew I wouldn't go ahead without having it. Finally I took the mosquito netting from a nail out the barn. We used it to strain jelly through. I washed it and soaked it best I could and tacked it on for the back of the skirt. And there I was, in the worst-looking gown you could imagine. Only my wool shawl kept me from looking like a haint peddling. I wasn't but fourteen years old, so I reckon that's why I was so proud of myself" (Morrison, *Beloved* 59). Her agency also results in the gift of crystal earrings from Mrs. Garner which, nevertheless, Sethe did not wear until she left Sweet Home (Morrison, *Beloved* 59-60). Sethe's image of "a haint peddling" in the context of a dress evokes the image of Beloved arriving in a wrinkled "black dress" trimmed in "good lace," though the two portraits are also constrasting (Morrison, *Beloved* 50-51).

[140] By contrast, Sethe does not have to deconstruct the quilt which contains inherited, but not borrowed pieces as well as pieces that were wholly Sethe's.

bedding dress. The language of stealth and cunning repeats a page later as the narrator recounts the story: "She chose Halle and for their first bedding she sewed herself a dress on the sly."[141] Sewing on the sly might also translate into economic agency as Sethe releases the detail immediately after saying that she earns a living as a "cook at a restaurant in town."[142]

One of the first things that Sethe does when she arrives at 124 is to sew: "So when I got here, even before they let me get out of bed, I stitched her a little something from a piece of cloth that Baby Suggs had. Well, all I'm saying is that's a selfish pleasure I never had before."[143] Sethe defies slavery and declares her eventual emancipation through sewing, rather than written literacy, though she learns the alphabet in the utopian twenty-eight days at 124. Sethe's freedom to sew for her daughter celebrates her release from slavery. She claims sewing the dress for Beloved as a "selfish pleasure," though doing something for herself also benefits another. In addition, Sethe remembers fabric that she left at Sweet Home and connects its color with beauty, pleasure and memory—the calico had "the prettiest colors"—and not just any color, but "a rose with yellow in it," perhaps like the orange in the quilt's two squares.[144] The cloth that Sethe actually used remains outside of language, however, devoid of color and description. As a practitioner of mixtery, Sethe makes use of available materials:

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[141] Morrison, *Beloved* 11.
[142] Morrison, *Beloved* 10. Historically, Fry reports in *Stitched from the Soul*, quilting could bring extra income to enslaved persons, some of whom even purchased their freedom through use of their sewing skills (16). These skills also brought a degree of status to "slave artisans, who held an important place in plantation hierarchy: they were also better fed, clothed, and housed, and had more freedom of movement" (Fry 16). Quilting can still be a source of economic empowerment. Prominent contemporary examples include the Freedom Quilting Bee and the Gee's Bend Quilting Collective of Gee's Bend, Alabama. Members of the Freedom Quilting Bee not only profited individually, but also raised funds to support the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.
[143] Morrison, *Beloved* 162-163. The passage starts with a homophone of "sew."
[144] Morrison, *Beloved* 163.

"a piece of cloth that Baby Suggs had."[145] It again suggests that the act of sewing was more important than the material object that Sethe produced.

Emphasizing the act of sewing rather than materials expands the possibility for participation in an activity that garners agency. The sewing materials in *Beloved* include "scraps," materials dictated by "thrift and modesty," fabric borrowed then returned and fabric on hand—all quite different than the carmine velvet that drives Amy Denver to travel from Kentucky to Boston.[146] Even the fancy fabric that Sethe walked four miles to buy for the carnival dresses comes to the quilt in the form of scraps. Yet making something with found objects produces agency, transforming their potential along with her own. The bedding dress of temporarily purloined cloth, for example, solemnizes a marriage while resisting enslavement. Quilting's potential lies in an accessibility independent of gender, race and class.

Formal "Western" art began to shift in the early twentieth century from painting to collage, heralding a trend toward more democratic forms long employed in vernacular traditions, such as quilting. The principle of collage runs parallel to the principle of quilting and, therefore, to the narrative structure of *Beloved*. Closely related to *bricolage*, collage is an art form that "involves the pasting together of various materials on a flat surface."[147] Collage often incorporates one or more found objects, "usually a common mass-produced item selected by the artist which might be altered or combined with other objects."[148] It emerged in the formal "Western" art tradition in the 1910s and challenged oil painting as formal artists' preferred medium. Collage calls for the recombination of

[145] Morrison, *Beloved* 163.
[146] Morrison, *Beloved* 241, 38, 80.
[147] Diane Waldman, *Collage, Assemblage and the Found Object* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992) 8.
[148] Waldman 8.

scraps in ways that defamiliarize them with their former purpose and give them significance in the context of a new creation.

In *Collage, Assemblage and the Found Object*, Diane Waldman stresses that

> collage has come to symbolize a revolution in the nature of making art. Collage has often emphasized concept over end product; it has stressed the meaning of the process; it has brought the incongruous into meaningful congress with the ordinary and given the uneventful, the commonplace, the ordinary a magic of its own.[149]

Similarly, the significance of quilting in *Beloved* lies within process and the ordinary. A hallmark of process art is its accessibility, as socioeconomic status does not prohibit its practice. Collage and quilts can be constructed from scraps, thus requiring less expensive and specialized materials. Imagination, rather than equipment, is key. Creating leads to empowerment, whether the scraps are serge or silk.

Canonical versions of "Western" art history cite Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque as the founders of collage; however, artist and quilter Faith Ringgold suggests that quilt makers practiced its principles prior to the early twentieth century. In an interview, Ringgold states that

> Harriet Powers [1837-1910] was a quilt maker, and the quilt makers were ahead of everybody. It's not until the early 1900s, that abstract art became prevalent. The quilters were doing it before that, but nobody though it was art so it didn't matter. Powers certainly did it; they all did. We need

[149] Waldman 15.

> to take the everyday and make it high. And we can take that high and we can make it the everyday.[150]

The process-orientation of collage and quilting—as practiced by those traditionally excluded from the canon—has a lengthy past and ephemeral roots that can nevertheless be traced. Ringgold cites this orientation as a source of cultural knowledge as well as a reason for its marginalization. When interviewer Melody Graulich notes that Ringgold "repeatedly point[s] to a really strong cultural base, passed through women," Ringgold responds that

> Yes, but that's why they don't want to recognize it, because of those last few words that you said—"passed through women." It didn't make any money so it's not important. But you have to decide what's important and not allow those other people to do it. And that's the way we've always managed to change things. That's why we need to have everything vulgarized, because if art is not vulgarized, then the rest of us can't participate. We gotta knock it down and vulgarize it or a whole lot of us can't get in there.[151]

Ringgold calls for participation, reminiscent of the aforementioned notion that music used to be participatory and include every member of the community before "contemporary Western society" (and this sector only) began to rely on expert musicians

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[150] Melody Graulich and Mara Witzling, "The Freedom to Say What She Pleases" A Conversation with Faith Ringgold" in *Black Feminist Cultural Criticism*, ed. Jacqueline Bobo (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001: 184-209) 199. Born into slavery in Georgia, Harriet Powers created quilts whose appliquéd images represented Biblical stories, folklore and astronomical events, such as meteor showers. Two of her quilts now reside in the collections of the Smithsonian Museum of American History and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, respectively. See Gladys-Marie Fry, "Harriet Powers: Portrait of a Black Quilter" in *Missing Pieces: Georgia Folk Art, 1770-1976* by Anna Wadsworth (Atlanta: Georgia Council for the Arts and Humanities, 1976: 16-23). Images of Harriet Powers's quilts can be found on the Smithsonian's Web site. Go to <http://americanhistory.si.edu> and enter "Harriet Powers" in the "Search" box.

[151] Graulich and Witzling 198.

performing before passive audiences.[152] Perhaps a parallel exists in the art world whereby art became the realm of those deemed expert rather than of every person equally.

Beloved not only resembles collage structurally and methodologically. In addition, Morrison fuses representation and antirepresentation in the novel, consistent with Thomas Brockelman's analysis of literature and collage. In *The Frame and the Mirror: On Collage and the Postmodern*, Brockelman posits that collage is both representational and antirepresentational. He sees collage as a world in which the Saussurean sign rendered complete by modernism and the postmodern (Derridean) sign of perpetual meaning can meet and challenge one another:

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[152] Levitin 194. Faith Ringgold writes of her increasing need to blend text and textile in her 1995 autobiography, *We Flew over the Bridge*. Classically trained as a visual artist, Ringgold branched out from painting on canvas to painting on quilts that included written text. Language, she writes, "had become increasingly important to me in my art since 1967 . . . . I needed to speak with more than images and I began to explore words and texts more and more" (Faith Ringgold, *We Flew over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold* (New York: Little Brown, 1995) 187. She collaborated with her mother, an accomplished fashion designer, to create her first story quilt in 1972. Tibetan tankas—paintings on silk framed in brocaded cloth—provided a pragmatic escape from the rigidity of wooden frames as well as a new medium for Ringgold. Once Ringgold showed tankas to her mother, she "made the tankas for all my paintings" which "were beautiful, though at the time I was horrified by the asymmetrical liberties she took with the design. Later I realized how skillfully she had translated the Tibetan tankas . . . into a unique African-American expression"—mixteries (Ringgold 197).

When "images alone were insufficient," Ringgold began incorporating diverse elements in her story quilts in her search for language, from using "Kuba triangular spaces and words to form a kind of rhythmic repetition similar to the polyrhythms used in African drumming" to trying to invent a visual language based on Kuba designs (Ringgold 189, 203). Throughout the process, she writes not only of a search for language, but an attempt to find her voice and then to share conversation with others (Ringgold 147). She explains that by "talking to myself through art, and hoping that, if I could communicate with myself, I would also communicate with others. I desperately needed some opportunity to have meaningful dialogue with other artists. I was starved for this kind of exchange. . . . Nobody I knew seemed to have the time just to talk about ideas or problems, except my mother. She never got tired of listening" (Ringgold 147). Perhaps more significantly, she wrote an initial autobiography, *Being My Own Woman*, that did not find a publisher and instead of continuing her efforts to publish it or holding a retrospective show of her art work, she created a one-woman show that included masks that she made, music and audience participation. She "had a need to share this work—more so than anything else I had ever done" though after giving performances for five years, "things began to change professionally for the better, and I no longer needed to tell my story in this way" (Ringgold 238). This particular period in Ringgold's life fits the paradigm of finding agency through non-linguistic forms of expression within a communal context. When she did publish her revised memoir, she changed the title to *We Flew over the Bridge*, a shift from her earlier title's focus on a singular individual to a title that describes a group of people, including herself, engaging collectively in an act of agency. Faith Ringgold's quilts can be viewed on her Web site at <http://www.faithringgold.com>.

> But, if we take the word "representation" to mark the cognitive and linguistic mediation not just of experience but also of *meaning* (representation as the completion of a certain movement from a signifier to a signified), then there is also a way in which the new view of collage is itself *antirepresentational*: that is why, for some . . . collage problematizes any view of art as a medium for truth.[153]

In other words, Morrison uses language to create non-linguistic expression, simultaneously engaging in representation and deploying language to frame activities that defy linguistic representation: from trauma to quilting to experience. She shapes language in such a way that the narrative itself assumes a form more akin to an image or sound rather than to written language.[154] Is she creating a text, broadly defined, that is visual, aural and tactile, even though also linguistic? Might that text resemble a quilt? If so, Morrison renders non-linguistic expression through language. Language, then, becomes non-linguistic, as Freedberg and Gallese contend that "everyday images and works of art" can be upon observation, akin to a manipulable object that can activate the region of the brain "normally considered to be involved in the control of action and not in the representation of objects."[155] Morrison crafts *Beloved* so that readers' experience of it is more visual and aural than textual—more like quilting than reading.[156]

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[153] Thomas Brockelman, *The Frame and the Mirror: On Collage and the Postmodern* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001) 7.
[154] Scholars such as Jennifer James propose that Morrison develops a "picture language" that Beloved employs in narrating her experience of the Middle Passage.
[155] Freedberg and Gallese 200.
[156] Three years prior to the publication of *Beloved*, Morrison writes in "Memory, Creation, and Writing" that, generally, she wants the reader "to respond on the same plane as an illiterate or preliterate reader would" (Morrison, "Memory" 387). Further, she wishes to "insist that the reader rely on another body of knowledge" other than, for instance, literary references (Morrison, "Memory" 387).

In the context of the novel, quilting's importance rests in its process-orientation. Put differently, quilting offers utility to characters because they engage in it. Their active involvement in quilting makes a difference in the rest of their lives, its impact rippling out into their other practices and, more importantly, to their perspectives on their own agency. Though quilting can also result in a product, it is the process, as Amiri Baraka argues in his essay, "Hunting Is Not Those Heads on the Wall," that holds value for the participant(s). Baraka distinguishes the process of art from its resulting product, cautioning against "accepting the material *in place of* what it is only the remains of."[157] He goes on to posit that "the process itself is the most important quality because it can transform and create, and its only form is possibility."[158]

Before Baby Suggs gave up the Word and began pondering color, she told congregants in the Clearing that the "only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine."[159] To permit one's self to imagine, a transformative act itself, is to subscribe to possibility. Creating transforms by definition. Sethe extinguished her imagination after the Misery, not unlike Paul D who locked up a portion of his heart after serving on a chain gang. Only when, years later, Sethe understands who Beloved is, does she again engage in process-oriented, creative activities that she sees as such. For example, by "*making* men and women cookies," Sethe and Beloved symbolically create new people, whereas, prior to Beloved's arrival, Sethe kneaded the biscuit dough at work not as a creative act, but as a way of "beating back the past."[160] The process-oriented purpose in

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[157] Amiri Baraka, "Hunting Is Not Those Heads on the Wall" in *Home: Social Essays*, 1966 (New York: William Morrow, 1976) 173.
[158] Baraka 174.
[159] Morrison, *Beloved* 88.
[160] Morrison, *Beloved* 241, emphasis mine, 73. Morrison's use of the word "make" rather than "bake" reinforces the activity as one involving creativity.

patching the quilt or making cookies is not to create static, non-functional works of art, but to rework themselves, creating new people out of available pieces.

In a capitalistic society, an orientation toward valuing process can be difficult to maintain. Nathaniel Mackey contends that race can contextualize the shift when process stagnates into product. In "Other: From Noun to Verb," Mackey builds on Baraka's arguments as he constructs a framework for "*other*" as a strategy for agency, as "something people do" and specifies it as a "practice" of "people subjected" to "the centralizing of a norm against which otherness is measured, meted out, [and] marginalized."[161] As aforementioned, Morrison uses "group" as a verb, for example, a move that embodies African American strategies of plural personhood. Additionally, in the course of the novel, the noun "patch" becomes a verb, reflecting the quilt's increasing orientation toward process.[162] Like signifyin(g) in some ways, employing other as a verb means that, "denied agency in a society by which they're designated other . . . the black speaker, writer or musician whose practice privileges variation subjects the fixed equations which underwrite that denial (including the idea of fixity itself) to an alternative."[163]

In a sense, Mackey identifies a kind of reverse signifyin(g) whereby "other" goes from being a process, or verb, to a product, or noun, when it is codified, reified and standardized, often as a result of being reappropriated from a group designated as "other." He cites Zora Neale Hurston's observation of black vernacular language transforming nouns such as "friend" and "funeralize," into verbs and notes that "the

[161] Nathaniel Mackey, "Other: From Noun to Verb," *Representations* 39 (1992: 51-70) 51.
[162] The patches on the quilt remain nouns until the penultimate scene in the novel when "Paul D sits down in the rocking chair and examines the quilt patched in carnival colors" (Morrison, *Beloved* 272).
[163] Mackey 53.

privileging of the verb, the movement from noun to verb, linguistically accentuates action among a people whose ability to act is curtailed by racist constraints."[164] It is this sensibility that can drive the functional and artful appearance of non-linguistic expression in African American literature. Morrison, for instance, attempts to place language into non-linguistic process and also to place non-linguistic practices within language while retaining their processes. As with Douglass and the songs of sorrow, there is an understanding that a dynamic approach can put freedom in play rather than consider it petrified by prejudice.[165]

The active gerund, quilting, rather than passive noun, quilt, can keep quilting in the realm of process and action. Using Mackey's theoretical framework, quilt and song might be nouns, but, in *Beloved*, they function as verbs. For example, the keeping room quilt serves as a practice, not an object. Quilting becomes textual, yet retains its extratextuality. A song, likewise, acts as a process, rather than a product. Morrison also resists language as fixed especially when used to "other" people, as Mackey explains. Like Baraka, she conceives of "the self not as noun but as verb."[166] Thus, Denver, the thirty women and Paul D do for Sethe what the Thirty-Mile Woman did for Sixo: they begin the process of giving her "the pieces [that she is] back in the right order," mutually constructing her—and their—selfhood.

In addition to the structures of quilts and collage, Morrison also takes on the dynamic disorder of the carnivalesque in *Beloved*. Racism, however, corrupts the notion of carnival as characterized by Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*. In his study of medieval carnival, Bakhtin observes that carnival temporarily democratized feudal

[164] Mackey 53.
[165] Neuroscientists now theorize about the effectiveness of these approaches.
[166] Mackey 60.

society: "all were considered equal during carnival."[167] The liminal season of the carnival created a "second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance."[168] Bakhtin emphasizes that the carnival suspends normative social relations for everyone and, thus,

> carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part.[169]

Eventually, however, carnival-goers must abandon its classless society and return to feudal stratifications.

The explicitly-stated carnival in *Beloved* is a place where the world turns upside down, but, due to racism, the suspension of usual societal relations is not wholly encompassing, as in medieval Europe. Instead of a single carnival, two separate carnivals take place that not only have different audiences, but also differing levels of performance quality and length.[170] African Americans can only attend the carnival on a day designated as "Colored Thursday"—a segregated and bowdlerized event; white performers edit their acts because of their disdain for their audience whom "the barker

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[167] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1968) 10.
[168] Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 9.
[169] Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 7.
[170] The carnival in the novel also suffers from the same affliction that contemporary Western society imposes on music in that it is an event in which an audience watches performers rather than an activity in which everyone participates, as in medieval Europe. This is in contrast to the church on whose steps Paul D takes refuge in drunken dispair. At that house of worship, "the congregation was also the choir" (Morrison, *Beloved* 218). The Clearing, too, involves everyone singing, dancing, laughing and crying.

called . . . names."[171] However, within the context of this carnival, African Americans watch white performers as "other:"

> Two pennies and an insult were well spent if they meant seeing the spectacle of whitefolks making a spectacle of themselves. So, although the carnival was a lot less than mediocre (which is why it agreed to a Colored Thursday), it gave the four hundred black people in its audience thrill upon thrill upon thrill.[172]

The carnival provides an opportunity for a group of African Americans to share a common experience—to feel together in a manner reminiscent of Douglass's Sabbath school class whose "feelings were more alike than . . . [their] opinions."[173]

While the carnival does not eradicate, even temporarily, racism, it does equalize power relations within the African American community. The schism resulting from the Misery and its aftermath fades and the carnival knits together the community such that Denver experiences "kind, gentle" looks from people—a novelty—and Sethe receives similarly amicable acknowledgement from others for the first time in eighteen years.[174] Paul D helps to negotiate this temporary truce. He embodies the carnival laughter that, according to Bakhtin, "is the laughter of all the people. . . . [I]t is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants:" there was "no one, apparently, able to withstand sharing the pleasure Paul D was having."[175] The carnival does not effect permanent change, however, as only Denver's request for help and the

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[171] Morrison, *Beloved* 48.
[172] Morrison, *Beloved* 48.
[173] Morrison, *Beloved* 48; Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 306.
[174] Morrison, *Beloved* 48.
[175] Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 11; Morrison, *Beloved* 48.

subsequent gifts of food and sound by the women of the community finally shift relationships within the African American community into less divisive territory.

The provisional change in power relations occurs externally in the world of the carnival, and Morrison demonstrates that for a permanent shift in power relations, internal perspective and perception must change. The artifice of the carnival masks the rabid racism that entangles black and white psyches in mutually destructing subjectivity; however, Bakhtin interprets the carnival as a source of renewal that portends hope.[176] Morrison similarly signifies the promise of interior transformation through the three shadows—of Denver, Sethe and Paul D—holding hands en route to and from the carnival.[177] As with the carnival, reality stands apart from the optimistic visage at this point in the novel. Before the event, Paul D asks Sethe, "What about inside?" and she responds, "I don't go inside."[178] He volunteers to support her while she grieves, but she declines his offer. Sethe's clothing echoes her emotional stiffness and disconnection from the community; her dress is too warm and too formal for the occasion while Paul D and Denver move—and feel—more freely in their more comfortable outfits. Paul D enjoys the carnival to the extent that other people share in his pleasure, though the tobacco box portion of his heart is still rusted shut.[179] Until the shadows can deal with

[176] The narrative speaks to the artifice after naming the carnival's features, such as "doing magic" and "eating glass:" "All of this was advertisement . . . and the fact that none of it was true did not extinguish their appetite a bit" (Morrison, *Beloved* 48). One might apply the latter clause to white racism as well.
[177] En route to the carnival, Denver, Sethe and Paul D "were not holding hands, but their shadows were. Sethe looked to her left and all three of them were gliding over the dust holding hands. . . . [A]ll the time the three shadows that shot out of their feet to the left held hands. Nobody noticed but Sethe and she stopped looking after she decided that it was a good sign. A life. Could be" (Morrison, *Beloved* 46-47). After the carnival, "on the way home, although leading them now, the shadows of the three people still held hands" (Morrison, *Beloved* 49).
[178] Morrison, *Beloved* 45, 46.
[179] Morrison, *Beloved* 47.

the shadows in their psychological lives, however, they will remain shadows—rather than embodied figures—holding hands.

Not coincidentally, Beloved arrives on the day of the carnival, and, weeks later, Sethe's realization of Beloved's identity—signaled by song—begins a carnival within 124. Sethe confirms the carnivalesque atmosphere when she makes dresses for herself, Beloved and Denver, their impotency revealed by the observation that the three "looked like carnival women with nothing to do."[180] The supposedly transformative dresses offer no avenue for performing new identities despite the fact that Sethe "cut and sewed [them] like they were going somewhere in a hurry."[181] They remain static and foreclose action, unlike the quilt which receives patches during the time of the domestic carnival and exemplifies Bakhtin's formulation of the carnival as "a dynamic expression" of "ever changing, playful, undefined forms. . . . filled with . . . [the] pathos of change and renewal."[182] The clothing remains a failed attempt at external transformation. Tacking scraps onto the quilt, however, creates an internal transformation—embodied rather than superficial—and connects the women to the "busy women" with "unrested hands," whose purposeful work left the quilt "smelling like grass."[183] The quilt is a tool, as Margot Anne Kelley writes about another quilt, for "artistically rework[ing] women's experiences."[184] En route to the carnival, Sethe begins to let go of her notion that "the 'better life' she believed she and Denver were living was simply not the other one" and imagine a life available for making one's own.[185] In remaking the quilt, Sethe recognizes

[180] Morrison, *Beloved* 240.
[181] Morrison, *Beloved* 240.
[182] Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 11.
[183] Morrison, *Beloved* 78.
[184] Kelley 51. Similarly, Peppers refers to "quiltmaking as a technology for the embodiment of lived experience" (87).
[185] Morrison, *Beloved* 42.

the possibility for future transformation of her experience, for "a life" not defined dialectically by living outside of slavery.[186]

At first, the carnival atmosphere equalizes Sethe, Beloved and Denver and initially they engage in group building activities that build social cohesion, such as going ice skating together. Group cohesion dwindles, however, as Denver becomes observer rather than participant. Sethe and Beloved engage in generative activities, such as patching the quilt and making cookies while the liminality of the carnival defies death, albeit impermanently; Sethe can play, laugh and live with the child that she pushed permanently "through the veil."[187] The fleetingly festive scene deteriorates as distorted power relations return and Beloved again haunts Sethe. Denver interprets exclusion from the group as a sign of the carnival's end, observing that "whatever was happening, it only worked with three—not two."[188] Denver realizes, too, that the carnival clothes, like the relationships, no longer fit.[189] Paralleling the colors in the dresses, she "saw Sethe's eyes bright but dead. . . . She also saw the sleeves of her own carnival shirtwaist cover her fingers; hems that once showed her ankles now swept the floor. She saw themselves beribboned, decked-out, limp and starving but locked in a love that wore everybody out."[190] Denver disengages from the carnival gone wrong, leaving 124's familiarity, if not comfort, the only world that she ever inhabited except for her river birth and subsequent journey to 124. She "knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help."[191]

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[186] Morrison, *Beloved* 47.
[187] Morrison, *Beloved* 163. Morrison even configures death in terms of fabric.
[188] Morrison, *Beloved* 243.
[189] Morrison, *Beloved* 243.
[190] Morrison, *Beloved* 243.
[191] Morrison, *Beloved* 243.

Thus, only Denver's dress becomes "sun-faded to a quieter rainbow" and then, only after she goes for help outside of the house.[192] Denver's dimmer dress demonstrates that she is the first resident to regain a worldview that rebuilds community, not through carnival artifice, but through mature, adult relationships.

At the end of the novel, the "brightly colored clothes lie on the floor," no longer needed to create an external artifice that eventually imploded (or exploded, depending on who tells the story of Beloved's disappearance).[193] Paul D finds those clothes in Sethe's room, following a trail up the staircase whose "entire railing is wound with ribbons, bows, [and] bouquets" recalling the dying roses by the lumberyard fence en route to the carnival.[194] The path marked by signs of the carnival reveals the abandonment of the scene by the performers; their bodies are no longer representations, neither on display nor commodities as their carnival dresses, likened to those of "hussies," suggested.[195] Beloved's original dress is also in Sethe's room "hanging from a wall peg."[196] In contrast to the carnival clothes that lie upstairs, Sethe is on the ground floor in the keeping room, grounded—in the sense of being re-centered—by the thirty women. Like the thirty women and unlike Baby Suggs, Sethe is singing in bed, voice unmuted like the quilt's transformed colors. As Sethe accepts the restoration of her ability to see a full spectrum of color, she also accepts the capacity to feel a full range of emotion. Finally free to

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[192] Denver leaves the house to seek help from Lady Jones in "the brightest of the carnival dresses" which, at Lady Jones' house, was "so loud it embarrassed the needlepoint chair seat" (Morrison, *Beloved* 243, 247). Color "speaks" in sound (to a chair capable of embarrassment), reminiscent of the orange patches which made the absence of color "shout" and the roses en route to the carnival whose scent became "louder" as they grew "closer . . . to death" (Morrison, *Beloved* 47). Notably, Denver's dress becomes a "quieter rainbow," but not "muted" as Baby Suggs's quilt once was.
[193] Morrison, *Beloved* 270.
[194] Morrison, *Beloved* 270.
[195] When Denver finally goes for help "in the brightest of the carnival dresses," Morrison likens her appearance to that of a "chippy" and a "hussy," both terms for prostitutes (243, 246, 250).
[196] Morrison, *Beloved* 270.

grieve, under "the quilt of merry colors" and the empathic gaze of Paul D, she begins to cry.[197]

Similarly, the enslavement embedded in the quilt no longer suppresses, but becomes part of a larger whole claimed by Sethe as an aspect—not the entirety—of her experience. After remaking the quilt and, in parallel, her encounter with enslavement, Sethe is able to aim her attack at Mr. Bodwin rather than Beloved. She applies mixtery to the quilt that generates agency; she correctly targets the source of the threat—white racism—unlike eighteen years prior when she sought to deny her children and herself existence in an effort to address the problem obliquely. The scene might have degenerated into a different tragedy without the agency of the singing women, however, who prevent Sethe from hurting anyone and simultaneously exorcise Beloved. Beloved's disappearance signifies the end of Sethe's denial of slavery and grief that prohibited her from the internal integration that must occur in reckoning with bereavement, loss and trauma. The scraps of her quilted subjectivity finally include, but are not governed by, her enslavement, the Misery and memories of Beloved. Her multifaceted story can exist within her—and beside Paul D's—without the need to mute her emotions, deny her body or shun the community. Enslavement, the Misery and grief do not go away; the quilt is not "dispatched" to the junkheap, but rather remade so that its painful parts become, like the scraps that comprise it, useful.

Likewise, Morrison draws from African American communal expression, shaping *Beloved* after strategies that translate horror into healing. The text emulates quilting, a mixtery that allows artful resistance to transform experience. Quilting's ordinariness offers accessibility while also concealing its subversive potential. In the novel as in

[197] Morrison, *Beloved* 272.

everyday life, quilting often goes unrecognized though its powerful effects can be felt unknowingly. Morrison honors quilting as an art form by which African Americans, especially African American women, can remake their lives and, in doing so, leave a legacy for effecting change.

Chapter Four: "Making Ourselves Feel Like We Belong:" The Agency of Dance in *Rize*[1]

Rize, David LaChapelle's feature-length documentary released in 2005, chronicles the advent of "krump," a form of dance developed by a group of young African Americans in Los Angeles. The film frames dance as a response to a jury's acquittal of four white Los Angeles Police Department officers in the beating of African American motorist Rodney King and the riots that followed, a repetition of a similar incident and outcome in 1965.[2] The dancers co-create krump, whose efficacy emerges from the expression of emotion within a communal context. Rooted in African American resistance, krump yields knowledge distinct both in concept and manner of acquisition from that gained through hegemonic structures such as language. In a krump session, soloists take turns improvising within a circle of dancers, and the often ecstatic exchange between individual and group channels personal experience into shared performance, generating interdependent subjectivities through dance. Krumpers situate self and community within a plural personhood whose dynamic simultaneity elicits feelings and evokes identity, a combination that can lead to action in the circle and beyond its bounds. This chapter contends that krumping continues to be a sustaining and sustainable tool for transforming experience that can empower not only African Americans in South Los Angeles, but also participants around the world.

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[1] The title draws on a statement by a dancer named Dragon in *Rize* (*Rize*, dir. David LaChapelle, DVD, Lions Gate, 2005). Subsequent references to *Rize* will be identified in the text rather than footnoted with the exception of special features included on the DVD.

[2] The following histories of Los Angeles focus on the city's changing racial makeup and dual sets of riots: Delores Nason McBroome, "'All Men Up and No Man Down,'" in *City of Promise: Race and Historical Change in Los Angeles*, Martin Schiesl and Mark M. Dodge, eds. (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 2006); Josh Sides, "A Quest for Dignity," also in *City of Promise*; and, Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Rize begins with a claim of authenticity reminiscent of those predicating slave narratives. Unadorned text declares that "the footage has not been sped up in any way," its promise of reliability questioning its veracity. In an instant, the film encapsulates issues of race that date to the founding of the United States concerning the embodied existence of African Americans. Slave narratives often dealt with the calculus of African American authorship and racism through prefaces written by white abolitionists. A preface vouched for the former slave who wrote the book, attesting to the narrator's experience of slavery as genuine since literacy—prohibited for enslaved African Americans in most states—threatened to undermine the credibility of the author's enslavement. The statement at the beginning of *Rize*, a documentary made by a white filmmaker, questions the representation of African American experience in film rather than in written text, but the underlying issue, as with slavery and the riots, is embodiment. This chapter argues that, in *Rize*, African Americans reclaim embodied subjectivities through dance, a strategy also employed by enslaved African Americans.

Though written literature on dance acknowledges language's complicity in reifying race as well as its limitation as a medium for discourse about dance, much of it draws analogies to dancing bodies as texts to be read, equating embodiment with written language.[3] This chapter posits that krumping, like many other forms of African

[3] On the challenges of incorporating dance into discourses conducted primarily in written langauge, Jurretta Jordan Heckscher comments that "because dance is difficult to describe, it is elusive in the historical record. Its deeper cultural implications are even harder to trace, for dancing cannot be separated from the larger web of a culture's movement system—the way people within that culture move, which is as characteristic and culturally specific as the way they speak, and is far more difficult to document (Jurretta Jordan Heckscher, "Our National Poetry," *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader*, ed. Julie Malnig, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009) 19). Regarding dance and bodies being likened to written language, Carla Huntington, in her book *Hip Hop Dance*, claims that "hip hop dance functions as a text," citing the work of Susan Foster who contends that "to construe bodies' movements as varieties of corporeal writing is already a step in the right direction. Where bodily endeavors assume the status of forms of articulation and representation, their movements acquire a status

American expression, considers embodiment to be a non-linguistic entity. Krumping conceives of subjectivity in terms of dancing; or, as earlier noted, "'we sing and dance, therefore we are.'"[4] "We" is as important as "dance" in William Benzon's postulate because krumping necessarily implies individuals dancing in relation to others. Further, krump's grounding in African American expression means that dancers create subjectivities that do not require a dialectic of whiteness, language or individualism, instead negotiating a plural personhood that is process-oriented. In the sense of the distinctiveness of African American song that can also conceptualize African American quilting and subjectivity, krumping is a mixtery.

The *Krumptionary*, an online reference published by a group of dancers known as the Krump Kings, specifically excises language from its definition of krump:

> An aggressive, emotional, and spiritual style of dance known for cutting edge dance moves and intense interactions between performers and spectators. Krumping emerged from South Central Los Angeles in 2000 as a way for dancers to express emotions and different aspects of their personalities as well as a way to cope with the stresses and pressures of everyday life in a constructive manner. In Krumping, a dancer tells a story through the voice of his or her "character" while attempting to advance through three levels of intensity (Krump, Buck, Amp). A dancer may express his or herself in any way, just as long as it is authentic and

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and function equal to the words that describe them" (Carla Stalling Huntington, *Hip Hop Dance: Meanings and Messages* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2007) 20, 21; Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Histories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 9).

[4] Benzon 18.

> organic. In Krump, there is no right or wrong way to express one's self. It is an art form owned by feelings, not words or rules.[5]

In its emphasis on emotion conveyed through communal creativity, krumping revisits the structure and effectiveness of the circle within which Frederick Douglass experienced the "songs of sorrow." Setting aside its historical inheritance for the moment, krumping replicates the phenomenon of being "within the circle" that Douglass credits with his first realization of slavery's inhumanity. Like the singers, krumpers employ African American cultural practices that are non-linguistic to express their deepest feelings, improvising in a communal setting to reconstruct individual and social identities apart from racist strictures. It is no accident that dancers frequently cite krump as a way to release anger, for example, which can stem from societal inequities, including racial and economic disparities, but also from more personal (and sometimes overlapping) burdens such as the death of a family member or friend.[6] Krump taps intense emotion, especially anger, and transforms it into a source of vital power; dancing together elicits emotion that, in turn, inspires agency. Krump dancing, or "getting krump," as the dancer Tight Eyez contends in the film *Shake City 101*, is "when all of your adrenaline is pumping and you feel like you can do anything. You can just tell your story to the beat of the music."[7]

Krumpers' stories drive the dance in both form and content as experience informs improvisation and, reciprocally, improvisation customizes expression. Dancers base

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[5] "Krumptionary," *Krump Kings*, 2008, Krump Kings, Inc., 29 December 2008, <http://www.krumpkings.com/krumptionary/krump>.

[6] LaChapelle dedicates *Rize* to 15-year-old dancer Quinesha "Lil Dimples" Dunford who, along with 13-year-old Demario Moore, died after being caught in the crossfire of a gang shooting on their way to the store in 2003. The film also discusses dancer Lil C's father, who committed suicide.

[7] *Shake City 101*, dir. Mark St. Juste, DVD, Urban Works, 2003. In this film, Tight Eyez's name is spelled "Tight Eyes." Since he now refers to himself as Tight Eyez, e.g. on *KrumpKings.com* (as do the vast majority of references, including *Rize*), this chapter will use this spelling for consistency.

choreographic invention on a combination of affective experience and personal style. Los Angeles-based dancer Rod Soriano, a member of the krump group Rice Track and also known as Hot Rod, explains that "'some people, when they have problems, write in their diary. Krump dancing is our diary. . . . It's our everyday.'"[8] Krump provides a way to process intrapersonal experience interpersonally and kin[a]esthetically, yielding movement that is uniquely individual yet part of a collectivity. Krumper Lil C echoes Soriano in the movie *Breakin' vs. Krumpin'* when he compares krumping to another non-linguistic form of expression. He describes fellow dancer Slayer as "actually painting a picture for you of what he's going through . . . He has his own style. . . . Everybody does not dance the same."[9] Krump's overall effect tends to be one of powerful angularity and forceful grace; however, according to Tight Eyez in the instructional video *Krump 1.0*, krump's equation of style and identity can render a dancer individually recognizable "from a block away."[10]

Though every krumper "does not dance the same," krump is nevertheless distinctive even while constantly evolving. A krump dancer "typically" improvises while encircled by dancers who show solidarity with the soloist through clapping, calling out encouragingly and/or swaying or moving in other ways that acknowledge the rhythm of the accompanying music, which is usually recorded.[11] Additional dancers sometimes join the lead dancer and offer interactive support, including through physical contact, or

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[8] Guy Trebay, "The Clowning, Rump-Shaking, Wilding-Out Battle Dancers of South Central L.A.: How a Dance Called Krumping Took over an Inner-City Neighborhood" *The New York Times Magazine* (19 June 2005: 28-33) 30.
[9] *Breakin' vs. Krumpin'*, dir. Kokie Nassim, DVD, Krump Kings, 2005.
[10] *Krump 1.0: Introduction to Krump Techniques*, dir. Kokie Nassim, DVD, Krump Kings, 2005.
[11] In *Rize*, LaChapelle overdubs all of the music that accompanies the dancing so audiences cannot hear the krumpers' choice of music. In an interview on the *Rize* DVD, LaChapelle states that they edited the film to dance, rather than to music ("Filmmaking Insight with Director and Director of Photography," *Rize*). The soundtrack for *Rize* features some music composed specifically for the film whose often explanatory lyrics impose text as well as interpretation on krump.

what Tight Eyez deems "army moves" where dancers' arms linked or draped around the shoulders, for instance, increase the group's energy level.[12] Alternately, two dancers can face one another in friendly, but fierce competition or in a kind of danced conversation. In the ring, krumpers combine basic moves such as the "stomp," "chest pop" and "arm swing" in myriad ways, creating one-of-a-kind performances unified by outsized movements that engage dancers' entire bodies in erratic, yet flowing motion.[13] The role of soloist cycles through the ring of dancers, also improvisationally, allowing multiple individuals the opportunity to dance. Observer-participants forming the circle's circumference become observed-participants in the center and then return to the ring. The process, or krump session, can last one to two hours interspersed with fifteen minute breaks, states Lil C in an interview that aired on National Public Radio soon after *Rize* opened in theaters.[14]

Krump crosses boundaries of age, gender, race and geography. Most dancers are teens or young adults, however, young children also krump, including those under the age of four, or "Tiny Littles," who warrant an entry in the *Krumptionary*.[15] While *Rize*

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[12] *Krump 2.0: Advanced Krump Techniques*, dir. Kokie Nassim, DVD, Krump Kings, 2005. Tight Eyez explains that the term gets its name from the way that warriors bond on the battlefield which he perceives as highly motivating. He also defines the technique as "organized confusion" and says that it "cannot be taught," but rather can "only be created in the heat of the moment."

[13] Tight Eyez teaches the "stomp," "chest pop" and "arm swing" as three fundamental krump moves in *Krump 1.0* and shows how they can be innovatively fused into fluid sequences of movement. In addition, Lil C states in *Rize* that krump's authenticity is detectable though ephemeral: "Once you see the real thing, you're gonna know it's the real thing. You're gonna know. You're gonna be, like, 'That has to be the real thing because I will never see anything like this again.'"

[14] "'Rize' Documents Dance on L.A. Streets," *News and Notes*, National Public Radio, 27 June 2005 <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4719872>.

[15] The *Krumptionary* defines "Tiny Littles" as "Krump Babies" or "Krumpers under the age of four….yes under the age of four!" ("Krumptionary," *Krump Kings*, 2009, Krump Kings, Inc., 6 June 2009, <http://www.krumpkings.com/krumptionary/tiny-littles>). For example, Tight Eyez's younger brother, who appears to be in the "Tiny Littles" age group, dances in footed pajamas in *Rize*. In addition, *Rize* features dancers younger than teens, most notably Lil Mama, who is approximately eight years old at the time of the filming. She is among the cast appearing in interviews on the "Special Features" of the *Rize* DVD ("New Dancer Interviews" and "Tribeca Film Festival Q & A with Cast," *Rize*).

represents female and male dancers in relatively equal numbers, males tend to appear more conspicuously in krump's Web presence and in film. In addition, *Rize* primarily features African American krumpers with a few exceptions, such as the Filipino American krumpers of the Rice Track Family and, Milk, a Caucasian krumper featured briefly at the film's end; however, the movement now extends internationally with krump communities established in Great Britain, Japan, Germany, Korea, Australia and New Zealand.[16] These and other locales retain krump's grounding in African American expression, in part due to *Rize*, major motion pictures and television programs featuring krump such as *Stomp the Yard* and *So You Think You Can Dance*, respectively, as well as other media available electronically and via the Internet.[17] In February 2009, for example, Google Video and YouTube searches on the word "krump" each resulted in almost 50,000 hits, and krump groups such as the Wanganui, New Zealand-based Bully Nerd Squad post videos and photos on their respective Web sites.[18]

Krump requires little equipment though dancers use available materials and spaces to fuel their creativity.[19] Street clothes rather than specialized costumes suffice, typically t-shirts and jeans that often fit loosely to permit maximum mobility. Dancers' clothing, as well as other items at hand, such as a chain link fence and a telephone pole in *Rize*, can become props incorporated into performances. While *Rize* depicts some

[16] Though krump groups include female dancers as well as non-African American dancers, African Americans—and, specifically, African American males—make up the majority of the dancers profiled on the Krump Kings's Web site and dancers in other films about krump, especially those produced by krumpers themselves like the Golden Series of Krump DVDs.
[17] *Stomp the Yard*, dir. Sylvain White, DVD, Rainforest Films, 2007; *So You Think You Can Dance*, Fox Broadcasting Company, 2006-2008.
[18] A search on "krump" performed February 23, 2009 on Google Video yielded 48,300 hits, while an identical YouTube search on the same date returned 47,200 hits. Searches on "krumping" generated an additional 900 and 1,000 hits on Google Video and YouTube, respectively (*Google Video*, 2009, 23 Feb. 2009 <http://video.google.com>; *YouTube*, 2009, 23 Feb. 2009 <http://www.youtube.com>. Also, see, for example, videos posted on the Bully Nerd Squad's Web site at <http://www.bebo.com/bullynerds>.
[19] "'Rize' Documents Dance on L.A. Streets," *News and Notes*, National Public Radio, 27 June 2005 <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4719872>.

krumpers painting colorful markings on their faces, this practice is no longer common and might have stemmed from a transition between clowning—a similar dance style that involves more extensive makeup—and krumping.[20] Krump sessions can occur virtually anywhere and arise with a spontaneity akin to the improvisational nature of the dance itself. Many krump venues are ordinary places that become sites for "deep play," in anthropologist Clifford Geertz's sense of the term.[21] For example, in *Rize*, krumpers hold sessions in the street, the living room of a dancer's home and a playground outside of an apartment building. Krump "battles," or competitions, can be planned and their locations chosen in advance, however, as in the formalized "Battle Zone" competition in *Rize* sponsored by Tommy the Clown that draws thousands of spectators to an arena. Additionally, online videos show krumping occurring in places ranging from gymnasiums to backyards and empty lots.[22] Krump's minimal material requirements keep it affordable, portable and in the vernacular, traits of mixtery shared by some forms of African American singing and quilting.

Though its genealogy is disputed, LaChapelle portrays krump as emerging from clown dancing and echoing its format though with an increased emotional and physical intensity.[23] Another African American dance form forged in the aftermath of the Los

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[20] According to the United Kingdom-based Krump Junkies, "during the introduction of Krump to the public via the media, many misconceptions have surfaced, one being the idea that Krump dancers paint their faces. This is not so, as face painting is a clown practice that evolved from the circus image. Some early footage does show the Krump Kings with painted faces (examples can be seen in the movie *Rize*) however this was during their transition from Clown dancers into Krump dancers" (*Krump Junkies*, 2009, 8 June 2009 <http://www.krumpjunkies.com/page2.htm>.)

[21] Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

[22] To see krumping online, search with the term "krump" or "krumping" on Web sites such as YouTube. Also, the Krump Kings have a "Video Clips" section on their Web site, <http://krumpkings.com>.

[23] Tight Eyez states emphatically in *Krump 1.0*: "No clown started any krump. No krump came from any clown." However, the *Krumptionary* has an entry for clowning and defines it as the forerunner of krumping ("Krumptionary," *Krump Kings*, 2009, Krump Kings, Inc., 6 June 2009, <http://www.krumpkings.com/krumptionary/clown>). Tight Eyez and Big Mijo are senior members of the

Angeles riots, clown dancing, or clowning, developed as and continues to be a form of entertainment at children's birthday parties, but it quickly became a creative outlet and social network for young Los Angeleans. In addition, clowning serves as a business and a personal mission for Thomas Johnson, also known as Tommy the Clown, arguably its most prominent founder. A former drug dealer, Tommy advocates clowning as an alternative to joining a gang for local youths and acts *in loco parentis* to many dancers. Organized into groups that dancers liken to families, dancer Lil Tommy—his name emblematic of his relationship to his mentor—estimates in *Rize* that the number of clown groups in Los Angeles exceeds fifty and asserts that their prevalence in the area is such that people will ask not whether someone is in a clown group or a gang, but which one. *Rize's* promotional materials explain that Tommy is "known these days as the *Father of Krumping*," a nod to the preeminence of krumping over clowning, a shift occurring between the film's taping and release. A related revision is the Rice Track Family's identity which changed from clown group, as seen in *Rize*, to krump family.[24]

Clowning shares similarities with krumping that also place it within a tradition of African American dance, whose centuries-long heritage will be explored later in this chapter. In *Rize*, for instance, Tommy the Clown, his dancers and guests at a birthday party gather in a ring around an individual dancer who improvises while observers awaiting their turn in the ring dance, clap or cheer on the soloist. The circle forms in the street, and, in a sequence appearing repeatedly in the film, the soloist moves rapidly in crisp, angular motions centered in the shoulders and hips and then follows those moves with a slow, undulating wave of movement rippling through the body before returning to

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Krump Kings whom Tight Eyez claims repeatedly are among the founders of krump so the acknowledgment is notable.

[24] Momo Chang, "Demons in the Dance," *Hyphen*, Issue 9, 30 April 2006.

the staccato rhythm again. Most of the dancers are young African Americans ranging in age from approximately four to twenty, some of whom have been dancing with Tommy for years.[25] Though school-age children primarily participate in clown dancing at parties, where guests are predominantly African American as well, *Rize* depicts some very young children, including babes in arms, and women dancing, too.

The analogous configurations of clowning and krumping contribute to their effectiveness and correlate to parallel conceptions of subjectivity. In both dance forms, an individual dancer emerges in relation to a group, distinguishing herself in solo performance yet remaining an integral part of the circle of dancers. Likewise, in an African American understanding of intersubjectivity, a person attains a dynamic selfhood within the context of a community. As in the previous chapter, this chapter distinguishes intersubjectivity from its use in the fields of psychoanalysis and phenomenology theoretically and linguistically, instead conceptualizing the interdependence of persons on one another for the constitution of their individual subjectivities as plural personhood or, alternately, mutually constructing subjectivity. The dancers, for example, create clown and krump groups, or "families," and, in *Rize*, Tight Eyez formulates their relationships as characterized by shared experience, especially shared emotion: "We laugh together. We cry together. . . . Whatever one person goes through, that whole group goes through it."

In its emphasis on shared emotional expression, krump emulates the communal spirituality of African American Christian worship, recalling the Clearing in *Beloved* and "relocat[ing]," as Christina Zanfanga writes in "The Multiringed Cosmos of Krumping," "the 'invisible church' of the brush harbor to the streets, the school yards, and the

[25] For example, in *Rize*, eighteen-year old Larry states that he has been clowning since he was twelve.

blacktops."[26] The expression of emotion can be cathartic for the soloist as well as for the assembled group as a whole, often concurrently. In *Shake City 101*, for example, Hurricane states that "getting krump is just . . . taking out all your anger on dancing. If you get as much krump as you could, you could get enough energy to pass it on to someone else." Lil C makes a comparable claim about the dancers featured in *Rize* in an interview on PBS's *Charlie Rose*: "We would hype each other up and feed off of one another's kinetic energy."[27] Likewise, Tight Eyez describes "transfer[ing] your energy to a whole group of people" in *Krump 2.0*. As mentioned in the Introduction, "speaking without words" through krump does not require language because "you're supposed to be powerful enough to move the crowd without even saying anything."[28]

Similarly, in many African American churches, ecstatic experience often signals the presence of the Holy Spirit which can be manifested in multiple individuals simultaneously. The Holy Spirit is a part of the Trinity believed to unite worshippers in a numinous way while preserving their individual subjectivities, and "catching the Spirit" is one of many descriptions of the transformative event. "Getting krump" refers to a related state of being in *Rize* that is achieved through dance. The terminology is interchangeable; "getting krump" can mean dancing as well as having an ecstatic experience. Dragon, who krumps and dances in church, explains in *Rize* how compelling getting krump can be in theologically-inflected language: "When you know that there's a krump session . . . it's the spirit that's there. There's a spirit in the midst of krumpness.

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[26] Zanfanga also writes that "similar to the forest sanctuaries of the rural South, krumping provides a street sanctuary to the urban city" (Christina Zanfanga, "The Multiringed Cosmos of Krumping," *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader*, ed. Julie Malnig, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009) 345).
[27] "A Conversation about the Documentary *Rize* with Tommy Johnson, Christopher Toler and David LaChapelle," *Charlie Rose*, PBS, 22 June 2005.
[28] *Krump 2.0*.

There is a spirit there, you know." At a krump session, one could describe the presence of a shared spirit, which some krumpers indeed attribute to the Holy Spirit, as plural personhood at work. In any case, the numinous quality is something achieved in the company of others, not alone.

A powerful sequence in *Rize* culminates when a dancer named Daisy enters an ecstatic state while krumping. She first appears in a sneak preview of the krump session before the sequence begins, standing on a wooden bench facing a male dancer.[29] She wears a serious look along with painted designs on her face. Her hair is in cornrows and clear beads adorn the ends of her shoulder-length braids. She has on green camouflage pants, a white top, a white coral necklace and earrings. After a moment of stillness in which she stands ramrod straight, her first move is to punch toward the male dancer, also in camouflage pants and a white shirt.[30] Unfazed, he calmly points to the bench and then to the ground. A few seconds later, without looking at him, Daisy steps off of the bench into the ring of dancers. Like other solos to follow in the session, hers takes the form of an ongoing conversation with another dancer that emerges collaboratively.

A shot of the dancer Tight Eyez in front of Los Angeles's Watts Towers begins the sequence that will eventually return to Daisy. The Towers serve as another reminder of

[29] Based on Daisy's *KrumpKings.com* profile, it appears that Daisy battled Dragon (now known as Slayer) in the scene from *Rize*. She remarks in her profile that "the toughest battle [of her krump career] . . . was against Slayer (Dragon) in Rize [sic]. . . . He always used to push my buttons because he wanted to see a side come out of me that I didn't know was there . . . and boy did he do it!!!!. . . . that battle caused me to snap and it took me to a new level in my Krump . . ." However, the film's editing minimizes the collaborative as well as competitive nature of the session.

[30] The dancers in *Rize* assert that it is dangerous to wear certain colors because of their association with gangs. The "neutrality" of white shirts offers a modicum of protection. Additionally, they evoke the African American church. For example, candidates for baptism sometimes dress in white, as do ushers who facilitate aspects of worship.

location, a notion that this segment will simultaneously affirm and trouble.[31] Drums announce a departure from dialogue as well as the krump, hip hop and gospel music that provides the soundtrack for the rest of the film. The sequence begins at dusk in Los Angeles where Lil C krumps in the midst of dancers gathered around him on an asphalt playground. Then, the scene shifts to a single silhouetted krumper at sunset in the shadow of the Watts Towers. The camera returns next to the circle of dancers on the playground before leaping to Africa. In footage filmed in Sudan in the 1960s by filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl, Nuba tribespersons seem to parallel the strong movements of the krumpers, the start of a visual argument by LaChapelle designed to persuade viewers of connections between African and African American dance.[32] Seconds later, again in Los Angeles, krumpers appear to wrestle, anachronistically anticipating the next scene in which Nubans wrestle forty years prior.[33]

LaChapelle relentlessly isolates movements made by the Nubans and contrasts them with apparently corresponding motions by the krumpers. Dancers in Los Angeles paint their faces as do Nuban dancers.[34] A dancer is lifted above the circle in Los Angeles and then likewise in Sudan. The drums increase in tempo, announcing heightened tension as the dancing intensifies in each place. The film cycles continuously around the globe, using more than three dozen cuts in an attempt to unite the dancers

[31] An example of vernacular architecture, the Watts Towers recapitulate the film's focus on vernacular dance.
[32] The *Rize* credits list "The Nuba Material, Riefenstahl-Produktion" as the source of the Nuba footage.
[33] According to David Hinton in *The Films of Leni Riefenstahl*, the Nubas of Mesakin "were farmers, not nomads, and although they had to work hard to survive, they still had time for their pleasures: wrestling for the men and dancing for the women" (David Hinton, "The Nuba" in *The Films of Leni Riefenstahl*, 3rd ed., Filmmakers Series, No. 74 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000: 101-104) 102). The footage chosen by LaChapelle reflects Nuba men and boys engaged in traditional wrestling matches rather than dancing by Nuba women despite Rize dancers' statements that "fighting is the last thing on our minds when we're dancing."
[34] Hinton also notes that filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl filmed in color "since one of the most outstanding features of Nuban beauty was their ability to paint their bodies in many different colors and designs, often resembling abstract paintings" (Hinton 103).

across thousands of miles and half a century. The cuts become shorter and then overlap such that they begin to fade into each another, suggesting further permeability between continents and cultures. At the climax of the cuts, dozens of dancers encircle Daisy who is dancing forcefully in Los Angeles. When she closes her eyes, sways and appears dazed, a male dancer enfolds her in an embrace—the same dancer that she faced and interacted with in the earlier clip. Dancer Baby Tight Eyez stands next to them and explains: "She just struck. It's what we all been waiting on. Yep. She has reached . . . that's what all of us been waiting on." The drums stop, replaced by the muffled sound of someone screaming, though it is unclear who it is. After a few moments, the male dancer carries Daisy out of the ring.

Daisy succeeds in "getting krump," or in achieving an alteration in her consciousness reminiscent of ecstatic religious experience, such as churchgoers catching the Spirit or Vodoun practitioners being mounted by *loa*.[35] Baby Tight Eyez's commentary suggests that the realization of liminality is the ultimate goal of krump sessions. Significantly, it is a goal not only for the one "struck," but for everyone: "what we all been waiting on." Witnesses attest to the authenticity of the experience and indeed are pivotal to it, even if they do not get krump in the same way that Daisy does during that particular session. Getting krump is an interactive phenomenon that, albeit variously, transforms the experience of all participants. Further, getting krump exceeds language not only in its medium of movement, but also in defying description. Baby Tight Eyez trails off and does not name what that Daisy "has reached," keeping it outside

[35] In an interview after the movie's release (included on the DVD), Daisy, in fact, states that she "caught the Holy Spirit" for the first time that night ("Tribeca Film Festival Q & A with Cast," *Rize)*.

of language.[36]

Neuroscientific research suggests that a connection exists between dance and action that is independent of language. The neuroscience of dance is a relatively recent area of scientific inquiry despite the prevalence and significance of dance in virtually all human cultures; however, this emerging area of inquiry could support the notion of a relationship between krump and agency. In a study published in 2005, neuroscientist Beatriz Calvo-Merino and her colleagues report on a link between expertise and the observation of action that they discovered by studying dance. Prior research associated watching an action being performed—but not physically performing it—with a neurological mirror system that replicates the action in the areas of the brain that control the motor system. In "Action Observation and Acquired Motor Skills: An fMRI Study with Expert Dancers," Calvo-Merino's research team asked whether visual stimulation alone activated the internal motor system. They compared the areas that "lit up" in the brains of expert ballet and capoeira dancers (as well as a control group of "non-dancers") when watching familiar and unfamiliar dance styles on video and determined that, while observing dance could spark neurological mirroring, the kinesthetic knowledge of the observer greatly enhanced the effects of the observation. In other words, Calvo-Merino writes, "the brain's response to seeing an action is influenced by the acquired motor skills of the observer;" knowing how to perform the movement being observed increases the neurological reaction to watching it, triggering a simulated reenactment in the observer's motor system.[37] For example, ballet dancers experienced a stronger reaction to seeing ballet dancing than capoeira, and the inverse was true for the capoeira dancers. Stated

[36] Similarly, in *Krump 1.0*, Junior Tight Eyez comments that certain moves are "too buck for me to explain."
[37] Calvo-Merino, "Action Observation" 1245.

differently, dance's effectiveness as a neurological stimulant increases along with the dancer's kinesthetic repertoire. Importantly, the observer's motor skills, as Calvo-Merino distinguishes, are "acquired," or learned, rather than stemming from any innate biomechanical ability.

In a follow-up study by the same authors in 2006, "Seeing or Doing? Influence of Visual and Motor Familiarity in Action Observation," ballet and capoeira dancers again watched videos of the dance style in which they had expertise as well as another style in which they did not. This time, however, the researchers showed dance steps within the genres that were gender-specific to confirm that dancers responded to movements that they knew how to execute and not simply to familiarity based on visual observation. Functional MRI (fMRI) scans of the dancers' brains again correlated kinesthetic knowledge with increased neurological stimulation. For example, male dancers who observed "female" steps—steps that they had likely seen before, but not performed—experienced less neurological activity than when viewing steps designated as "male"—movements that they knew how to execute. In addition, for reasons yet unknown, male dancers experienced greater neurological stimulation proportionate to the female dancers.[38] For both groups, however, Calvo-Merino and her colleagues identify the necessity of motor experience as key to augmented activation of an observer's neurological motor systems that mirror the movement being watched. In other words, the expertise had to be embodied for it to make a difference.

Though both studies involved ballet and capoeira dancers, one can imagine that krumpers might respond similarly. (Capoeira, an African-Brazilian dance form that

[38] Beatriz Calvo-Merino, Julie Grèzes, Daniel E. Glaser, Richard E. Passingham and Patrick Haggard, "Seeing or Doing? Influence of Visual and Motor Familiarity in Action Observation," *Current Biology* 16 (October 2006): 1907.

combines martial arts with dancing, resembles krumping in some ways.) Krumping could theoretically amplify responses to observed movement because the observers are also participants. Like the dancers in the study, krumpers have what might non-scientifically be called "muscle memory," and krumping's circle of observer-participants exemplifies an ideal arrangement for watching performers execute movements that observers have learned and incorporated into their motor repertoire. In "Seeing or Doing," Calvo-Merino notes the value of watching others, which enhances learning, and she implies its benefits also include relationality:

> Although the subjects in our experiment viewed actions of an individual dancing alone, their professional work requires an exquisite ability to observe the actions of others. This observation has a clear motoric aim, for example, in perfecting the dancer's own repertoire by watching a teacher, or in synchronizing with others in *pas de deux* or *corps de ballet* pieces. Motor simulation would clearly facilitate these aspects of dance skill.[39]

If one considers the neurological stimulation of the motor system gained by observing other dancers to be a form of agency, krumping could serve as a source of agency with krumpers' kinesthetic competence, as well as the dance's communal context, only strengthening its potential effectiveness.

Tellingly, the two studies published by Calvo-Merino's research group found no activation of regions of the brain relating to language. Calvo-Merino specifically states in the second study ("Seeing or Doing?") that the group "found no effects in areas concerned with categorization and naming" that would suggest the research subjects had

[39] Calvo-Merino, "Seeing or Doing" 1909.

different vocabularies for movement that somehow influenced the study.[40] Further, a study published between the two, "Building a Motor Simulation de Novo: Observation of Dance by Dancers," specifically attempted to understand whether watching dance activated regions of the brain associated with language. Neuroscientist Emily Cross and her colleagues wondered if a participant watching a dancer in Calvo-Merino's first study could have been influenced by knowing the name of a particular step. Could that knowledge somehow contribute to the activation of certain brain regions? By using "modern dance sequences that do not have standardized verbal labels attached to movement" versus, for example, ballet which has an extensive vocabulary for movement, Cross's group was able to diminish the role of language in the experiment and reconfirm Calvo-Merino's findings.[41] They "established that. . . . it is one's own ability to actually generate the movement" rather than "time spent practicing the movements and visual and physical familiarity with the movements" that "has the greatest influence on further increasing activity within action understanding areas," concluding that there is "a close relationship between the substrates of action and physical embodiment" that appears to be independent of language.[42] By extension, it would theoretically depend on a krumper's ability to execute a "chest pop," rather than his or her time spent practicing—or knowledge of the move's name, as to what degree watching another krumper do a "chest pop" would activate the observer's mirror motor system. Watching krumping could provide a kind of neurological agency that bypasses semiotic representation and increases along with the viewer's kinesthetic expertise with the movement being watched.

[40] Calvo-Merino, "Seeing or Doing" 1909.
[41] Emily S. Cross, Antonia F. de C. Hamilton and Scott T. Grafton, "Building a Motor Simulation de Novo: Observation of Dance by Dancers," *NeuroImage* 31 (2006): 1258.
[42] Cross, "Building" 1265.

While watching dance can be neurologically stimulating and potentially enhance one's ability to synchronize movement with others, sound generated through dance can also aid in unifying a group of people. Psychologists Steven Brown and Lawrence M. Parsons theorize that dance evolved as a way to generate sound and hence served as a precursor to language. They posit that the kinesthetic knowledge exchanged between the motor system and brain bypasses some auditory processing areas of the brain associated with language in favor of a "'low-road'" approach that keeps rhythmic cues in the realm of unconscious responses.[43] Additionally, they imagine the existence of a yet-unnamed area parallel to Broca's area, which aids in ordering words and phrases, that might direct the sequencing of movement.[44] They draw from these and other studies a "view [of] dance as a marriage of the representational capacity of language and the rhythmicity of music. This interaction allows people not only to tell stories using their bodies but to do so while synchronizing their movements with others' in a way that fosters social cohesion."[45] Their statement is remarkably similar to Dragon's contention in *Rize* that krumping "is how we express ourselves. This is the only way we see fit of storytelling. This is the only way of making ourselves feel like we belong."

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[43] Their research indicates a direct relationship between music and muscles, leading them to formulate "a 'low road' hypothesis that unconscious entrainment [of muscles to music] occurs when a neural auditory message projects directly to the auditory and timing circuits in the cerebellum, bypassing high-level auditory areas in the cerebral cortex" (Steven Brown and Lawrence M. Parsons, "The Neuroscience of Dance," *Scientific American* 299:1 (July 2008): 81).

[44] Though this path seems to eschew any linguistic formulations, Brown and Parsons propose the existence of an area of the brain parallel to Broca's area that, instead of being "associated with speech production," might be associated with dance's "strong capacity for representation and imitation" (83). The potentially homologous area "does not appear to involve speech directly," however, but relates to imitation and gesture (Brown and Parsons 83). Research conducted "in the past decade . . . has revealed that Broca's area also contains a representation of the hands" and a 2003 study by Marco Iacoboni indicates that both Broca's area and its homologue "are essential for imitation, a key ingredient in learning from others and in spreading culture" (Brown and Parsons 83). Their hypothesis takes dance as "the quintessential gesture language" from which language might have evolved, primarily as a way to make sound (83).

[45] Brown and Parsons 83.

Brown and Parsons's "'body-percussion' hypothesis that dance evolved initially as a sounding phenomenon" recalls the singing women's sonic and social intervention in *Beloved* who reach not just beyond, but before language in order to rescue Sethe: "In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like."[46] The thirty women know that language is inadequate to the task of exorcising the trauma of enslavement, unlike a shared understanding—and evocation—of sound. The women's communal expression births a mixtery: sound shaped by African American experience that disrupts the hegemony of language and slavery while reuniting the community. Krumping similarly emerges from African American expression that the dancers employ to generate sound aurally—the "stomp" is elemental to krumping, for example—and to make themselves heard through their danced stories.[47] Like the singing women, krumpers do not create representation in the Saussurian paradigm of signifier, signified, sign; it is unnecessary to assign syntax to movement or the sound it generates for krumpers to express themselves and for that expression to be understood by others. Through krumping, dancers' bodies and their stories become audible as well as visible. Krumpers, in parallel with some African American singers and quilters, create multifaceted expression—audible sound, visible identity, embodied subjectivity and manifested community—that cannot be created through language, a process that is communal, non-linguistic and rooted in African American experience.

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[46] Brown and Parsons 83; Morrison, *Beloved* 259.

[47] The stomp is the first of three elemental steps taught in *Krump 1.0*, two of which retain an acoustic resonance. (Though differently from the onomatopoeia of "stomp" and "[chest] pop," "arm swing" also carries a style of African American music as well as dance within it.) Likewise, Lil C explains to Charlie Rose that "our bodies would become the instrument . . . [the] chest would be the bass," an analogy that Tight Eyez also makes when describing "chest hits" ("A Conversation about the Documentary *Rize*"). In *Krump 2.0*, Tight Eyez thumps his chest with the palm of his hand, saying that the "chest comes from the bass—boom, boom, boom. You can make a beat with it."

As previously mentioned, krump represents an alternative to the silence of suppressed rage as well as the destructiveness of explosive anger, and, thereby, provides a sanctuary for emotional release like the Clearing and other forms of ecstatic religious expression. In *Beloved*, Morrison couches the effect of the singing women's sound on Sethe in theological and kinesthetic terms—"she trembled like the baptized in its wash."[48] The women also bring the Clearing to Sethe, a place of communal African American expression where children, women and men interchangeably dance, sing and laugh, achieving cathartic release from the racism that impacts each of their lives. Krumping parallels the Clearing in its equally cathartic resistance to racism. In terms of racial stereotypes as well as the denial of the dancers' spirituality, Dragon rebuts being perceived as "just a bunch of rowdy . . . just ghetto, just heathen and thugs" in *Rize*, asserting unequivocally: "No. No, what we are, [we] are oppressed."[49] His statement suggests one reason that anger often surfaces when krumpers list feelings that dancing helps them to manage.

Emotion also appears to play a role in the neuroscience of dance. Calvo-Merino's 2005 study found that action observation sparked activity in the "ventromedial frontal cortex," an "area routinely activated in emotion processing," as well as the aforementioned motor areas in expert dancers' brains.[50] As an area related to "emotional experience," the ventromedial frontal cortex "shows strong responses to pleasurable and rewarding stimuli" and appears to contribute "to social judgment and the regulation of

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[48] Morrison, *Beloved* 261.

[49] A similar correction occurs in *Breakin' vs. Krumpin'* when former sitcom star Todd Bridges and break dance pioneer Adolfo "Shabba-Doo" Quiñones (star of the 1984 film *Breakin'*) organize a group of krumpers and break dancers, respectively, who then compete to determine which dance form is superior (the result is a tie). When Bridges describes the krumpers as impoverished, Quiñones corrects him, saying that he is "talking from Madison Avenue; the kids don't view themselves that way." The film's soundtrack also includes lyrics that voice this frustration: "I'm tired of people judging who I really be."

[50] Calvo-Merino, "Action Observation" 1248.

social behaviour [sic]," though the study's scope did not encompass discerning which category accounted for the stimulation.[51] According to the study's authors, however, an increase in this area's activation possibly results "when [experts are] watching their own movement style because it is particularly rewarding for them, or because they have a greater social engagement with the person they observe."[52] Krump could offer both catalysts, potentially at the same time. Krump sessions, for instance, hold such allure that many dancers, as Dragon explains in *Rize*, "will stop whatever is going on if there's a gathering." The findings could also explain the appeal of krump families within which dancers share movement styles and social engagement to an even greater degree than with krumpers generally. The krump family that one joins, for example, is emblematic of one's personal style so one who dances in a "rude" style most of the time might become a member of the "Rude" family, while the "Eyez" family could be a better fit for someone with a "more technical" style, another way that Tight Eyez describes his "Eyez" character in *Krump 1.0*.

In the same study, Calvo-Merino expands the social, emotional and motoric trifecta influenced by expertise to include memory. She suggests that related

> activations [in other areas of the brain] may contribute to imagery and episodic recall from long-term storage of allocentric information maintained in other areas of the brain. The greater familiarity of experts with their own movement style [e.g., ballet or capoeira] may lead to

[51] Calvo-Merino, "Action Observation" 1248.
[52] Calvo-Merino, "Action Observation" 1248.

> stronger activation of brain mechanisms of episodic memory, even when watching another person.[53]

Dance, then, could be a powerful tool not just for learning but also for the transmission of cultural memory, an hypothesis consistent with Jurretta Jordan Heckscher's historical research on eighteenth-century African American dance in the mid-Atlantic, or "Greater Chesapeake," region of the United States.[54] Heckscher demonstrates that traits characterizing eighteenth-century African dance align with aspects of African American dance in the contemporaneous Greater Chesapeake as well as African American dance nationwide in later centuries. The mirror motor system could be a conduit through which these and other continuities flow, reminiscent of Levitin's contention that mirror neurons could "turn out to be the fundamental messengers of music across individuals and generations."[55] His conjecture becomes even more compelling when paired with the knowledge that music implies movement in most human cultures.[56] Specifically, Heckscher asserts that one of many African traditions retained in African American dance is a lack of distinction between music and dance.[57] Known by discrete words in "Western" languages, music and dance are so interwoven in their "'closest African analog'" that they are linguistically and "'conceptually inseparable,'" as described by ethnomusicologist Alan P. Merriam.[58]

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[53] Calvo-Merino, "Action Observation" 1248.
[54] Jurretta Jordan Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance': Black Dancing, Culture, and Identity in the Greater Chesapeake World from the Early Eighteenth Century to the Civil War," diss., George Washington University, 2000. I am grateful to Adele Alexander for referring me to Heckscher's research.
[55] Levitin 267.
[56] Levitin 257.
[57] Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 136.
[58] Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 136. Heckscher cites page 110 of Alan P. Merriam's book *African Music in Perspective* as the source of this information. In addition, Heckscher notes that "'dance' is a culturally-specific concept, not a universal category of human experience, and many languages have no term equivalent to the English word" (Heckscher 26, n.10).

In "'All the Mazes of the Dance': Black Dancing, Culture, and Identity in the Greater Chesapeake World from the Early Eighteenth Century to the Civil War," Heckscher proposes that African American dance in the Greater Chesapeake spread across centuries and to other areas of the country, ultimately concluding that

> the distinctive regional African-American culture formed in the Greater Chesapeake rode in the deep currents of black migration for more than a hundred years, flowing through the South in the nineteenth century and from the South throughout the nation in the twentieth. And the Greater Chesapeake's black dance tradition became thereby the formative heritage of all African-American dance.[59]

The migration of thousands of African Americans from the southern United States to Los Angeles in the early to mid-twentieth century could account for krump's resemblance to antebellum African American dancing in the Greater Chesapeake. The "angularity and asymmetry" and "complex, whole-body movement" that exemplifies black dance in Greater Chesapeake can typify krump, for example, and krump's circular configuration also repeats the Greater Chesapeake, where dancers frequently formed a ring around an individual who improvised as the group watched and clapped in support and encouragement.[60] Further, like krump sessions, dancing in the Greater Chesapeake could be of a "long duration, sometimes for several hours at a time."[61]

While specific elements of the Greater Chesapeake dance tradition have counterparts in krump, most significantly, dance holds similar function and meaning for African Americans in contemporary Los Angeles as it did for their cultural ancestors.

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[59] Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 411-412; "Our National Poetry 19-35.
[60] Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 91.
[61] Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 92.

Dance's critical importance for African Americans enslaved in the Greater Chesapeake could mean risking death for the opportunity to participate in an activity that, like singing, could simultaneously create and affirm embodied subjectivity apart from enslavement.[62] According to Heckscher,

> black dance . . . was above all a primary instrument for the creation, preservation, and expression of a set of black identities that were a life-giving alternative to the identity slavery imposed—enabling black people to coalesce and persist in community . . . and to enact artful resistance while establishing an African-American model of the person that directly counterposed the bodily foundations of slavery in the bodies of the enslaved.[63]

The system of slavery attempted to infiltrate enslaved persons' bodily practices and establish itself kinesthetically as well as psychologically. Enslavement threatened identity in a system that, *de jure*, denied African Americans possession of their bodies as well as political subjectivity, literacy and property. Further, slavery's hallmark was instability, including social instability; one never knew when separation from one's family might occur, for example. Yet, Heckscher contends, when enslaved African Americans danced, they

> took shelter for a moment in an area of culture that was terribly fragile, contingent, beleaguered, and limited, but an area that, more than any other—even more than the music that was an intrinsic part of it, because

[62] Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 3.
[63] Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 17.

> of the ways that slavery limited the production of musical instruments—they could nevertheless make and keep as their own.[64]

Dance could be a "shelter" that African Americans could not only inhabit within their own bodies, but could create with them, carrying that kinesthetic knowledge inviolably. Notably, on her *KrumpKings.com* profile, Daisy couches krump as a way out of no way that eventually became like the embodied shelter of the Greater Chesapeake, one that she could "keep as her own:"

> [Krump] helped my life when I was in situations where I didn't feel there was hope [—] just the idea of an outlet to get away from it all while releasing everything you got built up in you was dope to me. . . . It eventually became my lifestyle instead of just my art. . . . even if one day I decide not to dance no more . . . Krump will always be a part of me.[65]

Heckscher posits that embodied shelter was one form of temporary escape that dance provided to enslaved African Americans. An opportunity to experience an embodied existence apart from enslavement, "dancing could become an instrument of inner liberation."[66] However, simply getting away to attend a dance could, in turn, have prepared dancers for escaping enslavement, "differing only in scale and finality from attempts to flee slavery altogether and making explicit the connection between dancing and freedom in the African-American imagination."[67] Three centuries later, dance's role remains strikingly similar for some African Americans. Krump offers both a temporary

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[64] Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 256.
[65] "Tribeca Film Festival Q & A with Cast," *Rize*; "Crew," *Krump Kings*, 2009, Krump Kings, Inc., 6 June 2009, <http://www.krumpkings.com/crew/pages/kkmember-11.html>.
[66] Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 168.
[67] Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 361-362. Heckscher writes that "surely, for some dancers, evading patrollers in order to dance served as practice for far more final acts of evasion, turning the possibility of escape from a fantasy to a realistic prospect in the dancer's own mind ("'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 361-362).

respite from being "oppressed," as Dragon states the dancers are in *Rize*, and a glimpse of future relief that might be more enduring. Dancing represents escape as a spectrum of possibilities ranging from being transported momentarily to actual travel.[68] In describing being "struck" in an interview after *Rize's* premiere, for example, Daisy states, "I felt free," whereas, the dancer Swoop likens clowning to "a getaway" in a literal as well as figurative sense.[69] In *Rize*, he lists leaving the neighborhood as one of dance's benefits: "You get to travel from here to there [and] see, meet different people. And [by contrast] some people don't even get out their own neighborhood."[70]

Dance's effectiveness as a provisional escape appears to align with neuroscientific findings. Like music, for example, dance can transport people away neurologically from a disconnected and painful reality, even if only momentarily. As with Oliver Sacks's aphasic patients who experience identity and community almost exclusively when singing, research now shows that dance can temporarily relieve the symptoms of Parkinson's disease, which can limit movement and cause tremors.[71] For example, Carroll Neesemann, who has attended dance classes designed for Parkinson's patients since his diagnosis, comments in an interview that "'the dance class is uplifting. . . . I know I'm not moving exactly straight up, but I feel symptom free.'"[72] One of Neesemann's instructors, David Leventhal, states similarly that "for those 75 minutes [of

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[68] Also in *Rize*, Miss Prissy talks of traveling to geographically near, but metaphysically distant Hollywood for ballet classes and the fear that others in her neighborhood have of venturing into such unfamiliar territory. Ironically, according to Miss Prissy, while some Hollywood dwellers view her neighborhood as "dangerous," some South Los Angeles residents don't feel safe outside of this place. . . . A lot of the kids out here they don't have that push or that drive to go and be in Hollywood because so many people have knocked them down already. So their comfort is the 'hood."

[69] "Tribeca Film Festival Q & A with Cast," *Rize*.

[70] Lil Tommy makes an analogous comment at the Tribeca Film Festival which the dancers attended in New York City in 2005 ("Tribeca Film Festival Q & A with Cast," *Rize*).

[71] Mary Brophy Marcus, "Dancing Moves Parkinson's Patients to a Better Place," *USA Today* (13 November 2008: Life, 06d).

[72] Marcus.

dance class], you don't have Parkinson's. You're a dancer."[73] In a kind of kinesthetic double consciousness, dance at once becomes a way for people to feel more at home in their bodies and free from them.

In addition, dance can be a practice ground for future freedom, as recent studies indicate that kinesthetic learning can also enhance the brain's ability to plan movement. In their discussion of Calvo-Merino's studies, Brown and Parsons state that

> both investigations highlight the fact that learning a complex motor sequence activates, in addition to a direct motor system for the control of muscle contractions, a motor-planning system that contains information about the body's ability to accomplish a specific movement. The more expert people become at some motor pattern, the better they can imagine how that pattern feels and the more effortless it probably becomes to carry out.[74]

Further, in their article "The Neuroscience of Dance," they explain that while "the ability to rehearse a movement in your mind is indeed vital to learning motor skills," perceptual knowledge alone does not result in physical competence.[75] Rather, as Brown and Parsons note similarly to Calvo-Merino and Cross, "true mastery requires a muscle sense, a motor image . . . in the brain's motion-planning areas of the movement in question."[76] The assessment supports the notion of dancing as an ideal way to hone skills that could aid in actual escape and underscores Heckscher's conviction that small acts of escape potentially led to larger ones. Similarly, krumpers also use dance as a practice ground for

[73] Marcus.
[74] Brown and Parsons 82.
[75] Brown and Parsons 82.
[76] Brown and Parsons 82.

a range of competencies. In *Krump 2.0*, Tight Eyez exhorts dancers to "envision" what they want to do and then "embody what you envision."

Likewise, *Rize* presents dance as a sustainable tool for transforming experience that can also fuel the dancers' self-efficacy outside of krump sessions. Baby Tight Eyez, for example, remains free of his former gang affiliation, and, symbolic of becoming "his own person," now goes by the name Wild Boi.[77] Lil C is now a renowned choreographer who both appears in and choreographs for film and television shows.[78] Along with Miss Prissy and Tight Eyez, he dances in the krump session that opens the film *Stomp the Yard*, for example. Miss Prissy teaches dance professionally while pursuing a career in film and music.[79] Tommy the Clown, too, continues working with young people through dance, and, through him, one can see a direct link between dancing and political subjectivity as he rallied residents of Los Angeles to participate in California's Census 2000 campaign.[80] Krumpers from around the globe also testify that krumping can be life altering, affecting them in a way consistent with their Los Angeles compatriots. New Zealander Sharna-Lee England, a dancer with the Bully Nerd Squad, states that "dance

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[77] *Breakin' vs. Krumpin'*.

[78] Included in "Slow Dance," the national exhibit featuring portraits of choreographers, "Lil C appeared in and choreographed krump performances in seasons two and three of *So You Think You Can Dance*" and "choreographed for the films *Be Cool* and *Bring It On Yet Again*" (David Michalek, *Slow Dancing*, 2008, 16 Oct. 2008 <http://www.slowdancingfilms.com/performers.html>; *So You Think You Can Dance*, 2008, Fox Broadcasting Company, 16 Oct. 2008 <http://www.fox.com/dance/bios.htm>). He has also appeared in music videos with "Madonna, Jennifer Lopez, Ciara, Missy Elliot, Christina Millian, Sean Paul, Fall Out Boy, and Gwen Stefani and choreographed performances for Chris Brown, Omarian and Brooke Valentine" (*So You Think You Can Dance*).

[79] Jessica LaCombe, "From Ballerina to the Queen of Krump: The Party's Just Begun for Marquisa Gardner," *Dancer Universe* (29 Aug. 2008) <http://danceruniverse.com/stories/issues/200809/from_ballerina_to_the_queen-S9/>.

[80] Reporter Ryan Murphy writes that, "thanks to Tommy's help," California "received its highest mail-in response rates [to the 2000 Census] in over four decades" (Ryan Murphy, "Five Things You Didn't Know about Krumping," *AskMen.com*, 30 April 2008, <http://www.askmen.com/entertainment/special_feature_100/105_special_feature.html>). James Christy, Regional Director of the U.S. Census Bureau for Los Angeles, confirms that "Tommy Johnson did participate in many of our Census 2000 events in Los Angeles" (James Christy, e-mail to the author, 22 May 2009).

has changed our lives," and the group's manager, Tania Hoeta, specifies that she "see[s] the positive way krumping has affected these kids. For example, Sharna-Lee has given up the hard partying, the drugs and the drink."[81]

In both the Greater Chesapeake and South Los Angeles, dancers choose what to include in their repertoire. Heckscher contends that eighteenth-century African American dance evolved through "creolization, not acculturation."[82] Enslaved dancers consciously selected movements made by persons of African descent as well as incorporated movements made by whites to syncretize a form of dance that became uniquely African American. Significantly, however, she notes that "the new dance tradition . . . reframed without obliterating the fundamental Africanity that was the dancers' ancestral heritage. . . . What is European has been added without obscuring or diminishing what is African, which persists like the generative rhythm at the dance's core."[83] Likewise, creolization remains one of krump's many inheritances from the Greater Chesapeake as dancers intentionally shape it on a daily basis, in part, by borrowing elements of other distinctive dance styles or simply observing movements and incorporating them into the ever-evolving krump canon. Rice Track Family member Laurence "Solow" Gogit acknowledges that watching krump—whether live or on video—facilitates the process of creolization: "'You see so much at a krump gathering. . . . You see a movement and add the idea to your own movement and watch a dance tape and take something from that.'"[84]

Creolization can also help to build social cohesion that doubles as a source of agency. In the Greater Chesapeake, enslaved African Americans imitated whites dancing

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[81] Anne-Marie Emerson, "Wanganui Krumpers Set to Challenge World's Best," *Wanganui Chronicle*, 10 March 2008, <http://www.wagnanuichronicle.co.nz/storyprint.cfm?storyID=3786665>.
[82] Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 198.
[83] Heckscher, "Our National Poetry" 27.
[84] Trebay 31-32.

in socially unifying "dances of derision," such as the cakewalk, openly yet surreptitiously resisting racism.[85] Similarly, LaChapelle suggests visually within the first minutes of *Rize* that krumpers reclaim the movements of the police officers in the Rodney King beating and integrate them with movements that simultaneously signal resistance and King's bodily resurrection, revising the ending of an event captured notoriously on video.[86] Krumping also draws heavily from African American kinesthetic expression. For example, Dragon's mother and Miss Prissy essentially equate krumping and the kind of dancing as well as the ecstatic experience that can accompany it to those found in African American churches. Miss Prissy states plainly that "these same movements can be found in church."[87] Further, krumpers remain part of the community by keeping up with innovation. Dancers claim emphatically in *Rize* that "every day, the style changes," so much so that, "if you haven't danced in two days [and] if you come to a krump session, we're gonna know." A lack of currency in the latest moves seems to jeopardize group cohesion. The lapse in participation is distasteful enough that, in *Rize*, one of the dancers adds an imagined conversation with a truant who asks, "What did I miss?" and hears in reply, "You've been slacking off. Go home." The proposed consequence for non-participation is further exclusion from the group.

Presaging krumpers, Greater Chesapeake dancers conceived of personhood through dancing together. Heckscher could easily be describing krump instead of black dance in the Great Chesapeake that

[85] Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 344.
[86] The video is absent from *Rize*, yet its wide circulation on national television assures its presence in viewers' imaginations.
[87] Daisy, too, likens being "struck" to "praise dancing in church" in an interview included on the *Rize* DVD ("Tribeca Film Festival Q & A with Cast," *Rize*).

> inextricably enmeshed [dancers] in a dense network of visible, spatial and sounded relationships with others. The very structure of the dances, or of the dance-music relationship ensured that no individual performance could be complete on its own; even the onlookers joined in performance through active judgment and responsive commentary.[88]

As aforementioned, Dragon states in *Rize* that dancing is "the only way of making ourselves feel like we belong." While krumpers dance rather than sing, his claim resembles Douglass's contention in *My Bondage and My Freedom* that "slaves sing more to *make* themselves happy, than to express their happiness."[89] Through dance, krumpers change the way they feel, fashion selves and develop community. Dragon uses the plural to describe forging selves through a creative process that mutually constructs both personhood and relationships: "making *ourselves* feel like *we* belong."[90] Again, like catching the Spirit, Dragon's use of the gerund emphasizes that getting krump is a process that must be continually reenacted to manage emotion, reconstitute community and transform experience.

Krumping also resembles other forms of African American creativity, particularly those that involve free-flowing yet intense competition. In more recent African American dance traditions, such as tap or break dancing, dancers try to best one another in contests both impromptu and staged. Although krumpers in *Rize* seek to distance themselves from commercialized hip hop, krumping strongly echoes b-boying and

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[88] Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 384-385. Similarly, in *Rize*, the dancers in the ring comment on the performance of the soloist although the overdubbing of the movie's soundtrack prohibits hearing their words. In addition, Tommy the Clown states that the crowd will judge the Battle Zone contest winners. He gauges the crowd's applause to determine whether La Niña or Miss Prissy will prevail in one round, for instance. Finally, the *Rize* dancers offer dance criticism throughout the film in interviews about clowning and krumping.

[89] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* 185.

[90] Emphasis mine.

b-girling, or break dancing, as it was initially known in the 1970s and 1980s.[91] So alike are the genres that Barbara Glass's characterization of break dancing, one of hip hop's many incarnations, could almost be descriptive of krumping as well:

> fast and acrobatic. . . . it was also competitive, with "crews" of young people battling each other. . . . The dance competitions could substitute for gang violence, provide bonding within crews, and push dancers to new heights of originality and athleticism.
>
> There was a moment in the dance sequence when the dancer improvised. . . . Furthermore, the crew was a context of mutual respect and equality, and crew members encircled and affirmed the performers as they took turns dancing.[92]

While krumping calls exclusively for improvisation, the forms share traits of African American dance dating to the eighteenth century. Further, they also fall within a long tradition of African American street dancing and hold commonalities with dance in the broader pan-African diaspora, such as Jamaica's dancehall.[93] If the wandering chorus were not already dancing, a wandering circle of diasporic dancers might also be circulating the globe.

Similarly, krump recollects musicians playing in African American genres, especially jazz, who toss each other challenges that can be exploratory and experimental

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[91] In *Rize*, Tight Eyez states: "We're not gonna be clones of the commercial hip-hop world because that's been seen for so many years. Somebody's waitin' on something different, [on] another generation of kids with morals and values [so] that they won't need what's being commercialized or tailor-made for them . . . custom-made, because I feel that we're custom-made. And we're of more value than any piece of jewelry or any car or any big house that anybody could buy."

[92] Barbara Glass, *African American Dance: An Illustrated History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2007) 278. Glass identifies hip hop culture as including "rap music, dance forms (breaking, popping, and locking), the DJ-ing that was itself an art, graffiti, and clothing styles" (280).

[93] Glass 278.

while also holding one's musicianship at stake. Krump battles emerge from a radically egalitarian framework that can encourage dancers not only to excel individually through dancing "against" others, but to strive for mutual improvement. In *Krump 1.0*, for example, Tight Eyez stresses that ultimately all krump dancers are members of the same "family" so pride, hatred and superiority are never legitimate "battle motives." Rather, he emphasizes, "If you battle somebody, your motive should be . . . for the bettering of me and you. I wanna see you dance against me because you bring out the best in me." He specifies, too, that "only certain people can bring out the best in certain . . . people," affirming the importance of individuality as well as its potential in communion with others.

Though krumping is non-linguistic, it recalls, too, the African American oral tradition of playing the dozens, or signifyin(g), in which speakers compete for power by showcasing their talents in improvised insults.[94] Like krumping, signifyin(g) provides an avenue for countering racism by shifting power to persons clearly in command of meaning-making. More recently, poetry slams provide forums for aggressive word play that is also competitive and improvisational.[95] Each art form entails the co-creation of individual and communal performance that can reclaim subjectivity. As in krumping, the communal is integral not only to individual invention, but also identity.

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[94] Zora Neale Hurston, for instance, famously begins *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as residents of Eatonville, Florida play the dozens while sitting on front porches, in part as an antidote to the disempowerment experienced in the presence of whites, a reality that ended at sundown: "These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment" (Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991) 3-4). Krumping retains playing the dozens' competitive improvisation; however, it more resembles Janie's storytelling to her friend Pheoby than the porch sitters' signifyin(g).

[95] Krumpers participate in similar language play as they choose and spell their names. Dance drives krump terminology, however, which borrows a kind of dancing to describe an elevated level of krumpness—"buck"—and a variant of amplify—"amp"—to depict another, the latter again linking dance and sound.

Like tap dancing, break dancing, jazz, playing the dozens and poetry slams, krump is open to female as well as male practitioners although the latter seem more prominently associated with all of these forms of artistic expression, especially historically. While not within the scope of this study, the question of gender distribution among krump could yield additional insight into the cultural context in which krump emerges as well as krump's role in dancers' lives. Does Calvo-Marino's finding that male expert dancers experience higher levels of neurological stimulation than female expert dancers also hold true of krumpers? If so, why? Finding out would require an alternative method of testing, however, as krump does not have gender-specific movements and therefore does not conform to the criterion for Calvo-Marino's second experiment, another fruitful area for future exploration.

In any case, gender could be another level at which plural personhood operates, one of many sites for exchange in a krump session. Constructing one's subjectivity with that of another person or persons might necessarily include incorporating aspects of others' gendered performances into one's own. For instance, Tight Eyez depicts one of his styles in *Krump 1.0* as "pretty," an unexpected descriptor though one counterbalanced by his "rugged" persona. Gender and parental roles can be difficult to untangle in krump, as some dancers emulate mentors and use gendered imagery to explain their approach. In preparation for narrating a battle for instructional purposes in *Krump 1.0*, for example, two male dancers employ a maternal (as well as a kinesthetic) metaphor to explain their intention: "Between the two of us, Rude Dude and Junior Rude, we're going to be basically helping ya'll out, showing y'all, kinda guiding y'all, you know how a mother holds a child's hand. We're going to be walking you through the park a little bit."

In fact, some krumpers are also the mothers of dancers, realizing a potential for interaction in the ring.

In addition to gender, the use of "characters" in krump suggests an intrapersonal component could also comprise a shared dimension of plural personhood. In *Krump 1.0*, Tight Eyez stresses the importance of developing a character or characters that one can assume while dancing. For example, he goes by the name "Tight Eyez" when he performs in a more "flashy" way and by the moniker "Rude Boy" when he channels his alter ego, or, in his words, "the more rugged side of me . . . the side that people don't want to see."[96] The dancers couch character development and style as parallel processes that also reflect self-understanding. Tight Eyez states in *Krump 1.0* that "you build that [character] up by knowing what your style is." The capacity for housing a character and especially for more than one character suggests an openness to a plural personhood even within one's self; selfhood is as non-monolithic internally as it is externally. The dancers in *Krump 1.0* acknowledge that characters can even be "opposite" within the same person, again bringing out a sense of experimentation—the "try" in the alternate spelling of "mixtry"—as does their process-oriented terminology for practicing, "labbing."[97] However, the dancers urge those learning to krump, "don't try to be something you not," not to discourage exploration, but to direct it to an appropriate starting point. Junior Rude advocates for "any type of style you want but make sure it fits you," also in *Krump 1.0*. Character(s) must still be somehow consistent with an

[96] *Krump 1.0*.
[97] "Krumptionary," *Krump Kings*, 2008, Krump Kings, Inc., 6 June 2009, <http://www.krumpkings.com/krumptionary/labbing>. Krumpers deem space for practice as the "Lab," short for "Laboratory" according to the *Krumptionary* definition ("Krumptionary," *Krump Kings*, 2009, Krump Kings, Inc., 6 June 2009, <http://www.krumpkings.com/krumptionary/lab>).

"authentic" self-image, yet facilitate an interior multi-dimensionality that, in turn, meets that of others.

LaChapelle argues in *Rize* that watching krump can be psychosocially transformative. In an article appearing in the *Los Angeles Times* after the release of *Krumped*—LaChapelle's initial, short version of *Rize*, Miss Prissy says, "You can see my story when I dance."[98] As Denver and Beloved co-create a story in *Beloved* that becomes aural and visual, krumpers collaboratively generate stories that are visual and aural, the latter in the sense of Brown and Parsons's conception of dance as producing sound. The non-linguistic stories are visible not only to those within the krump circle, but also to viewers in the extended circle, such as LaChapelle and the film's audience, evoking emotion and touching off cycles of mutually constructing subjectivity. For example, seeing the dancers' stories motivates LaChapelle to enter the circle and improvise in his own style. Through his lens—literally and figuratively, yet resulting from an interactive process, LaChapelle portrays the dancers' stories such that still others can see—and feel—their stories, including the dancers themselves. In conversations filmed after *Rize's* premiere, several dancers state that LaChapelle helped them to see they had "something special."[99] Lil C, for example, tells LaChapelle, "We succeeded a long time ago . . . but you made it evident to us and now it's going to be evident to the world."[100] The dancers as well as LaChapelle report experiencing the film as transforming. *Rize* extends the effect of krumping; through it, the dancers and LaChapelle see themselves through one

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[98] Jessica Hundley, "Cirque for the Soul," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 August 2004: E1; *Krumped*, dir. David LaChapelle, Darkfibre Entertainment, 2004.
[99] Lil C states, "We do have something special" ("New Dancer Interviews," *Rize)*. The Rice Track Family recounts a different experience of seeing the film as Laurence "Solow" Gogit describes disappointment that their group was featured more briefly than expected, only seconds despite a day's worth of footage (Chang).
[100] "New Dancer Interviews," *Rize*.

another. As in a krump session, they mutually construct their subjectivities; and, as artists, they bring out the best in one another as the dancers state that krump can also accomplish. The combination of the dancers' and LaChapelle's unique visions contribute to the mixtery, or, as Tight Eyez comments that *Rize* made him realize, the dancers and filmmakers "all had a purpose and we all had to serve a purpose to each other by being in each others' lives."[101]

Put another way, the dancers' stories achieved a level of krumpness that LaChapelle and, through *Rize*, others could also experience. Indeed, akin to a krump session, *Rize* can emulate enough "energy" or "spirit," as some dancers deem it, to sweep the film's viewers into its convection. For example, an article in London's *Observer* newspaper described the reaction of the audience at the film's Sundance premiere as motivating movement in both senses of the term: "standing up, emotional, crying; 60-year-old women said this film moved them, because they were inspired."[102] Again, the dynamic process of krumping extends beyond the krump circle, as is also apparent given krump's international following, some of which resulted from persons watching *Rize*. Krumpers in Australia, for instance, cite *Rize* as part of the impetus and method of instruction for learning to krump, and the dance's migration to New Zealand came full circle when the Bully Nerd Squad traveled to the United States to compete against krumpers in Los Angeles at the latter's invitation.[103]

Learning, a process reinforced by observation and kinesthetic knowledge, becomes a medium by which krumping can be transcultural. Neuroscientists Grafton and

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[101] "New Dancer Interviews," *Rize*.
[102] Benji Wilson, "Krump for Joy," *The Observer*, 6 November 2005, Features: 5. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2005/nov/06/features.review1>.
[103] Emerson.

Cross note that "behavioral research on action learning conducted during the past half-century suggests that . . . learning from observing and simultaneously reproducing another individual's movements, results in the quickest and most accurate learning."[104] The proliferation of krumpers around the globe demonstrates that the dance can be learned remotely, although krumpers also travel to teach their technique.[105] Although krumpers invest hours labbing (practicing), many of their moves are based on actions that are accessible to most people. Almost everyone knows how to "stomp," for example; however, executing a multitude of movements improvisationally involves acquired skill. Reminiscent of the Kentucky woman's commentary on mixtery, Tight Eyez remarks in *Krump 2.0* that krump requires more than making an ordinary movement like an arm swing: "It's simple. Anyone with an arm can do that, but it takes a lot to have flavor."

Like the mixtery of African American song, however, the meaning of krump can be lost on those outside the circle. The dancers in *Rize*, for example, often explain that despite appearances to those unfamiliar with krumping they are not fighting.[106] The gap dates back centuries in the context of African American expression observed by outsiders, especially whites. Uninitiated eighteenth- and nineteenth-century observers often described African American dance similarly to African American music, as "strange" or "bizarre."[107] For example, Heckscher cites the commentary, "in Maryland in 1774, [of] a young Englishman [who] struggled to find words for the 'Negro Ball' he witnessed: 'Their Dancing is most violent exercise, but so irregular and grotesque. I am

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[104] Grafton and Cross 62.
[105] Auckland krumper "Fasitua Amosa says most people in New Zealand are learning how to Krump by watching DVDs and surfing the Internet" ("W.A.R.—When Angels Rise—Is Auckland's First Krump Battle," *View* (20 June 2006) <http://www.viewauckland.co.nz/tools_feature_print.asp?id=596>).
[106] LaChapelle used footage of the Nuba to portray dancing that looked like krumping, but likely was wrestling.
[107] White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery* 18, 37.

not able to describe it.'"[108] Flashing forward, twenty-first century descriptors of African American dance still confess confusion, as in Sherril Dodds's characterization of krump: "a bewilderingly fast style of L.A. hip-hop dance."[109] Krump, however, shares a continuity with African American expression that often embraces "provocatively juxtaposed elements," as White and White note about music made by enslaved African Americans.[110] In *Krump 2.0*, for instance, Tight Eyez encourages krumpers to be "unpredictable" and "weird" and to make their dancing asymmetrical, the latter characterizing a key element of eighteenth-century African American dance in the Greater Chesapeake.[111]

Despite LaChapelle's enthusiasm for his subject, the notion of seeing can be problematic in *Rize*. LaChapelle generally resists recasting *Rize* in his distinctive style of photography. Although few scenes do slip into his supersaturated colors, he opts for a documentary style for most of the film, including in his choice to use Riefenstahl's footage along with his own to make a case for parallels between the early twenty-first century dancers in Los Angeles and dancers in Africa in the mid-1960s. A controversial German filmmaker, Riefenstahl filmed and photographed two different Nuba tribes in Sudan beginning in 1962. The clips used in *Rize* were likely filmed by Riefenstahl during her stays with the Nuba of Mesakin, Sudan in 1964-65 or 1968-69. The inclusion of the footage in *Rize* revives issues that surround Riefenstahl who produced the Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* in 1938. Jürgen Trimborn chronicles the ongoing

[108] Heckscher, "Our National Poetry" 21-22.
[109] Sherril Dodds, "From Busby Berkeley to Madonna: Music Video and Popular Dance," *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader*, ed. Julie Malnig, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009) 256.
[110] White and White, "'Us Likes a Mixtery'" 415, repeated in *The Sounds of Slavery* 34.
[111] Heckscher, "'All the Mazes of the Dance'" 74.

critique of Riefenstahl's work in *Leni Riefenstahl: A Life* and notes that Susan Sontag considered "the Nuba volumes to be the final stage of Riefenstahl's rehabilitation, which had begun in the United States in the seventies, much earlier than in Europe, after influential artists and performers such as . . . Andy Warhol increasingly expressed solidarity with Riefenstahl and her allegedly timeless longing for beauty."[112] Neither Sontag nor Trimborn considers Riefenstahl unproblematic, however. Trimborn concludes that Riefenstahl's unwillingness to dissociate herself with "the films that she created during the Third Reich" ultimately "brought her entire work into disrepute."[113] Andy Warhol's help in launching LaChapelle's career might explain the latter's familiarity with and respect for Riefenstahl's work.[114] Riefenstahl valued beauty above all else, according to Trimborn, who suggests that this contributed to her unwillingness to renounce fascism and her propaganda films that were used to encourage it.

Weaving contemporary footage with that of Riefenstahl also raises the spectre of focusing an "imperial gaze" on the Nuba and, by extension, on the krumpers to whom LaChapelle compares them. Scholars in the field of postcolonial studies such as Homi Bhabha theorize that representatives of empires often construct a view of colonial subjects distorted by inequitable power based on ethnocentrism, or an imperial gaze, that reinforces hegemonic power relations and structures, including and especially racism.[115] The Nuba footage can potentially reiterate such a gaze, opening LaChapelle to criticism for connecting the two groups of dancers. LaChapelle strikes a precarious balance

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[112] Jürgen Trimborn, "Riefenstahl Discovers a New World," *Leni Riefenstahl: A Life*, Trans. Edna McCown (New York: Faber and Faber, 2007: 247-261) 256.
[113] Trimborn 261.
[114] "David LaChapelle Claims Pop-Art Throne: One of the Most Sought-After Photographers Deemed Heir to Warhol," *Sunday Morning*, CBS News, 4 March 2007, transcript, 20 Oct. 2008 <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/03/01/sunday/main2529341.shtml>.
[115] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

between exoticizing dancers' bodies, honed by the rigorous, physically demanding work of krumping, and showing their beauty.[116]

By contrast, the dancers indicate that imagining such a direct link with Africa had not occurred to them until they saw the film, and they appear to be awed rather than disturbed at the proposed connection. Lil C states that he "had no idea that the movements were so similar . . . to me, that's one of the most powerful scenes in the movie."[117] The film portrays the dancers' acute awareness of how society often perceives them stereotypically, as, for instance, "sports players," so their placement of the parallels that LaChapelle draws to the Nuban dancers into a different framework—one of connection with an unconscious heritage—is even more striking. However, Lil C also comments that the scene left him speechless when LaChapelle asked him about it after he watched the film, going on to say that the dancers were "not copying" the movements because they did not know about them.[118] He surmises that the connection must be "like memory genes," in some ways a similar concept to mirror neurons; however, the idea becomes problematically represented as biological rather than cultural by LaChapelle in some interviews, feeding centuries-old stereotypes.[119] Historically, it seems more likely that the *Rize* dancers more directly inherit from their Greater Chesapeake predecessors who, in turn, created mixteries from West African dance traditions due to the region's geographic centrality in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slave trade rather than from the East African Nuba region; however, the seemingly acute congruencies illustrate how such a legacy might work. Functionally, dance can facilitate the passing on of

[116] Jennifer James usefully noted this distinction on an earlier draft of this chapter.
[117] "New Dancer Interviews," *Rize*.
[118] "New Dancer Interviews," *Rize*.
[119] "New Dancer Interviews," *Rize*. See, for example, Elvis Mitchell, "On the Menu at Sundance: Quirky Chef and Dancers," *The New York Times*, January 21, 2004, E1.

meaning and technique by tapping into intertwined pathways that encode neurological, social, emotional, musical/rhythmic and kinesthetic cues reinforced by the vernacular of everyday use.

Rize takes its cue from the structure of the dance itself. Like krump, *Rize* features a cast of many dancers instead of focusing solely on an individual. However, *Rize* includes individual interviews with dancers which are akin to solos in the krump circle that the film also contains. Both give viewers a sense of dancers' distinctive personalities.[120] In the film, Swoop lists identity-related recognition as a benefit of dance when he says, "I can make myself a name to where people know who I am." Interviews with several dancers and filmmakers included on the *Rize* DVD also recall the structure of a krump session. Nine dancers, LaChapelle and, in one segment, director of photography Morgan Susser, sit together in a semi-circle. LaChapelle introduces everyone by name, and each person receives time to talk about their experience of the film. As LaChapelle and the dancers talk to viewers, who complete the circle, they live out in yet another way LaChapelle's stated desire that "when you watch *Rize*, I want you to feel that you're in the audience watching a krump session, as [if] you're a spectator at the actual krump session."[121] Daisy conveys an similar sentiment when she tells the unseen audience, "I hope you can get krump, too."[122] LaChapelle is conscious of many of the parallels between krumping and making *Rize*, thanking the dancers for "letting me and Morgan enter your lives . . . [and] get krump with y'all in whatever way we can."[123] In addition, he likens his filmmaking team to a krump group, especially in their offers of

[120] Similarly, the Krump Kings's Web site includes a self-generated profile for each dancer.
[121] "Filmmaking Insight," *Rize*.
[122] "DVD Introduction with Cast and Director David LaChapelle," *Rize*.
[123] "DVD Introduction," *Rize*.

encouragement as challenges arose during the two-and-a-half year process of making the movie. Addressing the dancers, he states that his team was "my crew, and you guys had your crew."[124] His hands meet as he continues, "and we all came together and I feel like it was a real gift."[125] Likewise, Baby Tight Eyez's remark that "this is all of our movie" resembles the way that a krump session belongs to all participants.[126]

Discussing krump exceeds language at other points in the sessions, as when LaChapelle explains the difference between his choice to edit the film to dance, unlike many music videos that edit to the beat of the music. Meaning the krumpers, he begins, "I'm letting the dancer come out," but then starts moving his arms and body as if krumping.[127] He continues, arms still moving, ". . . [letting them] get the thing" and proceeds to pummel Susser gently as he becomes even less articulate though more physically animated: ". . . and before they even get the thing, they're getting . . . they're just . . ." Finally, he illustrates his words with his hands, making an arc to show the climactic trajectory of a krump session, as he concludes his own abbreviated version, "They're peaking . . . they're getting krump."[128] LaChapelle again relies on a bodily response at the close of another conversation with the dancers. In an effort to describe the film linguistically, LaChapelle offers, "It was . . . " and then lets out his breath, "whew," managing only in the segment's final seconds, "It was great."[129] The making of *Rize* mirrors krump's mixtery in yet another way. Referring to a backpack-turned-

[124] "Filmmaking Insight," *Rize*. In referring to his film crew, LaChapelle signifies on "crew" as krumpers sometimes refer to their groups as "crews." For example, "Crew" is a category on *KrumpKings.com* under which krumpers' biographical sketches appear ("Crew," *Krump Kings*, 2009, Krump Kings, Inc., 21 Nov. 2009, <http://www.krumpkings.com/crew/>).
[125] "Filmmaking Insight," *Rize*.
[126] "Tribeca Film Festival Q & A with Cast," *Rize*.
[127] "Filmmaking Insight," *Rize*.
[128] "Filmmaking Insight," *Rize*.
[129] "New Dancer Interviews," *Rize*.

camera-holder customized for the documentary's filming, LaChapelle explains that "it's homemade."[130] His *bricolage* extends to the movie's very existence whose subject found him in the manner of found object. Making a film, he contends, is "not about the camera and it's not about the lights. It's about having a feeling," again consistent with krump's emphasis on emotion, and "about having a subject find you."[131]

Daisy envisions krump as "an outreach movement," a perspective consistently held among krumpers and evident in Los Angeles-produced instructional DVDs as well as the development of krump groups for primary school children in New Zealand.[132] Likewise, Dragon visualizes krumpers on an almost evangelistic voyage provided by the vernacular. In the opening minutes of *Rize*, he fittingly characterizes krumping in terms of mixtery in a statement that also alludes to the challenges that dancers face:

> Well, if you're drowning and there's nothing around for help but a board floating, you're gonna reach out for that board. And this was our board. And from this board, we floated abroad, and we built us a big ship. And we're gonna sail into the dance world, the art world. We're gonna take it by storm because it's our belief. This is not a trend. Let me repeat. This is not a trend.

Almost two hundred years after the songs of sorrow rang through the woods, a group of African Americans again recognize communally-devised, non-linguistic expression as their "board" and proactively adapt it for their use.[133] The board-turned-

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[130] "Filmmaking Insight," *Rize*.
[131] "Filmmaking Insight," *Rize*.
[132] "Crew," *Krump Kings*, 2009, Krump Kings, Inc., 6 June 2009, <http://www.krumpkings.com/crew/pages/kkmember-11.html>).
[133] Later in the film, Dragon restates the creation story more directly, explaining that dancing originated in response to a lack of extracurricular activities. The film communicates the isolation and inattention from which the community suffers, particularly its younger members. Again, Dragon uses "we," "us" and "our"

ship forms the life-saving ring of the krump circle, the nautical imagery conjuring up the suffering of the Middle Passage, but also the continuing transmission of African American artistic expression across the Black Atlantic. Indeed, krumpers approach dance as "not a trend," but, rather, a tool powerful enough to promote survival. Further, just as Douglass depicted the songs of sorrow, the dancers see krumping as a way to communicate beyond the circle. Krumpers' kinesthetic storytelling generates empathy and, in doing so, sanctions space for the stories of others to be expressed equally freely.

Rize culminates in the joy of krumping. One imagines that dancers feel as healthy as they look in the film's penultimate scene, bodies sculpted by krumping soaring above the ground and, in an evocation of baptism, glistening from water poured over them.[134] Miss Prissy, Lil C, Dragon and others leap in what seems like exultation under an azure sky in the California sun. A passing Metro train in the background enhances the effect of motion in the dancers' lives as a function of krumping. LaChapelle's choice of the gospel standard "Oh Happy Day" as the accompanying soundtrack again marries spirituality with krumping and emotion overtly, much in the same way as some of the dancers profess dancing to be an aspect of their Christian faith.[135]

In her National Book Award acceptance speech addressed to the publishing industry, "The Dancing Mind," Toni Morrison frames the empathic exchange of ideas between human minds as a dance that achieves "a certain kind of peace:" "The peace I am thinking of is the dance of an open mind when it engages another equally open one—

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throughout his commentary. The founders asked, according to Dragon, "Is there something else for us to do?" besides sports. In response, he says, "a group of us got together and we invented this."

[134] LaChapelle states that the water attempted to echo the Nuba's use of oil, of which the krumpers were not aware at the time of the filming.

[135] Some krumpers assert that krump is an acronym that stands for Kingdom Radically Uplifted Mighty Praise and there is some conversation on Web sites and in film about redirecting the movement to a more openly Christian focus, such as on the United Kingdom-based Krump Junkies's Web site and in *Krump 2.0*.

an activity that occurs most naturally, most often in the reading/writing world we live in. Accessible as it is, this particular kind of peace warrants vigilance."[136] Morrison's statement leaves open the possibility that both the "dance of an open mind" and its specific peace can occur in settings other than linguistic ones, however. Krumping realizes her metaphor of dance as a conduit for profound interpersonal connection beyond boundaries of geography, race, gender and class.[137]

Krumping creates a forum in which open minds belonging to embodied subjects can engage one another, though through movement rather than language. Similarly, krumpers acknowledge a specific kind of peace that results from a krump session. The catharsis of emotional expression also accounts for Lil C feeling "so serene" and Daisy, "calm," following krump sessions; however, krumping also shares essential elements that Morrison considers imperative to "securing . . . the peace of the dancing mind," including mutually constructing subjectivity, accessibility and creativity.[138] Expressing emotion within the supportive environment of the circle of dancers generates plural personhood akin to that which Morrison ascribes to reader and writer: the "intimate, sustained surrender to the company of my own mind while it touches another's."[139] As Daisy explains, she succeeds in getting krump, or experiencing an ecstatic state while dancing, because she "let go."[140] Krumping turns on a dynamic interchange between individuals that yields greater self-understanding through empathy extended to others, a symbiosis exemplifying the "intimate, sustained surrender" of non-linguistic subjectivity.

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[136] Toni Morrison, *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*, ed. Carolyn C. Denard (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2008) 187.
[137] LaChapelle contends that *Rize* is not about race or class, but rather about "being an artist and recognizing other artists" ("New Dancer Interviews," *Rize*).
[138] "A Conversation about the Documentary *Rize*;" Hundley E1; Morrison, *What Moves at the Margin* 190.
[139] Morrison, *What Moves at the Margin* 190.
[140] "New Dancer Interviews," *Rize*.

Morrison could be commenting on krumping when she goes on to identify the "real life" of the publishing industry as about "creating and producing and distributing knowledge" and "about making it possible for the entitled as well as the dispossessed to experience one's own mind dancing with another's."[141] Krumpers create, produce and distribute not only new dance moves daily, but new knowledge and ways of being in the world that require neither entitlement nor dispossession, though they can grow out of combating the latter. Krumping is accessible to virtually anyone, and participants seek to protect it from becoming an activity associated with entitlement. Morrison refers to a "vigilance" that depends both on political and personal freedom, mutually cultivated to permit "the dancing mind." In this sense, she depicts a practice. Krumping similarly calls for the continuous recreation of a space in which imaginative, reciprocal exchange can occur among dancing bodies inhabited by dancing minds.

Shall we dance?

[141] Morrison, *What Moves at the Margin* 190.

Epilogue

Mixtery can provide a rubric for reworking African American literature, like the keeping room quilt in *Beloved*, to yield new meanings. By reassembling a genre that is itself a mixtery, an alternative view of the past could emerge along with the recognition of mixtery in a wide range of texts. Further, a preview of the future might result from observing the influence of mixtery on form. How will the transmission of mixtery via mirror neurons continue to shape African American literature, especially through non-linguistic expression particularly attuned to neurological response, including singing, quilting and dancing?

In the sense of Jill Dolan's "utopian performative," mixtery can provide an opportunity to experience the present in a way that serves as practice for the future. Dolan theorizes that live theatrical performance can offer momentary glimpses of a "transformed world" that can potentially generate change outside of a temporarily created utopia, or "'no-place.'"[1] She conceives of "utopia in performance" as a prelude to increased moral awareness and, more so, moral action.[2] What happens, then, when similarly ephemeral, yet real, mixteries become part of a body of literature? Can their inclusion in a variety of texts transfer a sense of the utopian performative as well as its call to action?

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[1] Jill Dolan, "Utopia in Performance," *Theatre Research International* 31.2 (2006: 163-173) 165. See also Dolan's 2005 book of the same name. I use Dolan's theoretical construct with the caveat that I find the partisan way in which she frames it problematic.

[2] Interestingly, Gilroy finds black musical expression necessarily intertwined with similar ethical concerns and contends that "utopian desires . . . fuel" the politics of transfiguration inherent in black performance (37). His characterization notably leads away from language as he observes that this politics is "not a counter-discourse but a counterculture that defiantly reconstructs its own critical, intellectual, and moral genealogy in a partially hidden sphere of its own" (Gilroy 37-38). He could be describing the utopian performative when he states that "the politics of transfiguration strives in pursuit of the sublime, struggling to repeat the unrepeatable, to present the unpresentable. Its . . . hermeneutic focus pushes towards the mimetic, dramatic, and performative" (Gilroy 38).

Does mixtery as a polyphonic and polylogic medium exemplify a democratic environment and thereby an ethical one?[3] Though we cannot excise enslavement from history, can the performative utopia of mixtery help to remake memory, a process that necessarily reconstitutes fragments given the impossibility of seeing a cohesive whole? Through mixtery's exchange, can we, like the 30-Mile Woman, gather pieces into a mixtery, a technique that implies both impermanence and the reordering of experience? Can mixtery supply a forum in which memory can appear, offering the potential afforded by the orange patches in the keeping room quilt? The orange squares occupied a multi-dimensional space that proved expansive despite suppressive surroundings, similar to the "deep pine woods," the Clearing and the krump circle.[4] As a model for African American memory, mixtery could be allied with morality in its capacity to provide a "no-place" for communal expression. Thus, the location of the keeping room quilt might aptly describe the function of mixtery in the evocation of African American memory. Perhaps mixtery can create a keeping room, a shared space for memory that nevertheless must be continuously produced.[5]

Quilting can also illustrate mixtery's relationship with memory in another way. As individual pieces are essential to the structural and aesthetic integrity of a quilt that is a mixtery, each quilter is necessary to the construction of the quilt as well as to the group of quilters. The quilters of Gee's Bend, for instance, can identify where a quilter worked on a quilt based on the appearance of stitches that reflect the sewer's idiosyncratic style.[6] These individuals' particular presences can encode mixtery in memory, aided by forms

[3] These questions emerged in conversation with Jennifer James.
[4] Douglass, *Narrative* 24. "Patches" and "squares" denote space.
[5] "Keeping" implies both claiming for remembrance and the process of remembering
[6] *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, dir. Matt Arnett and Vanessa Vadim, VHS, Tinwood, 2002.

that lend themselves to the capacity of mirror neurons to compound their impact on memory. The combination of cultural expression and plural personhood can render extraordinary complexity akin to White and White's description of the songs of enslaved African Americans being "virtually impossible to notate."[7] The amalgam of singularly distinctive cues might hold the greatest potential for establishing and retrieving memories, according to the previously discussed "multiple-trace memory model."[8] What keeps mixtery outside of language might therefore also make it memorable, as well as partially account for its invisibility or absence in hegemonic discourse.

Why, then, if forms of communal expression hold powerful possibilities for the transformation of experience and the transmission of memory—in short, for learning, do they tend to be marginalized in hegemonic discourse? The process-orientation of mixtery and other utopian performatives could represent one, among many, reasons that some constructions of history as well as educational enterprises cling to material artifacts, particularly written texts, for canonical form and content. The valorization of material artifacts reinforces what forms count as knowledge, and disparities in access to creating them can result in exclusion based on race, gender and/or class. However, mixtery's existence within African American literature expands epistemologies on its own terms.

The vernacular opens up possibilities for engagement, both in non-linguistic modalities such as singing, dancing and quilting and in linguistic representations that endeavor, simultaneously, to put them into and keep them outside of language. Mixtery yokes participation with memory, expanding the definition of what, how and whom African American literature can remember. The insertion of African American

[7] White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery* 34.
[8] Levitin 165.

communal expression into modes of discourse considered closed to non-hegemonic representation can recall forms that represent different kinds of knowledge than those afforded by semiotic systems. Moreover, re-membering African American literature through mixtery can re-populate it with people, practices and knowledge "disremembered" in Morrison's term.[9]

Mixtery's multifaceted construction contributes to its resilience; its intricacy supports the strength of its relational web of expression and people, holding a shape that does not allow those who make it up to be forgotten. Incorporating the tightly woven, yet dynamic, structure of mixtery into African American literature recalls African American communal expression, making "juxtaposed elements" integral not only to the contours of African American literature, but also to American history and memory.[10] Accordingly, the songs of sorrow comprise a crucial element of Douglass's subjectivity and life story and, thus, become part of the history of slavery and the texts that represent it. Quilting also retains a place in remembering enslavement, just as Beloved becomes a part of Sethe's memory, reflected in the quilt's transformed colors. Foote's autobiography represents the hymns that freed her in multiple ways, as krumpers similarly experience dance that structures *Rize*. Whether through singing, quilting, or krumping, mixtery continues to provide a strategic as well as theoretical model for the complex creolizations of non-linguistic African American expression, plural personhood and memory. To what no-places can mixtery take us?

[9] Morrison, *Beloved* 274.
[10] White and White, "'Us Likes a Mixtery'" 415, repeated in *The Sounds of Slavery* 34.

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Appendix: Guide to Recordings

"Mixtures of Joy and Sorrow." Spoon Creek Primitive Baptist Church in Critz: Service led by Brother Joyce, Elder Clifton, Larry Crotts and Buddy Crotts; selections from the Goble Hymn Book. Rec. 11 April 1976. Audiotape. FT-633. Tape 1 of 3 (Track 1).

"Mixtures of Joy and Sorrow." Greasy Creek Primitive Baptist Church: Selections from the Old School Hymnal #9. Rec. 12 March 1976. Audiotape. FT-616. Tape 1 of 3 (Track 9).

"Mixture of Joy and Sorrow." Long Branch Primitive Baptist Service. Rec. 31 Jan. 1976. Audiotape. FT-594. Tape 1 of 2 (Track 7).

"Holy Is the Lamb" (Verses 1, 3 and 7). Julia A. J. Foote and E. A. Hoffman. Recreated by Eric Armstead and choir from Julia A. J. Foote, 1879, 1886, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch* in *Spiritual Narratives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Brett Sutton granted permission to use the above recordings of "Mixture[s] of Joy and Sorrow" which are all from the Brett Sutton and Peter Hartman Collection (#20042), Southern Folklife Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Eric Armstead recorded "Holy Is the Lamb" in Stafford, Virginia on March 1, 2010. The singers include Erick Armstead, Gabriel Armstead, Maya Armstead, Mykel Armstead, Ashley Jordan and Leonna Marion.