Not yet? Ya basta: Healing and the horizons of an otherwise in Salinas, California

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Not Yet? *Ya Basta*
Healing and the Horizons of an Otherwise in Salinas, California

Megan S. Raschig
Not Yet? *Ya Basta*
Healing and the Horizons of an Otherwise in Salinas, California

Megan S. Raschig
Gonzalez is a visual interdisciplinary and community-based artist, mentor, and artistic director of Urban Arts Collaborative in Salinas; His work includes acrylic, oils, watercolor painting, drawing, murals, installations, and creative happenings. "Through my work across these media, conversations and sharing the creative space with youth; I further expand my knowledge about the power of arts to be a healing tool for youth to advocate and develop their leadership in real life experiences" states Gonzalez. "I am committed about promoting healthy youth leadership development through impactful creative expression exploring the nexus of arts, culture and healthy equity for youth and families" Gonzalez infuses his own Mexican roots with themes inspired by nature, life experiences and a celebration in the spirit of his indigenous ancestors informed by nature. Gonzalez received his Master in Fine Arts, in Creative Inquiry Interdisciplinary Arts in the fall of 2014 from the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, CA. He attended San Diego State University, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences Art with an emphasis in Studio Arts in 2008. Gonzalez grew up in Salinas and returned to create and transform spaces for youth and community using the power of arts and to effectively advocate for more equitable resources for youth and their families for public arts, environmental stewardship/land use and healthy youth equity and amplified opportunities to raise youth voice. Gonzalez’s community-based experience, artwork and dedication to advance youth equity through creative expression makes visible and palpable his passion for the human rights and healing informed creative expression in Salinas Valley. Gonzalez is currently the Artistic Director & founder of The Urban Arts Collaborative ‘nature is art art is healing” and is committed to transform his community through the power of arts.

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Acknowledgments

Si se puede, I learned early in my fieldwork, the rallying cry of generations in the Southwest and across the United States. Yes, it’s possible, yes, it can be done. It was one of the many teachings I’d pick up along this doctoral journey, many of which not only made it into this text, but made the work possible at all. Those teachings that aren’t explicitly articulated here might be heard reverberating somewhere in my analysis, my approach, my very being. This text barely does justice to the critical social shifts happening in Salinas and its environs, but my hope is that it may contribute to the wider recognition of these forms of change and continuity as precious and powerful. I can’t thank enough the folks who supported and inspired me along the way, sharing their energy and experience, manifesting this dissertation from all angles, though I’ll try to sum up some of this gratitude here.

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Palabra!
## Appendix of Selected Spanish and Nahuatl Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Spanish/English Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carga</td>
<td>In the healing collective context, literally ‘baggage’. More broadly, carga can also refer to a load, charge, or burden. Part of the check-in in a healing circle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Círculo</td>
<td>Healing circle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conocimiento</td>
<td>The relational knowing and understanding of another. This is not all-encompassing knowledge but a way of being with the other that is intuitive, partially unspoken, relational and charitable. To have conocimiento, one generally must have confianza in the other too, glossed as trust and comfort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gente</td>
<td>Folk. In practice gente gestures to ‘regular community members’ or local inhabitants, akin to ‘the people’ in politicized vernacular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mujer</td>
<td>Literally, ‘woman’, but colloquially to call someone a mujer in Spanish while otherwise speaking in English indicated the woman in question’s emphatic strength and often social consciousness. When capitalized in the text as Mujer, I am referring specifically to a member of the women’s healing collective, La Colectiva de Mujeres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepantla</td>
<td>In México/Aztec cosmology, a metaphysical vector of indeterminate in-betweenness, generative through its non-linearity and openness. In Nahuatl, literally means an in-between space. Gloria Anzaldúa popularized the concept in using of nepantla to elaborate her thinking on liminality and potentiality in light of the borderlands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ometeotl</td>
<td>‘All my relations’, a way of opening or closing a prayer or indicating a blessing, and a reference to a fundamental pair of México/Aztec gods (though this is disputed in historical scholarship).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palabra</td>
<td>Literally, word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placaso</td>
<td>Literally, tattoo, but also (and here specifically) a gang-given nickname.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plática</td>
<td>In the healing circle context, the segment after the check-in of cargas and regalos (baggage and gifts) when broader or unifying topics are discussed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raza</td>
<td>Literally, race. Rendered a cipher of Chicano cosmic consciousness through the work of Vasconcelos, La Raza Cósmica.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regalo</td>
<td>In the healing circle context, one’s gift, namely that which they are appreciative of. Part of the check-in in a healing circle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teponaztli</td>
<td>Style of México/Aztec drum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonantzin</td>
<td>México/Aztec mother goddess. Also recognized in a latter iteration as the patron saint of Mexico Our Lady of Guadalupe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya Basta</td>
<td>“It’s enough!”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Circling up

We could hear the children’s chants – AMOR Y PAZ! LOVE AND PEACE!! – muffled by the walls and competing with the sound of speeding cars and honking, so much honking, staccato bleats and leaned-on horns. It was grey outside at half past five in the afternoon in May, but we kept the lights off in the little office of the BreadBox community center in East Salinas, where we gathered, as every Monday and Thursday, for the women’s healing circle.

Most of us had just been out there on the sidewalk, some on the front lines with young boys and girls holding up signs of No More Violence, Amor y Paz, WE WANT TO TALK NOT FIGHT, some with arms crossed hanging around the back of the ambulating dozens, looking around, taking it in. People milled and strode across the breadth and width of the pavement, fists pumping in the air, chants coming and going. Daniel1, a member of the men’s healing collective MILPA, lit charcoal and laid it in a wide abalone shell, pulling apart pieces of fresh copal, a ceremonial resin the texture of taffy, on top. He let the sweet white smoke billow towards the children and into the corners of the door frames of the BreadBox, the site of the evening’s community dialogue and space for healing.2

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1 A pseudonym. Throughout this dissertation, aside from a few individuals who have consented to using their real names, all others have been given pseudonyms.

2 An appendix of Spanish and Nahuatl words used throughout this dissertation is available on page 8-9. English was the primary language spoken during my fieldwork though most everyday discourse was a mix of Spanish, English, and the occasional Nahuatl term. As many of these words encapsulate significance and shades beyond their English translations – such as palabra, conocimiento, carga and regalo – and where appropriate I unpack the term and continue to use them in their original language.
The dialogue was premised on the belief that people needed to let something out, to vent and to speak, after the shock of the recent homicides on these neighborhood streets. The protest was just a warm-up, and soon all 150 or so of them would be invited inside to sit in a wide circle. Mamas, comfy in colorful sweatsuits after days spent in the strawberry fields, joined their children holding up blue office paper with scribbled-on slogans, as men with brown weather-beaten skin and cowboy hats clapped along. Across the street other signs were being held up, part of another protest with an explicitly anti-police message. Shi, standing away from the curb, clutched her tablet-phone in its sparkly pink case across her waist, tattooed arms crossed under a white knit cardigan, her dark sunglasses on, her mouth tense.

It had been hectic, and we were worn down. All we really knew was that two days prior, an officer from the Salinas Police Department had shot a man named Carlos Mejía outside a bakery, just up Sanborn St. from the BreadBox. Nine days earlier another officer had shot someone else, Osmar Hernandez, outside of Mi Pueblo supermarket, the other way from the BreadBox down Sanborn. Mejía was a gardener, Hernandez a lechuguero or lettuce cutter. Both incidents were caught on film and circulated across everyone’s mobile phone. Angel Ruiz had already been shot by the police a couple months earlier in the parking lot of a chicken wing chain, and it would be another month or so when Frank Alvarado would meet the same end before sunrise in front of his mother’s home. Violent deaths were nothing unusual in Salinas, the youth violence capital of California and an unofficial border between the halves of California claimed by Norteño and Sureño gang factions. With these police homicides, however, came a surge of different responses and social action, most evidently these unprecedented protests.

The action outside was demanding, tempting, triggering, but some of us managed to slip away through a side door of the BreadBox. While the larger community group would gather indoors a bit later, it was already time for the usual Monday evening healing circle of the Colectiva de Mujeres, the Women’s Healing Collective. With sunglasses still on, Shi, as the Colectiva’s facilitator, welcomed us all to the space, but her voice was sharp and her body on edge. It would be a little different today given everything that was happening – the city was in uproar, the East Side in tatters. We had to come to circle though, she reminded us, if we were going to be able to do anything about it, if we even wanted to survive it. She stood to light the bundle of sage resting in the altar surrounded by our plastic stacking chairs, blowing on its embers to make more of the cleansing smoke, and wafting it towards her four times before passing it to the left.

The sage smoke hung in the air as Shi left the time open for anyone to talk. One by one, each of us – Willow and Graciela, Pamela and her daughter Rachel, Ana and Rosa, me and Shi, and a new face, Wera – ‘checked-in’ with the group, attempting in a few words to reckon with what had been happening. Wera grappled with her anger at her friend Osmar’s violent death, and asked us all to support her because she felt her old ‘street self’ coming back these days; she teetered on the edge of her recovery from past alcohol abuse, and on the cusp of concluding her probation, couldn’t bear another violation. For Shi it was not only about these specific deaths but the repetitiveness of death around her, in East Salinas, her whole life, so many of them unsolved and unmourned, just happening and then happening again. Her sunglasses didn’t hide the fact that she was crying. She closed her check-in with the Nahuatl word ometeotl, ‘all my relations.’ Myself, I didn’t know what to say. I had lost track of time those days of action and eruption of violence between police and people. Unlike most of the others in circle, I had never come so close to such spectacular dying.

In between and throughout these check-ins the sounds of the street protestors and their supporters pressed on. Pamela took the rattle, the object held by the circle’s speaker; she shook it once and said palabra, ‘word’. “These people,” she started, “have been silenced so long, but no more. This is them screaming out! In sound but also in actions! Because we are never allowed to just yell and let it out!” She squinted and snarled, her hands balled into fists, and let out a scream, a deep, scraping scream. It reverberated, bone-deep, for a moment, absorbed by the circle of us, then fading into the streetside din. A moment of pause. Then she screamed again. “Like that!”

As if on cue, the Aztec drumming began outside, a deep thudding teponaztli. Still raw from Pam’s screams, I felt physically barraged by the noise and, cringing, turned to Rosa – she was turning to me at the same instant, and smiling.

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3 Nahuatl is an Uto-Aztecan language group spoken by an estimated 1.5 million people in Mexico today, and historically spoken by the Méxica people (also known as the Aztecs). ‘All my relations’ or ometeotl is a sacred invocation that articulates the speakers’ connectedness to all other beings. One of my key informants, Juan, described ometeotl to me as “a powerful word” that connects beings across time. “Teotl especially,” he explained. “It resonates through time, that way,” he gestured behind his shoulder, then paused, and waved his hand the opposite way, forwards. “And that way too. So when we say these things, we should recognize that they make waves through time. The ancestors hear them.”
Not yet

Between the silence and the screams, the healing circle and the protest, my cringe and Rosa’s grin, this dissertation looks to emergent, uncertain, and experimental forms of political engagement at the contemporary late liberal conjuncture of state disavowal of the poor and problematic, and “the new social justice” of health equity and healing. Amidst the mostly slow, but sometimes spectacular, modes of state-sanctioned lethality at work in places like East Salinas – those abandoned, racialized and criminalized communities of color that are strewn across postindustrial America – what kind of politics is possible? In poor communities where life is hard and its management exhausting, where the so-called Latino ‘Sleeping Giant’ lies dormant, and where the stakes invested in silence may be illegible to latent liberal sensibilities, through what registers, relationalities, and temporalities is the social changed? In line with burgeoning activist techniques and tactics associated with ‘the new Civil Rights’ period of lives mattering, among those who feel the world was built against their survival, that very survival constitutes a radical contestation of the social order. Healing expresses “a political choice to try to build a new way of fighting” (Farrag 2016). In Shi’s words, “it’s actually history.” And it’s happening in Salinas; of all the unlikely places, Health Happens Here in Salinas.

Soft green lettuce and strawberry fields surround the city and line its eponymous valley, suggesting abundance, and the beautiful Monterey Bay hugs the coast nearby. The Gavilan mountain range, downy and golden, guides the horizons. But despite its quiet pastoral environment, Salinas is a sizzling, divided city, an interplay of rich and poor produced and sustained by industrial agriculture and the prison industrial complex. Amidst few inviting public spaces but ever-present police forces both local and federal,4 the city feels abandoned by the state but also under its deep suspicion, certain people less valuable and more vulnerable than others. Here, the organic vitality of the endless rows of lettuce contrasts with ubiquitous, layered lethality – the slow poisoning by pesticides of migrant farmworkers and their families; the abrupt violent murders of so many, too many, Latino youth, reported every night on the news in this homicide capital of California; the “social death” of dispossession by federal forces using counterrorinsurgency training developed in Iraq on teenaged boys wearing red or blue (Holmes 2013; Gordon 2008b; Cacho 2012). The East Side of Salinas, in particular, is a place I would come to know as difficult to understand, at once cacophonous and too quiet, mesmerizing and disorderly. With its origins as a Depression-era labor migrant shantytown receiving negligible attention or infrastructural investment, only incorporated into the city in 1963, the East Side’s pockmarked and sidewalk-less streets stand at angles askance from the rest of Salinas. Attempts at description of the neighborhood often fail amid disastrous homicide and poverty statistics, and colorful impressions of barrio life. Journalist Ricardo Robledo (Robledo 2014), opening a feature in the local newspaper showcasing this little-understood part of town, paints East Salinas (also known as the Alisal) as

a mural, banda music, slam poetry, jingle of an ice cream vendor’s bell, Spanish tile roofs, a gunshot, police siren, smell of deep frying carnitas, waft of field-fresh strawberries, blue-suited cops, black-hooded criminals, quinceaneras, funerals, church-going immigrants, soccer as religion, women with babies in strollers. Alisal is a sea of stucco houses, it is garages and sheds crammed with families; idled, dirt-poor Mexican laborers, coiffed Latina entrepreneurs in spiked heels, it is pot holes and computerized schools, wayward teenagers, Chicano college coeds, graffiti-scarred fences, green parks.

Alongside the episodic and impressionistic, the glimpses of beauty and suffering, Robledo concludes with a toast: “the Alisal is low expectations and high hopes – and so much more.”

Persistent phrasings like this underline any attempt to understand the city and its conditions: the Alisal is hope and more, the Alisal and its inhabitants are potential. But audible in these statements, in a register somewhere between panic and lament, is concern for this unfulfilled potentiality, the sense that the place and its people should be better by now, but it and they are not, not yet at least. This concern echoes the broader discursive trope of the Latino Sleeping Giant, the “inaccurate political cliché” that restricts legitimate social engagement among Latinos to already-recognizable practices like voting or formations like coherent collective identity (Beltran 2010:5). The Sleeping Giant figures a huge population that could be so powerful, so critical in elections, for example–but that hasn’t woken up to its power yet, is not yet awake.

4 The city is less than 20 miles from Monterey, home to the Naval Postgraduate School, where much of the country’s anti-terrorism counter-insurgency or COIN training and development occurs. COIN techniques, designed to address insurgency in the Middle Eastern theaters of war, have been applied in Salinas to address local anti-gang efforts since 2009 (Williams 2011).
Despite its hopefulness, as Beltran argues, the Sleeping Giant places limitations on Latinos' political potential in the present by effecting a problematic, impossible demand for Latino unity and homogeneity in order to have a place in the liberal political order. There is far too much variation in historical experience and cultural grounding grouped together in the so-called 'Latino' population to reasonably expect collective political coherence. As I see it, the Sleeping Giant signals a kind of social tensing (cf. Fabian 1983; Povinelli 2011), a power-laden temporization deferring attention from ongoing, potentially impactful action in specific community configurations to an anticipated, momentous, but unfulfillable future as a pan-Latino bloc. It is not only anthropologists who distance the populations they study through grammatical modes of tense like the ethnographic present, as Fabian argued (1983); social tense, as Povinelli sets out (2011), names a range of discursive techniques central to the apportioning and governance of difference in late liberalism. Techniques of social tense, such as discourse of "sacrificial love" that obscures present suffering in light of "what it will have been for," obfuscate and enable the disproportionately damaging sociopolitical realities facing disavowed populations in the present, through temporal displacements that have affective and material effects (ibid). The techniques of tense shape and disperse what can be seen as meaningfully happening, or what can happen at all, and demanding what kind of ethical response from whom. In the case of the Latino Sleeping Giant, any social action that does not fit in the spectacular teleology of ethnically unified progress is devalued or negated, and the late liberal distribution of power is left undisrupted by actions that might otherwise be realized as shifting conditions of life. I want to situate Salinas much like this Giant, less in space and more in time, seemingly stuck on the uncertain cusp of some kind of threshold.

The women, las mujeres, of the Colectiva de Mujeres, also find themselves at such a threshold. Here, now, they form the focus of this dissertation. The Colectiva is a funded experiment of a state-wide philanthropic initiative called Building Healthy Communities, and sister organization to a men's collective's name primarily refers to the philosophy of the milpa, a traditional Mexican agricultural system of communal cropfields, whereby the critical staple maize grows best with its 'sisters', beans and squash. MILPA and the Colectiva's model of social transformation was predicated on cultivating an awareness of the sociohistorical roots of individualized suffering and culpability, and a reflexivity honed through being in circle, in order to make incremental changes in one's life alongside more amplified changes in community life and urban policy. Both collectives employed a series of organic metaphors of preparing the soil of change, spacing dedicated to bringing about something other-than-what-is among a group of women. These women, mostly (but not entirely) Mexicanas and Chicanas in their late 30s, find themselves having somehow, surprisingly, survived so far, despite losing children, friends, lovers to the entrenched conditions of slow and spectacular state-sanctioned killing, and the social death of abjection and negation (Gordon 2008). With around 100 members (of which 30 or so are "solid"), many of the Colectiva's Mujeres are formerly gang-involved, coming from migrant agricultural families, but importantly many are not – there is no distinct experiential criteria for becoming a member.

Shi, a shorthand for the erstwhile placaso or gang nickname 'Shy Girl', had been asked by the Building Healthy Communities managers for months if she would facilitate a healing collective specifically for women, but repeatedly declined. She didn't believe she could manage to guide others in healing when she herself felt still so broken, despite years of spiritual healing and working in the community already. When she agreed to launch such a group, inviting old friends she hadn't seen in the years since she'd retreated from her Sureño gang scene but whom she anticipated were, like her, in need of something different than the usual community fare, she didn't know the form it would take.

"This has never been done before" in Salinas, Shi told me with astonishment about the Colectiva's twice-weekly healing circles a few months into their implementation. "There's never been a safe space for women, raw women, there's never been where women could just sit down and talk." At the same time, even with the same breath, Shi would tell me that "in Salinas, we are frozen, stuck, you can't just do stuff like activism. Everything is so controlled, or so political, that you just can't do anything." These senses planting seeds of consciousness, harvesting knowledge, and so on. These idioms resonated on a number of levels: NAFTA-oriented critiques of GMO corn ravaging Latin and South American economies and lifeworlds; local prominence of Big Agriculture; the grassroots self-sufficiency of backyard gardens (also known in Spanish as milpas, derived from the older Nahuatl word); and the metaphysical togetherness of the tres hermanas or three sisters, corn, squash and beans, that only grow alongside each other.

5 An abbreviation for 'Motivating Individual Leadership for Public Advancement', the men's collective's name primarily refers to the philosophy of the milpa, a traditional Mexican agricultural system of communal cropfields, whereby the critical staple maize grows best with its 'sisters', beans and squash. MILPA and the Colectiva's model of social transformation was predicated on cultivating an awareness of the sociohistorical roots of individualized suffering and culpability, and a reflexivity honed through being in circle, in order to make incremental changes in one's life alongside more amplified changes in community life and urban policy. Both collectives employed a series of organic metaphors of preparing the soil of change, planting seeds of consciousness, harvesting knowledge, and so on. These idioms resonated on a number of levels: NAFTA-oriented critiques of GMO corn ravaging Latin and South American economies and lifeworlds; local prominence of Big Agriculture; the grassroots self-sufficiency of backyard gardens (also known in Spanish as milpas, derived from the older Nahuatl word); and the metaphysical togetherness of the tres hermanas or three sisters, corn, squash and beans, that only grow alongside each other.

6 Chicano/Chicana (hereby referred to following Spanish gender and singular/plural spelling conventions as Chicanos/as) are terms of identification generally chosen by individuals who feel a connection to the Chicano Movement, arising in the 1960s Civil Rights period in the United States. I detail the Chicano Movement and its contemporary iterations throughout this dissertation, and especially in chapters one, two, and four. Chicanas/a is differentiated from Hispanic (an imposed and generally bureaucratic term), Latino/a (a common but still problematic term encompassing those of Latin or South American heritage), Mexican-American (referring to those of Mexican heritage who have been acculturated as Americans themselves or intergenerationally), or Mexican/a (here referring to those who have relatively recently arrived from Mexico to live in the United States). In this dissertation, while aware of the shifting problematics of the labels, I use the 'ethnonyms' preferred by each of my informants.
of novel potential and obstinate constraint hang together in Salinas, forming a morally ambivalent moodedness as a rich setting for shifts in interpretation and orientation of local conditions and possibilities (Throop 2014; 2015).

At the interstices of farmworking, gangbanging, and surviving, sometimes these Mujeres want to be different, but not so different that they lose who or where they have been. They want to change themselves and their community without disavowing either first. Together they are healing – which, as I will show, is less a series of discrete acts or spiritual entreaties and more a renewed modality of orienting to experience and being-together in-the-world – and together they stand at the forefront of an emergent movement. For Latinos in Salinas caught up in the political economy of the “shadow state” of community organizations between reductive categorizations as either farmworkers or gangsters (cf. INCITE! 2009), healing opens a sideways possibility not only for organizing bodies to a protest, but for orienting lives to reinvested histories, stakes, and horizons. Recalibrating their histories and horizons through healing, together they bring about an otherwise (Povinelli 2012; Zigon Forthcoming).

Meanwhile, otherwise

The otherwise, here, names a form of politics that is neither de rigueur nor radical, but which may emerge from already-existing social conditions. Arising in overlooked sites and makeshift configurations, without intention or purpose per se, that which is otherwise (rather than ‘other’) maintains a fundamental provisionality that echoes in its conventional usage as ‘what might be’ in different circumstances, or ‘what may happen’ if something else does or doesn’t. This uncertainty is the fount of its productivity, in terms of possibility. To seek and name an otherwise is to provide a minimal framing for conditions that are changing without those involved having a clear sense of what might ensue.

Making a conscious choice to use a conceptual vocabulary of the otherwise via immanent critical theory and continental philosophy opens space for an ethnographic approach that unsettles conventional Cartesian notions of agentic subjective action standing apart from an objective world. It holds instead that potentiality is not lodged within the agentic individual but differentially distributed across a social realm, laden in pockets of life and practice variably accessible to those differentially situated by configurations of race, class, geography, gender, and so on. Operationalizing the concept as it figures in the work of Elizabeth Povinelli (2011; 2012; n.d.) and Jarrett Zigon (2014; Forthcoming) I trace an otherwise here across multiple registers which may not initially seem properly political, as this tends to be recognized. This is precisely its value as a critical analytic, in configurations where the possibility of participating in liberal politics has been circumscribed, and when the political itself seems so profoundly unmoored and uncertain (Thomas 2011; Scott 2014; Zigon Forthcoming).

The need to rethink politics, or to think it otherwise, is a starting point of this dissertation, engaging an ongoing conversation around the ‘crisis of the political’ from a critical phenomenological-anthropological foundation. A key flashpoint of these conditions-rendered-crisis is Francis Fukuyama’s notorious pronouncement, that with liberal democracy we have reached the pinnacle of progress and the end of history (Fukuyama 2006). This claim has spurred considerable dispute from critical historians, political theorists, and anthropologists, who see this as cause for reckoning rather than triumph. While many agree that we have reached a breaking point in our beliefs in linear history and the march of progress, they query instead (with much trembling) what might be next (Brown 2001; 2015; Critchley 2013; Scott 2014; Moyn 2012; Thomas 2011). In light of the fading of post-Civil Rights identarian New Social Movements, and the concomitant, profound, economization and securitization of governance by neoliberalization especially in the United States, belief in liberalism has waned, its acclaimed universalism and relationship of rights and freedoms discredited.

This crisis is palpable in the anger and despair of the left and right, or the disappointment of activist generations after the ‘tragedies’ of scuttled revolutions (Brown 2001; Scott 2014). As David Scott notes, “the existential rhythms of that enduring relation between past, present and future have been broken,” or at least interrupted, making it hard to “continue imagining the present as though it were merely waiting for its own dialectical overcoming” (Scott 2014:6). Much more than a theoretical problem, this temporal disorientation can be profoundly unsettling in the disruption of experience and expectation (cf. Pickering 2004; Wilder 2015), the very rhythm of how we go through life and persist in being. How do we live in these broken narratives and temporalities of liberalism, Wendy Brown asks (2001), when nothing has taken their place?

While deep disillusionment with liberal democratic politics is an enduring feature of modernity, its American nadir may well be nigh in contemporary late liberalism – a periodization of the present era of advanced capitalism in the aftermath of new social movements in settler colonies,
when the “old coordinates of left, right, and center seem profoundly unmoored” amidst considerable duress, disappointment, and existential strife among progressives and conservatives across the country (Comaroff 2011; Povinelli 2011; Critchley 2013; Cvetkovich 2012; Zigon Forthcoming). As Jonathan Lear (2016) argues, this widespread anxiety and agitation is an expression of the feeling that what it means to be an American, as that has been set out, may cease to make sense. The categories through which Americans have fashioned and understood themselves and each other may already be lost. But while this sense of despair for the national situation and the future of democratic politics may be widespread and urgent, James Fallows (2016) notes, on the ground and in configurations I argue we should recognize in terms of the otherwise, “more is happening.”

Fallows’s three-year long ‘American Futures’ project has taken him across the country to seek the pulse of life in smaller places sharing the “familiar chronicle of stagnation and strain,” but in the throes of locally generated processes of revival. To the question “can America put itself back together?” he answers that it already is, if we care to adjust our lenses. In critical cultural commentary magazine The Atlantic, Fallows points to cities like San Bernardino, California, whose notorieties have inspired local residents to wrest whatever control and opportunities might be found from the resources at hand. While Fallows’s criteria of recovery and revival are decidedly liberal in their valorizing of economic growth and specific arts-based solutions, the forms of local engagement he traces are diverse, and the plurality of futures charted for America in the project’s title may be apt. Similarly, in her book The Next American Revolution (Boggs, Kurashige, and Glover 2012), iconic activist Grace Lee Boggs has noted the need to break attachments to older vernaculars of antagonistic organizing, and argues that another social order will come in diversified facets from those sites abandoned by industrial capitalism, where “people must instead build a new culture from within” (Kohl-Arenas 2015:26; see also White 2016).

While both Fallows and Boggs bring our attention to idiosyncratic, situated, and emergent projects of reinvention and revolution, neither mentions the constraints of liberal political action in many of these depressed or downtrodden places, where racial dynamics and economic precarity generate conditions that can significantly limit local inhabitants’ participation in conventional activist forms. Basic acts of dwelling in public or gathering there in numbers, for example, can constitute existential risks for residents to wrest whatever control and opportunities might be found from the resources at hand. While Fallows’s criteria of recovery and revival are decidedly liberal in their valorizing of economic growth and specific arts-based solutions, the forms of local engagement he traces are diverse, and the plurality of futures charted for America in the project’s title may be apt. Similarly, in her book The Next American Revolution (Boggs, Kurashige, and Glover 2012), iconic activist Grace Lee Boggs has noted the need to break attachments to older vernaculars of antagonistic organizing, and argues that another social order will come in diversified facets from those sites abandoned by industrial capitalism, where “people must instead build a new culture from within” (Kohl-Arenas 2015:26; see also White 2016).

Both industrial agriculture and prison industries require relatively stable source populations to feed and be fed to their machinery, populations akin to “children in the broom closet” (cf. Leguin 1973, in Povinelli 2011) whose being-constrained in precarious labor or incarceration today enables...
go on amidst all-encompassing structural racism, especially as felt among African-Americans and as evoked above by poet Claudia Rankine in *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014), signal these shifting formations and tactics today in what is tentatively being called 'the New Civil Rights' period. Julie Bettie, describing post-Civil Rights as a signifier of a historical moment, argues that its periodizing marks a shift away from the racial essentialism of older identity struggles (2014:xxi-ii). Indeed, today's 'New' Civil Rights gestures towards an increasingly perceptible and intolerable critical node of contention: the enervation, disposability and ungrievability of black life, and the institutionalization of a racist and dehumanizing gaze that perceives black life as an inherent threat to other life and, in particular, white privilege (Day 2015; Butler 2015).

The energy and lethality of going on amidst exhaustion has received considerable attention in recent popular, but critical, texts, like Sara Ahmed’s blog *Feminist Killjoys*, Ta-Nehisi Coates’s acclaimed *Between the World and Me* (2015), and Rankine’s *Citizen* (2014). As Ahmed writes, in such conditions “you might not be trying to move up, to project yourself forward; you might simply be trying not to be brought down. Heavy, heavy histories. Wearing, worn down” (2014). In a situation of structural abandonment, simply to exist in public entails its own precarity. “This need to be always on guard,” as Coates puts it, is “an unmeasured expenditure of energy, the slow siphoning of the essence” that contributes to the “fast breakdown of our bodies” (2015:90). And Rankine’s shape-shifting free verse traces the daily maneuvering of social sleights and race-based denials, “trying to dodge the buildup of erasure” of white America’s obliviousness to black life, and the sting-turned-numb of demands to “feel good. Feel better. Move forward. Let it go. Come on. Come on. Come on” (2014:11, 66). These authors describe the forces of exhaustion, the state-sanctioned slow death, that wear people down and can doom any burgeoning efforts to do or be otherwise (Povinelli 2011:20; Berlant 2007).

They further express the grievous, untenable conditions that led to Black Lives Matter’s emergence, with police homicides as the more evental eruptions of the same slow forces of exhaustion and ‘siphoning of essence’ that cast the latter into relief. In activism swelling around state killing and connected through a chronotopology of names and places – Trayvon Martin, Ferguson, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland – the Black Lives Matter movement has claimed center stage of this historical moment-in-process. The movement’s adherents demand Americans across the board, as well as systems of governance, realize black lives must be made to matter because up until now, they haven’t; in so doing, they draw attention to the racialized the rest of the population’s wellbeing, security and prosperity tomorrow. These particular conditions of state disavowal and industrial exploitation of these California ‘farmtown-ganglands’ effects both great vulnerability and entrenched criminalization of both place and people, the institutionalized assumption of inherent criminality tending to those who are poor, brown, and barrio-dwelling (Cacho 2012). Two sides of the same coin, criminalization and vulnerability generate conditions of withering exhaustion.

Alongside the tragedy of failed revolutions and the frustration of political moralism, exhaustion also figures as a somatic condition of contemporary politics, albeit with an intriguing generativity. As a state of being, exhaustion is increasingly brought to light in terms of unjust social configurations rather than individualized failure or apathy, in the presently-emerging period of what is becoming known as ‘the New Civil Rights’ (Day 2015; Kelly 2015; Onion 2015; Rickford 2016). What kinds of alternative ‘American futures’ might be underway here, among communities of color that have become both criminalized and totally worn down? What else and otherwise can emerge from exhaustion?

### New movements, enduring exhaustion

*To live through the days sometimes you moan like a deer.*

Sometimes you sigh. The world says stop that. Another sigh. Another stop that. Moaning elicits laughter, sighing upsets. Perhaps each sigh is drawn into existence to pull in, pull under, who knows; truth be told, you could no more control those sighs than that which brings the sighs about.

*The sigh is the pathway to breath; it allows breathing. That’s just self-preservation. No one fabricates that. You sit down, you sigh. You stand up, you sigh. The sighing is a worrying exhale of an ache. You wouldn’t call it an illness; still it is not the iteration of a free being. What else to liken yourself to but an animal, the ruminant kind? (Rankine 2014:59-60)*

At a different historical juncture, different experiences of race and race-based social injury take different forms as well, and form resources for different political problems and activist tactics (Ralph 2015). Articulations of the aching and sometimes sickening exhaustion of daily struggles to
asymmetries of the ability to live and be-in-the-world itself. These activists articulate the fraying edges of abidance of these exhausting conditions of socioeconomic inequality and state abandonment, conditions that have become deeply normalized, that all must wake up to and “stay woke” to.

However, despite awareness of a new kind of political formation emerging with Black Lives Matter, naming this period as ‘New’ but a reprise of the earlier and much-mythologized Civil Rights movement is a form of recognition that is at once legitimizing but also limiting, as it subjects the emergent movement to certain past-prime and neutralized criteria (Surette 2015). The so-called ‘Civil Rights gaze’ has been conditioned in part by the original movement’s co-optation in the rising New Right in the 1970s, and institutionalized in conservative form by the multicultural state (Bettie 2014; Dowd Hall 2005). This conservative gaze stands behind critiques of Black Lives Matter’s activist techniques: that it is ‘leaderless’ in its horizontal diffusion and queer rather than heteronormative masculine leadership, or without tangible purpose in its calls to ‘stop killing Black people’ rather than clear pursuit of rights (Kang 2015; Cobb 2016; Alexander 2015). Attachments to old techniques persist alongside new political articulations.

Seeking in part to find “a new way of fighting” through a variety of techniques including spiritual practice (Farrag 2016), Black Lives Matter’s tactics have drawn high-profile skepticism from some, like President Obama (Shear and Stack 2016), but also support from others. Angela Davis, for example, an icon of the Black Panthers Party and the Black Nationalist streak of the Civil Rights era, has argued that “self-care and healing and attention to the body and the spiritual dimension—all of this is now a part of radical social justice struggles. That wasn’t the case before” (Van Gelder 2016). What Davis and other activists realize is that, with this movement’s core problematic of the exhausting experience and problematic perception of black life itself framed in aesthetic and existential in addition to juridical terms, new modalities of intervention are required – modalities like healing, and all that might entail. Expectations about activism or politics properly speaking need to shift accordingly. To reiterate, we need to think politics otherwise, and pursue it in alternative domains.

**But Brown lives matter, too**

The scene that opened this introduction – Salinas’s East Side in tatters, people at once energized and enervated by the sudden action amidst ongoing state disavowal – coincided strongly with this burgeoning move-ment. The period of police homicides in Salinas, which spanned much of 2014 but acutely took form that summer, happened both before and after “Ferguson,” the massive uprising at the officer-involved death of Michael Brown on July 9 that has been designated the cradle of the organized Black Lives Matter movement. When the uprising in Ferguson was saturating the news coverage, my friends in Salinas followed it closely, expressing solidarity but also a frustrating feeling of déjà vu – that already happened here, that happens here all the time, we cried amongst ourselves, as our everyday topics of state violence and police militarization became broadly circulated in mainstream discourse. “Before it happened, it had happened and happened,” as Rankine writes of the Rodney King beatings (2014:116), the blatancy of this particular beating overshadowing the backdrop of its repeated but unacknowledged occurrence.

In Salinas, though, many expressed a compounded disavowal. As was pointed out to me repeatedly by my friends and colleagues in the field, Latino communities endure nearly identical conditions of suspicion, criminalization, and exhaustion as African Americans; Latinos exist in great concentrations in the criminal justice system as well, and they are killed by police at rates lower than African Americans, but still-devastating, across the country. The point of this was not to engage in a kind of dueling “oppression Olympics,” as they would say, but to indicate how their communities have been differently constituted through history and geography and situated elsewhere in the racial imaginary, a coalescence of colonialism and “crimmigration” to the periphery of the black-white binary of slavery and republicanism. The Mexican-American or Chicano Civil Rights movement remains marginal to, if not ignored by, broad imaginations of the country’s racial history, and the issue of so-called illegal immigration in Latino communities often preempts attention to police violence among

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8 According to the Pew Research Center, Latinos have ‘low confidence and high exposure’ with the criminal justice system (Lopez and Livingston 2009). In 2008, 20% of those incarcerated in state, federal and local prisons of jails were ‘Hispanic’. Critically, they are often unaccounted for in juvenile justice incarceration rates, whose statistical instruments do not include a designation alongside white, black, Asian, or Native American. Chapter four gives a sustained discussions of the problematic political history of Census-style statistics and terms like Latino/Hispanic.

9 Crimmigration names the intersection of criminal law and immigration law, and the American juridical system’s treatment of immigrants as criminals in post-Civil Rights-era late liberalism (Hernández and Cuauhtémoc 2014).
both these communities and mainstream America (Santa Cruz, Vives, and Gerber 2015). While some calls of “brown lives matter” are occasionally heard, particularly in California and the Southwest where Latinos populations now outnumber other racial groups to constitute a majority-minority, more common is the question of why a more organized Brown Lives Matter movement has not, it appears, taken shape.10 Perhaps the Sleeping Giant remains dozing because he is exhausted by constant and impossible exhortations for him to wake up when he is so worn out. Or perhaps the Sleeping Giant isn’t waking up as he should because we are thinking in a very limited way about what constitutes that awakening. Holding Latinos in places like East Salinas to certain already-decided delimitations of recognizable political engagement ignores the realities that keep people from engaging — the conditions of exhaustion and negation facing the persistently or “permanently criminalized populations” as Lisa Marie Cacho (2012) calls them, populations who are subject to structural “misrecognitions” as illegal migrants or gang members. These criminalized statuses form not simply exclusions to, but the very foundations of, the liberal political order, as Cacho argues in her text Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected. Those who occupy legally vulnerable and criminalized statuses are not just excluded from justice, but are imagined to be the reason why a punitive justice system exists at all. And yet, in line with liberalism’s universalist aims, we should pursue the forms of social engagement that are possible, amenable, and already underway among criminalized Latino communities.

**Situated adjustments and the opening of health**

To do so, as Laurence Ralph writes (2015), we can begin by considering the conditions through which people come to live among rampant structural and physical violence and its enervating, even sickening, effects. The effects are compounded at a particularly critical juncture of a waning Obama era that mitigated hope with disappointment in the limits of electoral politics to bring about actual, lived, change in conditions of communities of color (Cobb 2016). In turning to the modes through which people cope with the conditions of exhaustion and abandonment of their lifeworlds and manage their ‘heavy, wearing’ histories carried into the present, we find creative embodied responses that align with shifting historical conditions, and can give clues about present constellations of power and future possibilities for action at multiple levels. What is the relationality between persistently criminalized peoples’ forms of coping, managing, and surviving, and the social and political projects that enlist and involve them? How can we understand these forms of management as the resources of novel political modalities, the starting points and transitional vectors of social change? And what other methodological and analytical tools might we develop to ascertain and address these shifting conditions?

Both Ralph (2014; 2015) and Zigon (2014c; Forthcoming) argue that forms of coping and accommodation constitute modes of poiesis, often unfolding through tacit communal frameworks of care, rather than individualized expressions of disaffection or acquiescence, or even failure to be properly liberal self-improving subjects ‘standing up to injustice’. But policies like Stop and Frisk in New York City, and Secure Communities and Street Terrorism initiatives by the federal government, have mandated the state’s constant suspicion of ‘likely’ drug users, illegal migrants, or gang members respectively, making everyday settings like sidewalks, stop signs and storefronts the loci of potential world-crumbling apprehension (Cacho 2012). These policies generate conditions that have rendered dwelling in one’s own world “difficult” to the point of “unbearability,” as Zigon has phrased it, reducing the range of creative possibilities for being-in-the-world “to such a degree that being-in-the-world becomes something like being trapped in a world” (2014c:757).

These broad conditions of disparity, here grasped in terms of unbearable dwelling implicating being and the world at once, tend to be understood and assuaged on the ground in terms of the suffering or failing individual. The diffuse neoliberal demand for the individual to improve and take care of oneself not only suffuses all of American social life, as Wendy Brown argues (Brown 2015), but is further institutionalized and occluded by the American philanthropic tradition. Typical of the late liberal American political economy in which the state systematically retreats from providing support for those residing within its territory, and where the responsibility to soothe social ills is outsourced to philanthropy and

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10 As of July 2014, the number of Latinos surpassed whites living in the state of California, a process that has been underway for years. With an average median age of 29 compared to the median age of white populations at 45, this demographic is expected to keep growing in absolute and relative terms. Nationwide, the Latino population grew 57% between 2000 and 2010, and California’s demographic shifting offers a “harbinger” for national trends as well (Panzar 2015).
devolved to individuals, East Salinas has attracted a rich range of attempts to manage, serve and mobilize its residents. These programs compose a vast patchwork-network of nonprofit and community services and programs, addressing the city’s conditions of disparity through a framework of recovery and health. Though newly resonant in the era of Obama’s Affordable Care Act, signed into law in 2009 and implemented in 2014, Salinas’s saturation of health-oriented programs are artifacts of a longer history, emerging from a postwar and late liberal entanglement of the pragmatics of structural disavowal and people’s dreams of social justice (Kohl-Arenas 2015; Nelson 2015).

But despite significant philanthropic investment of money and energy, and the moralized imperatives around health they engender, people’s participation in these various institutionalized forms of salvation in Salinas has remained a challenge to inspire. There is another disparity besides wealth and health, it seems, along the lines of will, read as individualized agency to participate in their own improvement via community programs, or resist their obvious exploitation through sociopolitical engagement. This is the not yet in Robledo’s toast to the community or more broadly the Latino Sleeping Giant, a social tensing assigning a group of people to an unfulfilled present with a future unclear and out-of-reach, with implications of moral failure. However, depleting and depleted social conditions like those in Salinas should alert us to precisely the limitations of individualized analytical terms like will, signaling instead the social distribution of constraint and potentiality, disproportionately sprinkled across landscapes of neoliberalism and neglect.

Whereas conventional individual-oriented health programs have modestly persisted in Salinas, healing has another edge. Since 2010, many of these community programs have been gathered under the umbrella of the ten-year East Salinas Building Healthy Communities initiative among thirteen other similarly underserved but potential-rich neighborhoods statewide, funded by private health foundation The California Endowment. The Endowment’s health equity approach shifts the focus to the social determinants of health, calibrating variables like access to fresh food, sidewalk quality, and streetlamp coverage with institutionalized racism and economic opportunity in a manner that makes space for a dwelling perspective. And, as I explicate below, those funded by the Endowment in Salinas have further tapped into both an enduring Chicana/o aesthetic of the wound and a contemporary groundswell in activism around queer thinker Audre Lorde’s claim for self-care as warfare, to open health onto healing as a critical means of managing disavowal and exhaustion, a modality of being and becoming otherwise through a range of practices, relationships, and dispositions that shift conditions and experiences of being-in-the-world or dwelling.

How people are or come to be takes generative form amidst the world around them and across scales of time, and their creative situated adjustments and interventions – what Jarrett Zigon terms an ‘ethics of dwelling’ – not only intervene on the individual but build a world that is ever opening onto an otherwise. This ethics, he argues, is the primary modality of politics understood as world-building (Zigon 2014c), and in this light the relationality between exhaustion, healing, and an emergent form of politics begins to sharpen.

Healing

The honking diminished, the children’s voices softened. Protest signs became planted in front gardens rather than hoisted in the air. But as the heyday of the police killings of Mejia and Hernandez ebbed and the action flowed back into ongoings, the Colectiva de Mujeres kept up its twice-weekly healing circles. All of us were coping with the recent deaths in different ways – Tara and Shi joining activist coalitions and keeping poster boards on hand for protest, Josefina avoiding the topic entirely, younger and college-busy women like Jalissa and I becoming ever-more interested in and aware of the dynamics of police brutality – but seeking means of doing so altogether in circle through a modality of healing. The healing circle seemed like the one place where we could find respite from the twin exhaustions of engagement and death, wanting to change the abiding conditions of lethality yet feeling saturated by the looming inevitability of death all around.

Tara, especially, embodied this dynamic. Nearing the end of her probation term, Tara had much at stake in managing the minutiae of her day-to-day life, and spent her time soliciting rides to circulate between AA meetings, city council sessions, our healing circles, and her Probation Officer. Her driver’s license wasn’t the only thing she lost when she was locked up – she lost her husband as well as her unborn child, and was still charting the contours of her compounding grief. The recent death of her friend Osmar Hernandez, the second victim of police homicide in Salinas in 2014, enflamed these lingering losses, but also opened a space for her to act and attempt to remedy the tumult of unmourned loss. “When something like this happens,” she said, referencing the latest police homicides, all the unmourned death that came before it “gets stirred up again and
surfaces. The danger is that it might explode.” The healing circle, and the idea of healing itself, was not only a refuge but an opening through which to generate a newfound energy to persist in her mourning and activism, by entwining them into a horizon that made sense: the police homicide deaths were like salt in the old wounds of all the other losses of her life running with Sureño gangs, and healing these wounds required action both deeply personal and widely, structurally, social. Indeed, neither domain could change without the other changing too. Reflecting on these multiple engagements, she noted to the circle that “being out there on the street is one thing but then being able to come back to this healing space and feel grounded and safe is what keeps us all alive.”

While the suddenly salient concept of lives mattering did circulate in the efflorescence of activism in Salinas, the city where “nothing ever happens, nothing like activism,” it was just one of many slogans and principles that were shouted from corners and stenciled on signs. In East Salinas, where an infrastructure of health-oriented community-level programs was already well established, where The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities program was already halfway through its ten-year engagement, and where Latino social engagement of all stripes was already framed by the ethical imperative of getting healthy, healing constituted a critical vehicle of resident coping and engagement. “You reach for the sage, you reach for the obsidian instead. You have this to hold on to instead of a bottle or a blunt or a needle,” Tara pointed out one day, referencing that critical symbol and means of healing, the smouldering bundle of sage whose smoke was felt to carry away the burdensome energetic force and weight of our difficult experiences, our ‘cargas’ or baggage. We saged the crowds at rallies, we gathered in sweat lodges and teepee ceremonies on weekends, and we invited police officers and civil servants to healing circles offering sage and copal’s cleansing smoke as both disorienting power move and galvanizing spiritual practice.

But sage is not a panacea, and healing doesn’t happen apart from the world. Burning sage is instead just one of many critical and creative practices through which these persistently criminalized people respond to, and attempt to manage, the ambivalences of their histories and the contemporary conditions of exhaustion and abandonment. Some of this healing was recognizable as activism, though much of it was less legible and more situated in its intervening on individualized but mutual conditions of exhaustion and compromised dwelling. Critically, these practices took form and became sensible in terms of seeing the world and one’s place in it differently, as a world that wounds and must be constantly healed from.

As my friends in Salinas articulate it, the idiom of healing emerges in part from a neo-Chicano worldview on the legacy of colonialism, informed by queer poets, activists, and icons of the 1980s like Gloria Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde. Anzaldúa’s arresting conceptualization of the borderlands – both geographical region and lived condition – as herida abierta or ‘open wound’ has circulated woundedness as a critical experiential mode endemic to Mexican-Americans (Anzaldúa, Cantú, and Hurtado 2012). The tactical aspect of healing is often traced to queer poet Audre Lorde and her statement, in Cancer Diaries, that “caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare” (Lorde 1988). Drawing parallels between her acute battle with cancer and ongoing battle with racial and gender injustice, Lorde articulates a relationship between social suffering and ill-health that has helped people realize that “power gets right to the bone.” Health and healing offer amenable domains, resonant through familiar vernaculars like recovery, among an overmandated and vulnerable population who is both wary of overt activism and accustomed to being told you need to be different, but at the same time you’ll never change.

Healing is neither a de facto moral category that the Mujeres and others in Salinas strive for, nor does it involve anticipation of a perfectly healed state. Instead, it is a modality of being through which they encounter, understand and inhabit the happenings of their lives differently. Traced from the Civil Rights-era Chicano Movement’s metaphysical tradition with its own roots in the reimagining of an ancestral Aztec past, I argue that healing has emerged among the Mujeres as a framework, a hermeneutic (cf. Heidegger 2008a), for understanding the world and themselves in it. As they re-interpret and rework their intertwined experiences of exhaustion and abandonment into an idiom of woundedness and healing, they re-curate their horizons of possibility, and find new ways to go on. This sense of hermeneutic, taking a nod from phenomenologist Martin Heidegger, does not pertain to self-contained textual interpretation but the constant “synthesizing activity of understanding” that characterizes our ability to be-at home-in-a-world, mostly non-consciously and at ease (Ramberg and Gjesdal 2014; Zigon 2014c). It concerns how the world becomes tacitly known or legible to us, a form of understanding that is more about ‘knowing how’ than ‘knowing that’ (Braver 2014:29–31). This understanding is not a matter of amassing knowledge but reconfiguring the coordinates of knowability itself, shifting the conceptual field in which other kinds of happenings can possible occur (Lear 2008; Dotson 2014). When the Building Healthy Communities slogan Health Happens Here becomes
a legible claim, health – in all its breadth, as we will see – becomes eventual, and the possibilities of what constitutes happening is shifted. It is named as healing (or sometimes the healing), spoken of in cherished tones, and taken up in various forms as a ‘social project’ by individuals and groups across the city. Healing happens amidst and alongside others both present and imagined, their relationships of community, mutually brought about or disclosed. Foregrounding the mutual imbrication of the Mujeres’s lives as they share and build elements of it with each other, ‘disclosure’ is Heidegger’s terms for the ‘coming into being’ of an entity (a Dasein, a Being, or a thing, or an element) through other entities letting that entity be, and its letting other entities be as-they-are. The world becomes a Dasein, a Being, or a thing, or an element) through other entities letting that ‘disclosure’ is Heidegger’s terms for the ‘coming into being’ of an entity (a Dasein, a Being, or a thing, or an element) through other entities letting that entity be, and its letting other entities be as-they-are. The world becomes a Dasein, a Being, or a thing, or an element) through other entities letting that entity be, and its letting other entities be as-they-are. The world becomes.

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Interlocutors and Methodology

While I engage the impasse of liberalism that Wendy Brown and others have laid out for us after Fukuyama’s proclaimed end of history, I have attempted to stage a conversation with key interlocutors speaking lan-

11 ‘Social projects’ are moral philosopher Bernard Williams’s response to utilitarian approaches of social action and ‘the good’ in people’s pursuit of happiness (Williams 2012). Projects give a sense of local ethical formations that respond to certain circumstances, rather than other, more monolithic Aristotelian notions of the good or flourishing. Such projects the “kinds of commitments that people find so deep to who they are that they might not care to go on with their lives without them, or would not know themselves if they no longer had them,” as Cheryl Mattingly writes (Mattingly 2014:12, 2013). But while Mattingly stresses their deep, essentially formative nature, I am interested in how those projects might absorb or generate other projects over time. As Williams himself noted, people are often “taken up or involved in any of a vast array of projects,” rich involvements that constitute their happiness, rather than achievement of perhaps the Aristotelian or liberal enframing ideal itself. Povinelli, working also with Williams’s ‘projects,’ characterizes them instead not as fixed things but “aggregating practices,” always assembling other dimensions and enfolded into practices (Povinelli 2011:25). These projects, in the aggregate, form the “thick subjective backgrounds” of lives, providing the backdrop of moral and political calculation (ibid). In their aggregating, their ever-shapeshifting as conditions ebb or flow, they also provide the resources for the crystallization of ‘new’ practices, dispositions, imaginaries, and horizons both moral and political.

12 The difference between this Heideggerian disclosure and a more Husserlian intersubjectivity is that the latter figures a space between bounded individuals with coherent subjectivities, whereas disclosure emphasizes the mutuality and enmeshment of being as permeating traditional subject divisions. It could also be thought alongside another Heideggerian term, ereignis, which conventionally means to happen or occur, but in his work is elaborated as a “process by which different beings in the world are brought into belonging to and with one another, and are helped to realize themselves and each other in realizing this belonging” (Heidegger 2008b:xix). This is a generative moment, “the creative release of potentialities that already exist right here and now but are covered over, or trapped within, or held back by that which currently is,” which Zigon contrasts with “creation ex nihilo” (Zigon Forthcoming:23).
guages other than the abstract and sociological about some of the same issues of politics and possibility. These vocabularies of the otherwise – that which is immanent and emergent, that which haunts and enchants and exhausts, somewhere between possibility and actuality – circulate in the work of Povinelli (2006; 2011; 2012), Jarrett Zigon (2014a; 2014c; 2015; Forthcoming), Avery Gordon (2008b; 2008a; 2011) and even Martin Heidegger (2008a; 2008b), but also the incipient, intertwining otherwise of the Chicana/o canon, via Gloria Anzaldúa (2009; 2015) and Luis Valdez (Valdez 1990), and in the words and imaginations of those Salinans involved in this project of healing as well, in their own way, as we will see. There are thus some more specific questions we may wish to keep in mind beyond how we live on with liberalism’s broken narratives: how does this liberal detritus give rise to novel projects, temporalities, and modalities of engagement? Amidst structural conditions of enervation, despite demands to hope and exhortations of empowerment, how is it that some people’s projects grow and others never get off the ground? “How do we approach the fate,” Elizabeth Povinelli has asked (2012:454), “of alternative social projects in late liberalism?” The questions she raises in her meditations on alternative social projects, and the ontoethical spacings of potentiality and actuality they animate, propel and lend language to my inquiry here (Povinelli 2011; 2012; n.d.; Povinelli and Berlant 2014).

The lived densities that become legible, thinkable, and articulable through these critical vocabularies, the latent dynamics and diagonals that can be fleshed out, can be slightly other than the purely sociological, with its abstractions of structure and agency and bias for the empirical, and the historicconceptual humanist baggage and “constellations of effects, historical and institutional” that entails (Gordon 2008b; Heidegger 2008b). Critical vocabularies of the otherwise, with their commonplace words used to unsettling effect, instead open new vistas onto ongoing problems of disparity, tuning the reader into the enduring and emergent attachments and imperatives that drive social life. Where possible I not only use these terms descriptively but also recursively, encountering them in the world and then deploying them as lens through which to see that world as it might also or yet be (Zigon 2013; Holbraad 2012). This is thus a methodological choice, in line with Zigon’s earlier analytical framework for pursuing an anthropopolgy of morality (2008), which requires the researcher to detect and pursue the enduring and emergent ethical imperatives that drive social action and become taken up into everyday ways of being-in-the-world (2008). This is, categorically, a rejection of moral terms imported a priori, such as humanistic principles transcending or dislodged from actual practice, while maintaining an openness to the contours of their circulation in lived social worlds, among other terms or imaginations or practices that might not be immediately or easily legible.13

Indeed, the critical framework that most strongly holds this dissertation together is inspired by Jarrett Zigon’s rethinking of politics and possibility as it unites his wide body of work. From the ontological foundations of our assumptions around what it is to be a person, to our most fundamental and unchecked tendencies in anthropology around demarcations of social action, in his breadth of work Zigon reveals the deep saturation of metaphysical humanism, and its progeny liberalism, in our ways of thinking about being, social life, and politics, and offers a cohesive repertoire of analytical tools to detect and disclose social action otherwise. His earlier reconceptualization of morality in terms of everyday, unproblematic, and tacit being-in-the-world, and its moments of puncture and revisioning he names as ‘ethical breakdowns,’ ground his subsequent attention to what he calls the politics of dwelling and the ethics of world-building (2008; 2014c). Recently, Zigon has articulated a ‘critical hermeneutic’ approach as an analytical-theoretical method of detecting and disclosing potentialities already laden in social life (2014c; Forthcoming). This method pursues a revised aim for anthropology, towards more foundational questions of human being and dwelling than its present focus for the particular. At all levels of analysis, from the most minute utterance of an individual to the broadest sweep of metaphysical individualism, the critical hermeneutic approach refuses to take concepts for what they are supposed to mean and looks instead to what they point us towards.

I attempt in this dissertation to gather many of Zigon’s tools and put them to work, not from the more sociographic ‘situational’ view he has recently taken with his work on the War on Drugs, but from a deeply situated ethnographic stance. Working with an approach that discloses rather than describes or discovers, though, provokes ethical dimensions of ethnographic engagement that we may not have yet articulated or accommodated in the discipline. In actively disclosing potentialities, the anthropologist engaged in critical hermeneutics is taking a stronger hand in shaping what may or may not yet be fully possible. Where I have attempted to show how Health Happens Here, or how healing as a hermeneutic opens

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13 It further aims to address the violent elisions at work in “legally inflected notions of morality,” where law (and its protectors) is “presumed to be both ethical and irreproachable,” that determine the value of lives and foreclose connection or compassion for those lawbreakers (Cacho 2012:41).
another range of what could possibly happen or be considered ‘a happening’, or eventual, or quasi-eventual (cf. Povinelli 2011), we shouldn’t lose sight of the problematic whose happening is it? Cognizant of the epistemological asymmetries that structure, guide and entrench unequal social relations and racializations across America, my approach here constitutes a critical reflection on the social production of knowledge in a politically pressing moment: at stake is the relationship between “epistemic power” and criminalization or humanization, the claims that subjects make across the spectrum to ‘truth’, not only who decides or how we know what constitutes a life’s mattering, but of what living and mattering itself might consist of (Cooper 2014; Dotson 2014; Lear 2008; Cacho 2012).

For such tacit alternative epistemes, expressed through existential and ethical imperatives, to become legible, we cannot assume we know better than our interlocutors what is at stake, and cannot always wait for an interlocutor to explain it to us in an interview; we have to find ourselves assailed by it in the field, through an involvement that goes deeper than a gloss like ‘participant observation’. Accordingly, throughout this dissertation I have foregrounded my many disjunctive experiences in Salinas, in situations where I fully expected one sort of action to happen or condition to arise, and my informants/friends/colleagues expected something entirely different. Our different historicities, our ideas about the relationship between past and future or experience and expectation, became apparent in these times, making possible many of the arguments and insights around temporality in this dissertation. Letting myself be disoriented by these moments, tracing the imperatives through situated perceptions as well as follow-up conversations and interviews with those present and sometimes not, and then integrating the perspectives or explanations offered to me into my own mode of dwelling in Salinas, I consider these disjunctive experiences and disorientations as my own ‘ethical breakdowns’ and means of establishing coevality with others.

In truth, I was deeply enlisted into the social project of healing. I spend more time elaborating on this enlisting in the first and fifth chapters, deferring a more sustained reflection on my en trance and place in the field to these two ‘bookend’ chapters in order to evoke and demonstrate throughout the dissertation as a whole how this deep involvement came to be. Throughout I further foreground how, while I had my own temporal conditions unique to a researcher such as a departure date and nonstop life elsewhere, I also oriented myself to the temporalities of healing – its ancestral traces, its quotidian triggers – and made myself available to be-in-time in these ways, inasmuch as one can, alongside or coeval with those in the Colectiva and the community. To think politics differently – not simply a matter of contemplation at the end of progress, but a very real concern among alternative social projects that emerge from conditions of criminalization – we need to dwell within late liberalism’s impasses and “reckon with” what assails or haunts us there (Gordon 2008, Cacho 2012). Rather than recuperation, reckoning means letting ourselves and our projects be de- and re-stabilized by those we encounter.

These attempts at establishing coevality were not limited to sharing communicative or active time together, though this was itself a key technique – especially given the arc of calendar time the research spanned, before, during and after the acute period of police homicides, when our pivoting between the protests and the healing circle were particularly critical. Further though, in line with Johannes Fabian’s cryptic claim that “the radical contemporaneity of mankind is a project” (Fabian 1983:xi), Kevin Birth argues that coevality has to be “created” through what he calls a shared “phenomenological sense of time” (Birth 2008). This of course comes with its own methodological challenges (or impossibilities), and in his work he lays out a number of these; one is the relationship between culturally variable concepts of being, becoming, and time. While many social scientists have looked into ‘concepts of time’ across cultures, they have avoided the problem of the ontology of time, treating them as ornamental concepts rather than ontologically organizing temporalities (2008:13). Instead, attempting to stay sensitive to the temporalities indicated to me during my fieldwork either through our shared tacit practice or through language and narrative, I have foregrounded these and integrated them recursively or hermeneutically into my ethnography. This means working seriously with ideas like Ollin, earth-quaking motion or social change, or Coyolxauhqui, the ongoing process of de- and re-assemble, using them to analyze as I do in chapters 4 and 5, and 2, respectively. This also, though, suits the underlying impetus of this dissertation, which is to trouble the linear telos of social change, wrought as recovery or revolution, the compulsion towards progress that perhaps precludes us from seeing other possible, vulnerable, insistent, and beautiful processes and temporalities of becoming otherwise at work among disavowed people and places.

The Chapters

To this end, each chapter engages with temporality in some way, building on others’ work on social tense (Fabian 1983; Povinelli 2011), ethical temporalization (Zigon 2014b), belonging-differently-to-time (Stevenson 2014), and
the historical genre of impasse (Berlant 2011), among others. The chapters are laid out to trace the social project of healing from its broadest sociopolitical situation, down to its most minute phenomenological jangling, rumbling back outwards through the interstitial epicenters of its growing.

The first chapter lays out the ‘patchwork-network’ of community provisions in Salinas, tracing it through a genealogy of community health as the crucible of state abandonment and social justice, as it has spaced the mutually imbricated American population of well-meaning white liberals and poor communities of color. With a basic question of what kinds of possibilities for moral being and becoming these health-oriented community provisions demand and capacitae of Salinans, I consider the aggregating effects of these forms of ‘political triage’ the populace, with particular regard for the women of the Colectiva. How health equity and healing have emerged from this landscape to offer modalities of recovery that are at once familiar and amenable, and ‘drastically different’ (in the words of more than one member of the Colectiva), shapes the analysis of healing as relational being-with rather than a subjective identity or practice.

This relationality of healing forms the substance of chapter two, which draws closer to the Colectiva’s twice-weekly circles and their key ethical practice of mutual disclosure via descargando, checking-in and ‘discharging’ the burdens of their experiences. Situating their circle-based disclosures in terms of the politicized spirituality of Chicanism and its ontological stance of In Lak’ech, translated as ‘you are my other me’ from the original Nahuatl, I explore how these piecemeal narrative utterances effect ethical actions of temporalization. This involves disassembling and reassembling the conjunctive and disjunctive happenings of their lives, recalibrating their individual life trajectories into alternative and mutual orders that make sense in terms of the novel hermeneutic of healing. I liken this process, which many of them gloss as their recovery, to the cyclical and off-kilter temporality of the ongoing fragmentation and integration embodied by the México (Aztec) goddess Coyolxauhqui, elaborated by Gloria Anzaldúa (2009). Unlike the conventional implications of ‘recovery’ as return to a past pristine state, this chapter demonstrates the uncertain and ongoing outcomes of healing in this way, as a project of becoming otherwise. Focusing deeply on the distinctive rhythm of the “path of healing” of one Mujer, Pamela, some of the experimentality and volatility involved in this process of healing becomes clear, with the ever-imminent risk of returning to experiences of trauma through such temporalizing work.

That risk of return, rendered in terms of ‘being-triggered’, is addressed in depth in chapter three, focusing on the period of police homicides in Salinas. The deaths of four unarmed Latino men were significant triggers for many locals, and especially so among many women of the Colectiva de Mujeres. Their triggers, as ‘temporal tripwires’ to unconsolidated experiences of other forms of state disavowal and killing, suggest what broader sociopolitical conditions may be at stake among communities of color as they refract the proliferating project of ‘Lives Mattering’ in local political configurations. Taking as its central problem the disparity in exceptionality of these police homicides – claimed at once to be something that never happens here by the police chief, and too much already by Shi and the other Mujeres – tracing the triggers of Shi and two other Mujeres, Tara and Maria, at this time, gives sense to shifting registers of eventfulness, in exhausting conditions that incapacitate certain forms of engagement by wearing people out with constant vigilance.

In contrast to the broader aesthetics of the trigger, expressed through the politically conservative and affectively stultifying ‘trigger warning’ found in university course syllabi across the United States today, the experience of being-triggered constitutes an ever-present risk amidst the “chronically traumatizing” conditions in abandoned and criminalized communities. As an experiential modality at perhaps the most phenomenologically basic level of the threshold of potentiality, being-triggered modulates effort and exhaustion. Rather than dismissing triggers as the nadir of liberalism, careful attention must be paid to how people either work through this modality – turning it into an “ethical breakdown” or moment to choose, do, become otherwise (Zigon 2008) – or are assailed and undone by it. From a temporal genre like the trigger comes a question of how we live and conceive of history and possibility, taking up Wendy Brown’s call “to take that which appears to be given and provide it not simply a history but one that reveals how contingently it came into being and remains in being, the degree to which it is neither foreordained nor fixed in meaning” (2001:104). This kind of history is “precisely the opposite of teleological history… [which] treats the present as the accidental production of the contingent past, rather than treating the past as the sure and necessary road to the inevitable present” (104-5).

The fourth chapter picks up this question of reorientation to history or the past by tuning into the ‘immanent Indigeneity’ felt and pursued by many of the women of the Colectiva, as inspired by local efforts to institutionalize, at unlikely interstices, a philosophy of spiritual healing called La Cultura Cura. I look at how this sense of being already-Indigenous, as a Mexican-American, effects and enlists a subtle ontological shifting beyond the subject. The relational and temporal vectors of this politics involve
The gathering of many glimmering threads, this dissertation aims to trouble the telos of progress narratives, and the violence of their linearity in light of the other tremendously consequential temporalities of change, shift, and bringing about the otherwise. What horizons do these alternative temporalities chart? What American futures but also histories do they reach into, and recalibrate? How might we thus come to think differently about social change and political possibility today? What else is happening?

Palabra

"It's actually history," Shi said; "I think this is history right now as women are coming together. Everyone is coming together and making it their own, and nobody owns it, and it's just like — something's transforming, it's so beautiful, because it's just like it's starting, and like what we call the Ollin, right, the sacred movement. And that's what it is! … Whatever it is, it's happening… And I'm just going through it, like… I can't witness what's happening but I think years later I could see, like, this is what's happened!! Or someone could be like 'this is what happened, you didn't even see it because you were in it!'"
Political triage: stretching health, spacing the sickening

Conocimiento

“If you’re a Méxicana, if you’re a Latina, you’re a gangster,” Shi told me from across her kitchen table, a banda jam playing loud and tinny from her phone. “Where you’re from, you’re already labeled. If your parents are in Ag, your family is labeled Ag. If you’re middle class maybe you’re more educated, you have better living. But we don’t know who we are… people put you in a category even if you yourself don’t.”

Shi and I had met up that day in early March to do some planning and administration for the Colectiva, but our afternoon of work was, as usual, turning into a personal history swapping-session. Such abundant conocimiento, coming to know one another, was an essential part of all of our conversations as we met and spoke over the months and years, the acknowledgment of one’s relations and history made critical and resonant even if those elements didn’t have a clear place of relevance in the conversation at hand. Her daughter Tatyana, six years old, sat next to us eating lime with salt while Shi explained the local geography to me through her own movements through it over time.

There was always a beautiful excess to Shi that spilled her life into her work, the two domains really just one intense overflow. She made a particularly engrossing interlocutor with her broad range of emblematic...
Salinas experiences, as well as an increasingly reflective tendency. Through our conocimiento I would learn of how she was one of the first women to be “jumped in” to a Sureño street gang in the 1980s,15 as well as one of the first women with such a background to take up a community-oriented leadership position around the turn of the 2000s. As a backdrop to that, her parents were “in Ag,” or worked in agriculture, and she grew up amidst elements of the local farmworker lifestyle. Back in the day her family, alongside other more transient and individuated agricultural workers, would live from one cheap motel to the next all down along Abbott Street, the industrial arm linking the lettuce fields to the highways in South Salinas. Her father, and eventually her brother, would oscillate in and out of prison on drug charges, and so she, her mother and her sister would find makeshift housing in these “rat, vermin, men”-infested motels. As a teenager Shi too became involved in gangs alongside her brother, getting locked up, and going through rounds of probation before deciding it was time to live her life differently, without knowing exactly how. Suicide was attempted and miraculously survived, more than once.

Now in her late 30s, her husband locked up in a federal prison near Fresno, Shi lived with two almost-adult sons in addition to her young daughter on a social housing compound that was gated, though the gate was never locked. On a street just outside the formal boundaries of the East Side, her house was in a district better known for its used car dealerships and halfway houses. Shi was all about the East Side, “the 93905” as it was colloquially known, but from her perch in another postcode she could send her children to better schools in South Salinas. Besides, she felt more comfortable living here than she would in East Salinas proper, where she had seen her life too much, and was too known.

Her life was not unlike that of many other women who composed the Colectiva de Mujeres, whose pasts and presents were sorted by the categories of Ag and Gangster, who bore histories of intergenerational gang involvement and attempts at maneuvering away from it. Many of the Mujeres and Shi had been tight friends years ago but became estranged by reorientations to mandated recoveries, or simply faded out of each other’s lives as the vicissitudes of gangbanging became too much. Now maybe their kids banded together or wore opposing colors. Or maybe their men were locked up, caught in prior waves of federal ‘stings’, or dead, or just out of the picture. Laws felt harsher, sentences longer, these days. Wanting something else, most of the women had settled for quieter lives, work in the produce packing plants or fields, service industries or shops, getting clean, maybe taking college courses, maybe engaging with the efflorescence of health-oriented community programs. Only recently, as Shi was asked to form a women’s healing collective, had these women begun to gather anew, reconnecting after years apart and realizing their parallel tracks. They had in common the overlapping experiences of wanting to change, pursuing recovery programs of various stripes to leave behind their addictions or crimes, but retaining a sense of ambivalence about just what something like ‘being recovered’ could even entail.

Shi, like many, felt she had come a long way, and realized the novelty of her position. “There’s not that many women that really go out there and they’re empowered,” she explained to me, “and they come from like a background where a lot of people think she should’ve been dead, or in a mental institution, or in prison.” This attenuated novelty was tinged by unlikeliness and ambiguity, rather than redemption; she was surprised she had survived so long, and wasn’t sure of exactly how to proceed. On many occasions she told me, “I should have been dead three times by now,” but here she was, running a healing circle, and herself “getting healed” alongside.

“Do I deserve all this?” I heard her ask, without waiting for an answer.

Sickening subjects

‘Invested in’ by the private health foundation The California Endowment to found and facilitate the Colectiva de Mujeres as an offshoot of MILPA, Shi held the healing space of the circle not simply as a 9-to-5 job but a primary orientation of her life. Her commitment to healing emerged out of a personal history of engaged attempts, relatively mandated or chosen, to recover from what she had been through – addiction, illegality, loss, everyday life on the East Side – and thereby to be somehow different while still being true to herself and those around her. Healing was the most recent framing but also, seemingly, the most adaptable and persistent of these recoveries; it built off of her prior experiences but seemed to be “dramatically different” as well.16

Shi’s various attempts at recovering – negotiating a sense of who she was and could be – had taken form through, against and alongside the ubiquitous categories of ‘Ag’ and ‘Gangster.’ Her pace had been set by the endless influx of selective, ever-partial, interventions at the level of community,
amidst East Salinas’s conditions of sustained abandonment by the state. In those problematic but poor places like East Salinas, where few social services are available or accessible despite needs being great, support often comes in variously caring and carceral forms, addressed piecemeal at populations. Leveled from platforms both governmental and philanthropic in a pattern that should be recognizable across late liberal landscapes of social disinvestment and devolved responsibility, in Salinas such interventions are often made through a framework of health—a domain that is broad in imagination, visceral in embodiment, amenable in morality. Since the post-Civil Rights 1970s but especially through the thoroughly neoliberal 1990s and 2000s, health-oriented community-level programs of various stripes have flooded Salinas as the key means of reaching the underserved, illicit, or otherwise-hard-to-reach Latino populace, its farmworkers and gang members, targeting those lives and the ‘community’ at large for improvement at the same time. These interventions have been continuously funded and legitimated as attempts to make sense of and manage the deeply related phenomena of Salinas’s agricultural economy and gang genealogy; they try to patch the gaps of state provision in neoliberal conditions of jagged social disparity.

However, such programs are not simply reactive to a given set of social problems, but deeply generative of those problems and their ‘sickening’ (rather than straightforwardly ‘sick’) subjects.17 As health-oriented programs intervene on the lives of so many poor Latinos on the East Side of Salinas, social conditions of poverty and violence are primarily addressed through problematized individual behavior, cut out of the world in which those individuals dwell. Program participants are demarcated into certain social statuses or categories of being, and set on trajectories towards specific horizons. Many farmworker health programs follow patchwork responsibilization strategies amidst conditions of systemic poisoning, letting organophosphate-reliant growers off the hook while workers are exorted not to touch their eyes, not to hug their children before changing into home clothing, and to keep their pesticide-laced clothing in separate laundry piles.18 Some gang prevention programs employ public health strategies and treat violence as an infectious disease, preemptively diagnosing and quarantining individuals through profiling, rather than addressing intergenerational conditions of social disparity that push and pull those individuals towards gangs in the first place. Those who work in agriculture become farmworkers through the constant cycle of catching-up with their contamination, and those who are seen to match gang-involved symptoms are cut out of the world as imminent social contagions. When gathered together, these programs bear notable continuities, regime-like, in effecting narrow categorial entrenchments of moral personhood, and foreclosures of futurity and capacity. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Shi didn’t expect to survive as long as she has.

Mixing the moral with the etiological, and meanwhile achieving the political, these interventions can pathologize individuals and prioritize certain trajectories of recovery without troubling the sickening social conditions themselves. This is not unique to Salinas, its range of health programming, and its problematic population; a porous political and moral concept of health has formed an interface of social justice and social abandonment in late liberal America, where Civil Rights-era ideals, dreams and disappointments continue to circulate amidst neoliberalized conditions of minimal state provision and maximum wealth inequality. In various guises of community health or (radical) self-help, the domain of health has thus given rise to both opportunities for making difficult lives more livable, and obfuscations of how those lives are made difficult in the first place. A multifaceted, productive and charitable framework for intervening on inequalities, health’s stretching so wide nevertheless leads one to notice the myriad forms of unhealthiness it assumes, and the befalling of these forms upon only certain segments of the population. Pulling health so wide and taut betrays the naturalization of various modes of social abandonment and state-sanctioned lethality, and the shifting of social responsibility, along raced, classed, and gendered lines.

In health’s latest stretching into health equity and healing, however, many in Salinas claim to be doing something different. By prioritizing the social determinants of health, and expanding the domain of recovery from individuals to communities, health equity locates the pathology in the public realm and its constitutive historical relationships. Rather than apportioning particular isolable blame for the problem, it takes a two-pronged, coeval approach: opening space for individuals to reckon with and heal from their various experiences of marginalization, as well as reframing the relationships of institutionalized inequalities and social abandonment as injustices that wound. Such efforts generate a mode of politics that calibrates personal recoveries with community improvement.

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17 The distinction between ‘sick’ and ‘sickening’ comes from Barbara Ehrenreich’s (2011 [1973]) feminist classic Complaints and Disorders, which elucidates how the ‘sick woman’ comes from the white upper class, while the non-white working class produces ‘sickening women’.

18 Farmworker health programs are often funded by huge locally-based growing concerns like Driscoll’s, who donate tax-free money to programs that keep this population healthy enough to keep going, amidst undisturbed conditions of contamination and structural violence. They can also almost always be counted on to donate pallets of free strawberries to community events.
In Salinas, philanthropically-funded interventions staged along the scaffolding of health equity were among the most radical iterations of health I encountered: school discipline, police violence, and juvenile justice came to form the acute social wounds that Salinans together had to heal from,19 engaging the sites of state killing and social abandonment in a non-agonistic but relational mode of politics. Women’s, men’s, and community healing circles rendered healing a deeply relational and rhizomatic experiment, without fixed chronology or endpoints.20 The expressions that these (and other) wounds took were not always defined from the outset, but left categorically open; the ‘something more’ that suffuses Salinans’ lives, that cuts across the spacings of farmworker and gangbanger, could be accommodated through the relational approach of healing. Healing must be understood in terms of relationality and endurance, away from the narrow demarcations of farmworkers and gang members, making space for what doesn’t fit in the categories but comes through conocimiento, that constant coming to know about one another.

In this chapter I draw out particular iterations of health and its synonyms in Salinas as they intertwine domains of social justice and social abandonment. First laying out the range of health-oriented interventions at work there, I historicize this landscape in terms of the relationship between ideas about justice amidst conditions of state disavowal, and ask about the aggregating effects of this political triage as the population seems to become neatly sorted into farmworkers and gang members. What kinds of possibilities for moral being and becoming do these programs demand, capacitate, or foreclose? How can this political triaging, a kind of concerted biosocial spacing (cf. Povinelli 2006), of the Latino population into farmworkers or gang members via endless health interventions help us interrogate the not-yet of East Salinas, or of Latinos in America? And, setting up the following chapters of this dissertation, how has health equity, figured through healing, emerged as a moral mode of recovery through and alongside these other regimes, and yet be seen by people like Shi as offering something “dramatically different”?21

Band aids on cancer: Provisioning health and sustaining inequality

I first came to Salinas intrigued by the wide breadth of health-oriented options seemingly tailored to its primarily undocumented or mixed-status family population. I was interested in the diffusion of political (activist) orientations, dispositions, and techniques through naturalized and benign domains like preventative health among this population “in the shadows,” at a time when federal Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR) was looking like a definite possibility. In 2012/13, the ‘undocumented migrant’ was primed to become the ‘Registered Provisional Migrant’, with a ten year (or so) pathway to citizenship ahead. The stakes were high as to how one as such could be, should be, and was – not only in the United States, but in the-world. Following Miriam Ticktin’s Casualties of Care (Ticktin 2011:10), I aimed to pursue the way apparently morally- (rather than politically-) driven health programs and practices “end up ‘doing’ politics despite not having a political mandate,” and the implications of such politicization of bodily integrity and emotional wellbeing on the lives and possibilities of those involved.21

The promise of Comprehensive Immigration Reform, to the dismay of many, fell apart in an intransigent Republican-dominated Congress the late summer weeks just before I arrived in the field in September 2013. With little time to rejig the research agenda, once I arrived I made it a methodological imperative to simply attend any and all public events framed in some way by health. Following the widespread disappointment at the dissolution of CIR, the Affordable Care Act (or, commonly but pejoratively, “Obamacare”) became the next key means of reaching hard-to-reach or hidden populations, and health became an even more salient topic of public debate and concern. With little effort other than listening to the local Spanish radio station, reading the free county papers, and paying attention to public bulletin boards, I had something to do nearly every day or night of the week.22 I would find myself at a range of events, well beyond the obvious free vaccine sessions or health fairs: for example, a local iteration

21 I was further curious about the other political aspects of these programs, wondering how so large an undocumented population, technically out-of-sight from the state, was being indirectly served, maintained, and managed through these diagonal health interventions and community settings, so they could keep the lettuce in the fields picked and packed; in other words, how the “shadow state” managed this population “in the shadows” (Gilmore 2007; INCITE! 2009).
22 I also owe a great deal of gratitude to my early organizational staff interlocutors, who eagerly enlisted me in the internal and coalition-based meetings they were constantly attending, around and beyond these events.
tion of global ‘take back the streets’ bicycle initiative Ciclovía; promotora de salud [health promotor] trainings and workshops; migrant parent meetings at alternative and East Side high schools; weekly “Strengthening Families” sessions for struggling students and their parents; an empowerment conference aimed at farmworker women; and a string of community and clinical events related to Semana Binacional de Salud, a transnational conference on Latin American migrant health.

All of these events, in some way, underscored health as an aspirational modality for betterment of individual, family, community, even ethnicity or raza. And this was only scratching the surface of what was open to the public; Monterey County had even officially accepted a “Health In All Policies” approach, bringing an awareness of policy effects on health to government realms beyond the Health or Behavioral Health departments, and promoting its spread in nontraditional domains. Some of these events and programs were run by longstanding local institutions founded in the wake of the United Farmworkers Union movement from the 1970s onward, others were products of short-term foundation-funded cycles, and most were coalition-based endeavors that involved complex partnerships of state, philanthropic, community, and private agricultural interest.

My method of diverse ‘health’ sampling may seem extreme, but in conversation with community organizer interlocutors it produced a number of distinct awarenesses. Instantly, there was the “volatility” between organizations that launched these different health events from different angles. I was warned repeatedly by staff or volunteers from different groups not to align myself too closely with anyone, since many had antagonistic relationships either deep or fresh (but regardless, vicious), linked to the kinds of political factionalism found in perhaps any small and ragged town with a hugely powerful and wealthy industry on its lawn. “There are so many haters in Salinas,” as Shi framed it; “you gotta be careful.” Before long, it became clear that there were deep political-economic striations among these health-oriented options, which perhaps had been covered over by the contemporary salience of health governance at the cusp of the Affordable Care Act, but nevertheless rendered the landscape rough and uneven.

And with time, realizing the ubiquity and chronicity of the health programs and their demands, the deeper political maneuvering involved in recovery or recoverability itself became an issue. I took the words of one community organizer to heart: so many community approaches to health, or health approaches to community, Graciela said to me with weary cynicism, were essentially akin to “putting a Band-Aid on cancer.” They did not trouble the root causes of the cancer or its spreading, kept a robust trade in Band-Aids, and barely relieved, if not exacerbated, the illness experience. “There is big money and big interest involved in keeping East Salinas poor,” Carolina, a clinician and administrator, explained. “Like there’s this cute feeling, like ohh, the little Mexican village, the little barrio in Salinas, but this is not a little Mexican village. Go tour around Mexico and you’ll see. This is a low income neighborhood in the United States of California—I mean America.” As she added later, “there is so much money to be made here.”

While Salinas is home to a particularly wide range of health engagements, its infrastructure is not exceptional. Its patchwork-network has been formed along the confluences of city demographics, state policy, and social justice, over the last half-century at least. In the next part of this chapter, I historicize the relationship between social justice and social abandonment through health-oriented community-level programs, demonstrating the way ideas about health and social participation have been variably but often contemporaneously deployed from both the political left and right to empower or manage the underserved. This localized patchwork-network becomes legible as an artifactual stratigraphy of state and federal political economies and sharp switchbacks in the idea of public goods, betraying the shifts in programs and principles of social justice efforts in tension with changes in civic policy and wealth concentration and distribution. Building on this, I ask, what kinds of aggregations of the population are wrought through these disoriented layerings of health, justice, and population control?

**Social abandonment, social justice, and health**

The intertwined relationship between ideas of social justice and conditions of social abandonment is made tangible in programs that have attempted to serve or manage marginalized populations through community health, along a horizon of political economy and policy. As Jennifer Nelson points out in her historiography *More than Medicine: A History of the Women’s Health Movement*, “the relationship between socially embedded inequalities and campaigns for better health [have] deep roots in social movements in the United States, particularly in the movement for Civil Rights, the New Left social justice campaigns, and feminism” (2015:3). These same socially embedded inequalities, however, and the radical challenges to the state that are sometimes (partly-)formed in their name, have historically been defanged and “neutralized” precisely through philanthropic corralling within the confines of those campaigns for health, a process Erica
Kohl-Arenas traces in great depth in *The Self-Help Myth: How Philanthropy Fails to Alleviate Poverty* (Kohl-Arenas 2015). This process is little different than the saturated neoliberalism of NGOs that continues to disappoint social theorists like Wendy Brown (2015), or the “camouflage” or co-optation technique of the mildly multicultural late liberal state as a complement to its politics of recognition (Povinelli 2011). In both regards, an unequal social order is secured rather than troubled by interventions structured through health access (whatever health comes to entail).

Both Nelson and Kohl-Arenas have recently published highly detailed accounts of the policy and politics shaping community-level health programs since the 1960s, but from different angles: Nelson focuses on women’s health across the United States as rooted in War on Poverty-era ‘community health’ funding, while Kohl-Arenas addresses ‘self-help’ programs in California’s Central Valley, addressed to the poor and people of color, in the context of American philanthropy in the post-Civil Rights period. Both end up writing about similar popular ideologies and policy phases, though the difference in terminology between ‘self-help’ and ‘community health’ belies a major schism that underlines the duplicity of the policies and programs themselves. In post-Civil Rights America, those on both the right and left of the political spectrum “appeared to agree that community action among the poor should be encouraged,” Kohl-Arenas writes, “yet they understood very different things: was self-help designed to engage diverse stakeholders in maintaining the status quo, or to encourage consciousness-raising and revolutionary action?” (2015:24-5). In either term or from either side of the spectrum, the poor’s self-elected participation has been considered essential, an elision that cloaks entrepreneurialism as empowerment. Demand for participation directs the responsibility to improve disavowed or abandoned conditions to those who dwell there, while often involving top-down, or ‘parachuted-in’, program specifications that may not match local moral frameworks or aspirations. This elision is not strictly an optic but a result of the Janus-like development of community health.

As the race-based social inequality of the early 1960s became more difficult to ignore, a range of state, philanthropic, and activist strategies around health were formed as modes of intervention. 1965 saw the introduction of federal Medicaid, and in 1966 California followed suit with Medi-Cal, making basic healthcare broadly available for low income citizens. Lyndon Johnson’s administration and its 1964 War on Poverty, linked to the Office of Economic Opportunity, began funding Neighborhood Health Centers (NHCs) in poor communities of color around the country, staffed by the medical establishment (Nelson 2015). President Johnson’s War on Poverty institutions, however, were based on earlier philanthropic models like the Ford Foundation’s Great Cities School Improvement and Gray Areas programs of the late 1950s and early ’60s. Out of the conservative tradition of American philanthropy – which was perhaps earliest articulated by Andrew Carnegie in 1889, who aimed to avert social unrest and its economic disruptions by proposing that “the new rich had a responsibility to help the poor help themselves” (Kohl-Arenas 2015:17) – Gray Areas funding in particular targeted urban tension by engaging the poor in their own self-improvement and leadership development, while leaving the uncomfortable, unfundable element of race out of it. Social participation and individual betterment through health thus worked to realign the responsibility of addressing difficult living conditions, absolving the state of responsibility to provide to these populations, and leading effectively to their structural abandonment.

Contemporaneous to federally funded Neighborhood Health Centers, with their top-down structures and only nominally progressive social aims, and occasionally with support like Ford Foundation Gray Areas funding, radical nationalist activist groups like the Black Panther Party, the Chicano Brown Berets, and the United Farmworkers Union opened health clinics, school breakfasts, and other “survival programs”. These diverse health programs were not only supplements to their more direct organizing efforts but part and parcel of their social justice aims. “While voting and political rights took center stage in the public Civil Rights movement,” Nelson notes, “much of what poor African Americans wanted and needed on a daily basis had more to do with basic survival – a prerequisite for political enfranchisement” (2015:4); the same could be said of Mexican-Americans. These initiatives were generally, though, made most possible by Black Panther or United Farmworkers internal efforts and volunteers; indeed, in the case of the UFW, health clinics formed a magnet for liberal, mostly white volunteers from across the country, a way to get involved in the Civil Rights movement. With organic support, many such ad-hoc initiatives endured and matured into various institutionalized forms. This process sowed the seeds for the extensive health-oriented options in Salinas; as Seif observes, the massive strikes launched by the UFW in 1970-71 in Salinas especially,
and their energetic cadre of volunteers, staff, and union members, generated a range of “more affordable and culturally oriented health care facilities than in most agricultural regions” (Seif 2008:88).24

While the community health/radical self-help legacy of the Black Panthers is being increasingly published and valorized (Williams and Lazero 2009; Nelson 2013), the remnants of the United Farmworkers Union’s community health projects have been less clearly documented, perhaps in part due to the combustion of the Union itself in the 1970s. As its leader, Cesar Chavez, became more narrow in his aims, “distracted away from union organizing by his own ego and fascination with organizational management” (Kohl-Arenas 2015:39), many Union-disillusioned organizers, staff and volunteers splintered off and formed their own organizations with what was left of their idealism and energy. This UFW diaspora clearly seeded important institutions in Salinas like the local California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) branch, as well as the county health department, county elected representatives, farmworker health organization CCA-Viva, the local labor council, and numerous other enduring sites of governance and activism, or interstitial sites of support like teaching or nursing.

Meanwhile, also underway in the 1970s was the dismantling of War on Poverty welfarism, and the extension of its proto-neoliberal devolution of responsibility evermore to the individual. The Neighborhood Health Centers and their preventative, cost-efficient approach to health were taken up as part of a broader shift in healthcare delivery towards prevention, and as such largely spared during the Nixon administration. The rising New Right was steadily assimilating Civil Rights and New Left activist institutions,25 displacing the War on Poverty with the War on Drugs and a battery of legal and social reforms in its name, as well as more subtle discursive shifts in the problem of poverty.

The Moynihan Report, written in 1965 but becoming most influential in the mid-70s, exemplifies some of the ambiguously-intended reforms of the time (Greenbaum 2015; Coates 2015b). Its author, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, was inspired by the Civil Rights movement and attempted to contribute to its progressive goals, targeting the plight of the black family by locating the social problem of inequality in the unemployment, or unemployability, of black men. With his analysis neither at the social nor the individual level but that of the family, Moynihan inadvertently generated and pathologized black male socioeconomic incapacity as a result of the castrating legacies of slavery (Coates 2015b). His characterization was pilloried by the New Left but embraced by the New Right, who seized on its problematization of the black family to target “lower class depravity” through rapidly rising incarceration rates. This period’s surreptitious inversions of pathologizing social inequality, and criminalizing mental health, has a legacy that could perhaps be traced through ongoing public health approaches to race- and class-tinged violence. Here we may start to notice some of the deep connectivity between the attempts in Salinas to manage the dual ‘problems’ of exploited, undocumented agricultural labor and poverty-fueled gang violence, issues often treated separately but sharing historical conditions of emergence.

The ascendance of neoliberalism in this period is most acutely traceable via its champion, Ronald Reagan. While still Governor of California, on his 1976 Presidential campaign Reagan had already begun testing out the narratives of welfare queens, illegal aliens, and other pejorative expressions of the socially draining effects of state-dependent poor populations. Poverty was not only stigmatized but criminalized through these discourses and concomitant legal reforms. The 1980s saw the ongoing defunding of public programs for the poor under President Reagan, and the emergence of what has been called the “shadow state” – the host of well-meaning but ultimately conservative organizations and institutions that quietly govern the state’s abandoned populations without accountability or oversight, only partially providing what was used to be guaranteed as public services (INCITE 2009). During this decade California began to massively grow both its state and private prison systems, forming an extreme node of the nation’s ever-growing reliance on incarceration as population management (Gilmore 2007). This era saw the neolicoristic rise of both the ‘non-profit industrial complex’ and the ‘prison industrial complex’.

As the state was turning ever away from provisions in lieu of nonprofits and prisons as population management, trade agreements like NAFTA were signed into law and solidifying the need for informal migrant labor.

24 During my fieldwork I met a number of older white women who, attracted by La Causa in the late 1960s and early 1970s, came from across the country to volunteer at these clinics. Staying on in some way after the movement’s heyday itself, they took up positions teaching, nursing, serving the community somehow. Many remain involved in community activism. More research needs to be conducted on how this generation of activists – white or Chicano, male or female – lived on after the strong movement faded out, and how their potential ‘disappointments’ at the failure of revolution (Scott 2014) informed their ongoing engagement in evolving ideas of social justice.
25 Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, in her essential article “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” draws attention to the discursive distillation, diminution, and circulation of a dominant narrative and tropes of the Civil Rights movement through state institutions. The rise of ‘New Right’ conservatism in the 1970s initiated the co-optation of ‘what happened’ in the then-recent Civil Rights heyday; these conservatives claimed themselves as ‘color blind’ centrists who redefined the purpose of the movement as preventing legal wrongdoing against individuals rather than redressing institutionalized racial injustices that affected collective situations (Dowd Hall 2005:1238).
1994’s North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) globalized agriculture and entrenched relationships of dependency among Mexican workers for low-wage American jobs (Kohl-Arenas 2015). This did not come without neoliberalized xenophobia and adjustment. In California, a state whose economy is highly dependent on a steady agricultural migrant labor source, a xenophobic tide was turning, encapsulated in the notorious Proposition 187 of that same year. Prop. 187 aimed to restrict access to public services like basic education and emergency care to citizens alone, thereby excluding an undocumented population estimated at 1.3 million men, women and children. The Proposition was approved by voters, citing concern for the cost of provisioning for “illegal” migrants, but never enforced.

Meanwhile, as income inequality and the stratification of wealth had become more extremely concentrated at each end of the spectrum, philanthropic foundations had grown endowments larger than ever and nonprofits had become more professionalized and bureaucratized. Foundations at this time shifted their support from emergent, potentially radical social organizations to new and more neutral ‘civil society’ institutions – community-level programs that didn’t have an obviously identarian or agonistic politics (Kohl-Arenas 2015). The California Endowment (TCE) is one of these superwealthy foundations that claims to forward progressive goals through ‘capacity-building’ at the community level – with an aim no less than ‘decolonizing philanthropy’, as it was put to me – through massive wealth accumulated through conservative means. TCE was founded in 1996 after Blue Cross health insurance was forced into restructuring, having accumulating profits unbefitting to a technically not-for-profit enterprise.

TCE’s large-scale and multi-year campaigns focus on the social determinants of health, dovetailing with rising interest in universal health care provisions around Obama’s 2012 Affordable Care Act. Their Building Healthy Communities (BHC) project, running in fourteen communities across California from 2010-2020, has endowed each site with millions of dollars to promote health without funding healthcare itself, working with already-existing groups addressing localized conditions. Thus in places like East Salinas, to receive resources from Building Healthy Communities or The California Endowment, and to be able to work collaboratively in its strong statewide network, organizations and programs engaged in such variable activities as visual arts, urban agriculture, land use, migration policy, and juvenile justice must speak in the fundable vernacular of health. And from there, they also must take on some of the top-down Endowment policy imperatives, like dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline, or pushing for justice reforms like 2014’s Proposition 47.26 In places like Salinas, The Endowment and BHC directly address social conditions of structural abandonment in the name of social justice through health equity.

Their support enables initiatives of considerable local salience to grow and for those involved to flourish. For example, their direct monetary intervention has largely kept the city’s library system open, amidst cuts that would have closed its three branches in this home of the great novelist John Steinbeck. But their support nevertheless allows conditions of state disavowal to persist – in a city that claims it is too poor to provide street lamps, sidewalks, or sensitive policing, in a county that is home to a deeply impoverished migrant labor population without clean water as well as the fabulously wealthy of Carmel and Pebble Beach, in a state that remains the 8th largest economy in the world and significantly economically stratified.

This politics of healing, as it is emerging in Salinas, shares and gathers elements from conversations held more broadly in the supposedly ‘post-race’ Obama era. Critical post-race ideologies, responses to the characteristic color-blindness of right-winged political rationalities that suggest the end of racism while actually burying it under a discourse of individual choice and failure, have provided significant tools for recharting the horizons of racialized struggle, among a generation that knows racism is alive through its experience, but which also less attached to identity politics than its predecessors (Bettie 2014:xxi). New engagements with post-race de-essentialize modalities of social engagement and political action, implicating others outside of the strictly injured social identity to realize their role in the condition.

New social movements like #BlackLivesMatter, forged out of these resources and constraints, are remaking the boundaries (not without contestation) of what counts as political, drawing attention to the viscera of inequality even as racial equality remains a nominal gain in the post-Civil Rights era. As Black nationalist icon Angela Davis said in a recent interview, “our notions of what counts as radical have changed over time. Self-care and healing attention to the body and the spiritual dimension – all of this is now a part of radical social justice struggles. That wasn’t the case before. And I think that now we’re thinking deeply about the connection

26 In light of the 2009 California Prison Realignment, which displaced some violations from state to county jurisprudence, Proposition 47 pushed for a battery of crimes to be reduced to misdemeanors both retroactively and going forward, generating a population of prisoners in the thousands suddenly eligible for release and expunged records. The bill also argued for funding to be diverted from prisons to schools, encapsulated in the hashtag #schoolsnotprisons. It was passed in fall of 2014.
between interior life and what happens in the social world” (Van Gelder 2016). Health, here and now, is connected to lives, their living, and their mattering; to survival amidst widespread structural slow deaths and acute police killings. It counters the notion that, in the blunt words of artist Johanna Hedva (2015), “wellness, as it is talked about in America today, is a white and wealthy idea,” unavailable to those with other skin tones and socioeconomic statuses. Now again social justice and social abandonment are meeting in the context of community health, places where it can be claimed, following the cue of the Building Healthy Communities slogan, that Health Happens Here.

Political triage: capacitating moral personhood

While this history only skims the surface of the uncomfortable resonance between social justice and social abandonment in terms of health, community, and participation, it does begin to speak to broader questions of the not-yet of Latino political power in America. In particular, when Salinas’s patchwork-network of health-oriented interventions is connected with imaginations and discourses that stake the city and its inhabitants as not-yet what it or they should be, its spread and saturation takes on critical political implications. What kind of moral personhood, what “new ‘kinds’ of people,” are capacitated at this conjuncture of social justice and abandonment (cf. Bettie 2014)? What kinds of recoverability and relatability are thereby figured? And in the midst of all of these concerns: what happens when people continue to endure endless health interventions without the health outcomes seemingly changing, when recovery is an impossible demand, when one’s very survival is effectively outside of expectation?

The interventions that spread throughout and saturate East Salinas – whether taking form in certain kinds of clinical settings for farmworkers, punitively-oriented public health for gang members, or philanthropically-funded health equity for all – are based on and imbue particular senses of moral personhood and relative (in)capacities for recovery, or change. I have come to see them as forms of political triage, sorting what Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) identifies as a population made “surplus” and requiring a new mode of management in terms of contamination and contagion corresponding to certain “status categories” like farmworker or gang member. These interventions posit each addressed population’s variable potential to be remedied (read: rehabilitated into a more legitimate or productive social subjectivity), institutionalizing social disparity as ontological.

As health and recovery continue to form a key vernacular of social improvement in a shifting political constellation, new articulations are being developed around the discourse and materialities of healthfulness. In addition to contamination or contagion, socially triaging webs of wellness and woundedness are being woven (Hedva 2016; Jamison 2014). These idioms correlate the exhaustion of going on in a world structured and suffused by racial disparity, and problematize of the lethality of this exhaustion, as it is forming a key vernacular of the emergent ‘New Civil Rights’ (as outlined in the introduction of this dissertation).27 In Salinas, Latinos are always-already contaminated farmworkers or contagious gang members, what they are and can be, when addressed through these health interventions and enlisted simultaneously into efforts of community improvement and social engagement. It is necessary to dig into these categories to reveal them to be configurations that serve the enduring order of power, arrangements that are impactful but not all-encompassing. Healing, as I demonstrate throughout the rest of this dissertation, is differentiated against the backdrop of these stultifying configurations.

Elizabeth Povinelli’s ‘biosocial spacing,’ as it describes the geopolitical distribution of ordinary and exceptional “life-worlds, death-worlds, and rotting worlds,” can provide a strong ontotheoretical foundation for this angle on political triage (2006:8). Povinelli’s concept attends to the interaction of people’s lived time, modes of sociality, and environment, making clear that not all bodies are capacitated for social action equally, in the unequal and often racialized distribution of energy and resources. It assists here with situating the political implications of various regimes

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27 Johanna Hedva, in her Sick Woman Theory manifesto (2016), flags the purpose the sick serve to the machinery of neoliberalism – the surplus and unproductive have no place, and the system can’t care for them — expanding on the political possibilities from this position of sickness in light of the privilege of wellness. The woman in question is not gendered per se, but is all of the “dysfunctional,” “dangerous” and “in danger,” “badly behaved,” “crazy,” “incarcerable,” “traumatized,” “disordered,” “diseased,” “chronic,” “uninsurable,” “wretched,” “undesirable” and altogether “dysfunctional” bodies belonging to women, people of color, poor, ill, neuroatypical, differently abled, queer, trans, and genderfluid people, who have been historically pathologized, institutionalized, brutalized, rendered “unmanageable,” and therefore made culturally illegitimate and politically invisible (Hedva 2016). Her work, intended for those “who were not made to survive, but did,” articulates the raced and classed configuration of whiteness and wellness that is supported and sustained “by the world itself” and not the pathology of any one ‘sick woman’ in particular. Jamison, in her essays teasing out the dimensions of empathy, insists on psychosomatic wounds and dwelling in or poking at them, pushing us to avoid essentializing wounds and to turn them instead into fertile loci for historicizing and understanding social relationships otherwise. Hedva’s manifesto and Jamison’s essays compel renewed understanding of how health, in its many discursive iterations and material interventions, triages elements of race, class, and gender into configurations of recoverability and relatability, and make strong cases for the undoing of these configurations as an orientation of political action today.
Empire of Love

Speaking directly of wounds, Povinelli writes in her text _Spacing the sickening_
their antibiotics and keep their (dirty) hands to themselves.

and admonish the Aboriginal sufferers for their ongoing failures to take
in terms of the unhygienic conditions of Aboriginal (enforced) settlements,
much, much less. Those Australian doctors rue its persistence but expect it,
tests to get it treated in the US and Canada, and it matters to her doctors:
tries to get it treated in the US and Canada, and it matters to her doctors:

On them, such wounds remain unremarkable, ‘shrugged-at’, despite
being technically the same infected and infectious wounds. One Aboriginal
body and its capacity to heal is diagnosed in terms of the failures of the
many that preceded it; the intervention assesses their _a priori_ failure to be
individually agentic, neoliberalistically culpabilized subjects. They are thus
effectively disqualified from ever becoming such, a foreclosure which mat-
ters not only because it underlines the ‘inclusive’ lie of liberal humanism
but also because it deeply affects their treatment and potential to recover or
be made well. Their treatment is barely a concern to the Australian doctor,
unlike the concern with infection and contagion fretted over by Povinelli’s
North American doctors, as they assume and hope she can recover from
the wound and not contaminate the (first) world. The different appraisal
of the values of Aboriginal versus white and globally mobile kinds of lives,
and the boundaries of their relative being, are expressed through the “dif-
ferent expectations about which forms of remedial care are likely to work
for whom, and why” (2006:81) – and rendered material and real in pre-
scription and treatment. Plotted against the horizon of late liberalism, such
spacings do not simply stand to the side but integrally keep social orders,
however unjust or unequal, in place.

This differently diagnosed social value is not only a concern at a level
of critical social theory. In an applied medical anthropological context,
Horton (2004) writes of health care “deservingness” related to appraisals
of the neoliberalized capacity for self-governance, as it is ascertained and
demanded with regards to different groups of migrants. Horton studied
health workers at a Florida hospital who implicitly and explicitly treated
Cuban refugees as model migrants, encouraging them to be more active
(proto)citizens, and treating them as better (more capable) patients. By
contrast, Mexican migrant patients were discouraged from using state
institutions out of the belief that they overused it and were not good self-
managing subjects; their use of the system was seen as wasteful, overtax-
ing, and to be avoided, because they wouldn’t take good enough care of
themselves. Horton argues that this led to “unmet health outcomes” among
Mexican patients, alongside feelings of “poor moral worth.”

Healthcare deservingness thus comes to form another technique to
devalue and disqualify Mexican and Mexican-Americans from equitable
moral footing in the United States, whether as migrants, proto-citizens, or
citizens. The flip side of this – the politicization through indignation that is
hypothesized by countless community organizers when poor Latinos come
to realize they too deserve state-apportioned health – is evident in the con-
siderable effort invested in Affordable Care Act outreach to undocument-

of recovery and attendant forms of contamination/contagion/wound-
edness, moving on from overdetermined senses of ‘subjectivity’ as a
bounded, individualized designation. Thinking through the temporal
and ontological implications of variably sited health interventions opens
analytical space between discourse and bodies sick, sickening and healing,
as well as the mutual imbrications of these discursively differentiated
categories.

Through attention to the ways different populations are biosocially
spaced, we see how discourses of contamination/contagion differently
demarcate and address differently moralized categories or status positions,
naturalizing and legitimating conditions of inequality and unequal social
value while shifting the onus of their piecemeal remediation to the indi-
vidual. Povinelli developed the concept with specific concern for the liberal
events of intimacy and love, as wrought through her Aboriginal interlocu-
tors’ relegation to ‘genealogical society’ and her queer fairy interlocutors’
position as ‘autological subjects’ at the two extreme but discursively depen-
dent poles of liberal agency and history. Arguably though, the framework
can be extrapolated to different ethnographic contexts, where it can help
make sense of “the speed at which [differently situated] bodies decay and
die,” along a spectrum of abandonment and attention, both caring and care-
ceral, by the state or its proxies.

Spacing the sickening

Speaking directly of wounds, Povinelli writes in her text _Empire of Love_
(2006) through a difficult-to-diagnose, and differentially diagnosed, putru-
lar wound; it might be staph, or maybe strep, or possibly anthrax? When
it pops up on the shoulder of her white, globally mobile body while mak-
ing the usual field-office-conference peregrinations of the academic, she
tries to get it treated in the US and Canada, and it matters to her doctors:
they immediately attempt to cure it, and expect her to follow through with
treatment. However, when the same wound emerges on the bodies of her
Aboriginal friends and interlocutors in outback Australia – both staph and
strep being extremely common as their bodies are ‘open’ amidst each other
and the rotting conditions of their reservation – medical authorities care
much, much less. Those Australian doctors rue its persistence but expect it,
in terms of the unhygienic conditions of Aboriginal (enforced) settlements,
and admonish the Aboriginal sufferers for their ongoing failures to take
their antibiotics and keep their (dirty) hands to themselves.
or moralized for the undocumented than the emergency room (Chandler et al. 2012). Salinas is also an outpost of UC Berkeley’s CHAMACOS project, a renowned long-term public health study of the effects of pesticides on pre- and postnatal child and maternal development.28 CHAMACOS raises important awareness of the disproportionate dangers of industrial pesticides and household chemicals but, not unlike the safety-net hospital, works with an idea of the farmworker subject as responsible for their own health despite ‘healthiness’ being for them always a game of impossible catch-up. They are always-already surrounded by life-leaching organophosphates.

Physical pollution and epidemiological vulnerability thus come to constitute a condition of their existence as farmworkers. Concomitant in these past- and present-tensed formations of farmworker contamination is the fixing of their timeliness in a mode of endurance, refusing to admit as ‘evental’ – remarkable, important, necessary – their multiple afflicting conditions in need of, or capable of, change. One lawyer, working at a local nonprofit serving this population through preventative health promotion, located this tense among farmworkers themselves as he described their lives in terms of “a culture of not-reporting-unwellness.” This social tense and non-eventfulness clearly paced the life of a Collectiva member named Araceli. Araceli was supporting her kids and herself through working in the fields when she developed ovarian cancer. Though she had lived in Salinas for 16 years, she was undocumented, and remained ineligible for healthcare. She did not even have access to the meagre state Medi-Cal provisions usually available to the undocumented due to a violation, years prior, of her Women, Infant, and Children [WIC] allowance. Araceli bore the symptoms of her developing condition for months without seeking any treatment, aside from emergency room visits when the pain became most extreme and untenable.

When avoiding treatment entirely became unbearable, Araceli began to procure one batch of medication at a time through her ER visits – all she could afford. I would see her in the healing circle twice a week, bursting with stress, as the cancer itself was only one aspect of her myriad concerns. In one healing circle check-in, she frantically narrated what had happened to her that morning, breaking straight into tears: her landlord, who happened to be her sister-in-law, was expecting the rent, but she couldn’t pay it, because she could no longer pick strawberries, as a result of the debilitat-

28 Chamacos means ‘little children’ in Mexican Spanish, and stands here specifically for Center for the Health Assessment of Mothers and Children of Salinas.
ling effects of her course of cancer medicines purchased without insurance. She felt unable to care for her kids, a set of eleven-year-old twins, after her eldest was killed less than a year prior in a gang-involved shooting – a loss she was still mourning. The thought of how to find a way that they could be cared for, amidst ongoing abuse from her boyfriend and no other family on this side of the border, is what plagued her most while she was dealing with her cancer treatment. Soon, she and her kids would be living in her car. Still, Araceli barely remarked on her condition itself. What was at stake in her illness experience was the day-to-day integrity and survival of her family, as it fit alongside a lifetime of carrying on amidst near-unlivable conditions. No mention was made of triumphing over the cancer but how to manage it, alongside the other recoveries she was juggling, and how to get back to work.

Preventative health programs, CHAMACOS, and the ER were somewhat available to Araceli, but only to the neglect of the broader conditions of her abandonment. The lack of provisions available to her – safe working environment, secure and affordable housing, subsidies for children, medical leave, access to basic healthcare – in addition to the ovarian cancer, all constitute the undiagnosed but implicit, and state-sanctioned, slow killing of the farmworker. Social hierarchies are embodied in farmworkers’ multilayered contamination and injury, and the ‘so what’ with which it gets treated by almost all involved (including, often, themselves) (Holmes 2013).²⁹ Farmworkers are figured as a self-sacrificing, deeply moralized population of parents, trading their lives and health for the gains of their children and subsequent generations. More tangibly, though, their sacrifice keeps their

undervalued labor in the fields, picking the lettuce and strawberries that bring billion-dollar revenues to the growers, and a certain percentage of those billions to the county.

**Gangbangers**

Diagonal to but not disconnected from Salinas’s farmworker population is its ranks of gang-affiliated men, women, boys, and girls. Salinas’s gang problem is usually described as one of youth violence, as if these youth are the neglected and lost children of the hard-working farmworker parents. This figuration adds a number of temporal and moral wrinkles to the discourse and a key form of their remediation: a public health approach to violence known as CeaseFire. CeaseFire is both a highly lauded and highly controversial approach to youth gang violence that borrows public health methods of epidemic disease control. Though championed by the Salinas Police force and Monterey County Behavioral Health department, CeaseFire was rued by community members who felt violated by its incursions. As one of the nation’s Six Cities for Peace alongside Chicago, Detroit, and other much larger cities, Salinas began receiving federal funding to implement CeaseFire in 2009 based on its disastrous (and, many believed, embellished) statistics on youth homicide rates and gun violence. From a CeaseFire perspective, the gang-related violence that racks the city is an illness. In the words of the police chief, Kelly McMillin, Salinas is a place “infected with violence.” The city is the sickened social body, with those who are practicing, or might practice, violence as its contagions that must be excised.

CeaseFire calls for an approach that might be called inducive, rather than inductive, of diagnoses of violence. Day to day, the strategy calls for ‘violence interrupters’ (often formerly gang-involved men employed by a coordinating community-based organization, or faith-based volunteers arranged through a local church partner) as a form of ‘inoculation’, perusing public streets and settings to detect and ‘interrupt’ conflict before it starts. It also engages the local police force with the department of Behavioral Health to elicit and pool evidence on individuals defined as ‘at-risk’ for gang involvement. Those who are enrolled in Behavioral Health programs, mandated or voluntary, around addiction or mental illness or probation programs, for example, can thus be exposed to federal authorities through this collaboration as these profiles are built. The approach relies on a sense of violence – generated by and across individuals – as immanent, reciprocal, and preemptively detectable through an enumerated list of behavioral

²⁹ Seth Holmes, in his book *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* (2013), attends to the dispersed naturalization of farmworker suffering as he follows a group of Indigenous Triqui agricultural laborers along their seasonal harvest migration, from the Mexican state of Oaxaca, to Central California, through Washington State, and back. He notes how the typically smaller stature of these Indigenous workers is often used to justify their exposure to particularly terrible conditions agachado, hunched over, picking strawberries. This is something argued of Mexicans in general, who tend to be shorter than white Americans, but the Triqui are doubly discriminated against in this way, veiling deep prejudice towards the Indigenous in Mexico. Their particularly injurious work becomes a matter of course, suitable even based on their bodies as they already are. Situated as both medical doctor and ethnographer, Holmes shows how such forms of structural and symbolic violence distribute and naturalize social suffering, and contribute to a situation wherein “certain classes of people become written off or deemed less human,” their health determined on a different scale (Holmes 2013:43). The pains of the laborers in their knees, back and hips from being bent over picking all day long, the overcrowded garages and decrepit motels in which they often live, the “grueling conditions” of their work and the danger involved in crossing the border desert all produce not only physical suffering, but also, he notes, “mental, existential, and interpersonal anguish” (89). Social hierarchies are embodied in farmworkers’ multilayered woundedness, and the ‘so what’ with which it gets treated by almost all involved (including, often, themselves).
risk factors (Ritter 2009). At the extreme, these profiles can be used as resources in planning federal Counter-Intelligence 'Sting' operations. And more quietly, preemptive interventions or ‘call-ins’ are also launched from these profiles, in which CeaseFire collaborators rely on a model that mixes rational actor theory with eschatological salvation, exhorting the detained individuals to choose the logically non-criminal path of redemption.

In both cases, working through more medicalized forms of recovery through partners with Behavioral Health, probation, and their community partners, towards a public health approach to violence and safety, the connection between caring and carceral apparatuses is laid bare. As Shi described it to me, putting herself in the shoes of those “caught up” in this machinery of recovery – like her brother and her husband – “people there, it’s like, ‘I’m trying to get rehabilitated, and I’m trying to be a different person,’ but I’m here now.” You get people like that. And then they get in trouble because they’re exposed to federal undercover agents and it’s all a sting. Every 18 months, or less than that, there’s always a sting going on.”

Adherents to the CeaseFire approach claim to shift how we think about violence “from a moral issue (good and bad people) to a public health one (healthful and unhealthful behavior)” (Kotlowitz 2008, emphasis added). Despite this claim, while ‘delinquent’ behavior gets rephrased as ‘unhealthy’ and sickening to the populace, it remains lodged in the individual’s potential (immanent; inevitable) culpability rather than their social situatedness and life conditions, as that individual is demanded to reject the gang lifeworld despite already being so deeply imbricated in it, among its many technically legal aspects. But when one tries to leave a gang, and pursue a future otherwise, the limits of on-goingness are pushed ever further.

Simply put, if closely affiliated, one cannot just leave a gang; the decision to do so would be seen as an untenable betrayal, and the individual would be labeled a ‘dropout’ and ‘greenlighted’ to be killed, with who knows what other repercussions for family members or intimate relations.

This is where many interventions like CeaseFire fail – and betray their postulating of these subjects as singular actors basing their choice on logical weighings of consequences – because the act of leaving is postulated as a matter of individual decision. The demand to quit the gang, in those terms, is an impossible one, that sets its participants up for failure. If participant leave, they disavow their families and friends; if they resist, they face incarceration and the host of disenfranchisements that entails. CeaseFire thus sets up countless young men and women for a condition of social death, their personhood in liberal humanist terms denied; as human non-persons, “they appear as if and are treated as if they were dead” (Gordon 2011:10).

**Health Equity and Heridas Abiertas**

For both farmworkers and gang members, or those so addressed through the aforementioned community health interventions, forms of recovery are dangled as possibilities but effectively denied as actualities. Those who are triaged and addressed in the present as unchangeable, or whose changeability is only conceived along a narrow and not-so-available range of possibilities, through the interventions constantly leveled at them, have the scope of their futures effectively foreclosed: always catching-up or already-diagnosed. It is precisely that extended moment of not knowing how to move forward in a morally comfortable and possible way, to dwell differently in the present in order to bring about a different future, that is at stake in Salinas’s ‘not-yet’, and the suffusion of healing and woundedness into its spread of community programming. When one didn’t expect to survive, how does one change the pace and tense of their experience of structural slow killing or social death, and come back to life?

And it is here, amidst these conditions, that we return to the Colectiva de Mujeres as composed of women like Shi – those whose lifeworlds have seemed more like deathworlds, calibrated and outstripped by the pace of too many ongoing and impossible recoveries. Like many others in Salinas, for the women of the Colectiva, farmworker and gangbanger are not at all fixed categories of being, but overlapping practices, aesthetics and moralities that, amidst others, offer contours to their lives. Many of the Mujeres were born into farmworker families, have partners or kids picking in the

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30 This emphasis on redemption is not unique to CeaseFire but common across approaches to the process of moving on from gang involvement. We see this at work in the novelty – and sometimes admiration – with which ‘recovering gangsters’ are treated in popular media and even academic literature. Edward Flores, for example, introduces his ethnography on ‘barrio pentecostalism’ in terms of ‘what most would consider a contradiction: ex-gang member male Latinos who still look like gang members, but seek the American dream. These men have ambitions to fulfill the social and economic responsibilities of fatherhood: to work a well-paying job and provide emotional support for their families’ (Flores 2009:996). The men of MLPA run up against this expectation all the time, at times using the apparent contrast strategically, other times rejecting as primary or fundamental their gangster pasts. Conventionally figured, these are not the ‘ever-self-improving, intentional subjects’ of the liberal imaginary, written about by Lauren Berlant (2007:759). Excluded as well from this subject-space, they hover in a different ‘zone of temporality’, a variant of what she calls ‘ongoingness’ tied to the work involved in getting by, living on, and maintaining a life even as it is worn down by this very work itself.
fields seasonally or full-time, or themselves work in the fields or empacares (produce-packing factories); equally many have spent years hustling and running with local gangs, spending time locked up, enduring the recurrent incarcerations of their fathers, brothers, husbands, and children, and never officially dropping out but often just fading away from the scene. Important to note, some have simply done neither, but living in Salinas are familiar in some way to these proximate practices. Both farmworking and gang membership are far more "pedestrianized" than their entrenched discursive categorizations suggest (Mendoza-Denton 2014).

At the edges of Colectiva members’ exhaustion and surprising survivals, they have come together in a new arrangement, in the space of the healing circle. The newness of the circle is only possible because of the continuity it takes from ongoing lived conditions in East Salinas. Despite the glut of health-oriented options in Salinas, for most Mujeres there have been few amenable alternatives to choose going forward around which to build a life that counts – to choose a different future by living differently in the present, without rejecting the entire (relational) world from which they’ve emerged, and thus the persons they each were and still are in some way, through those relationships. Deeply familiar with, but worn down by, the constant demands to be different, be healthy and recover, those assembled in circle are not asked or told to be a particular way, to completely change their practices, nor to disavow the person they were and in many ways still are through their ongoing relationships. Instead they are given the space to dig into their relational pasts through sitting, speaking, and being together, to take on the framework of healing/woundedness to otherwise understand what they are already doing, and thereby to be themselves differently, together.

This form of recovery hinges on their remarkable sense of survival, turning the paralysis of their ambivalence and even sometimes guilt at being ‘the one who made it’ into responsibility to each other and the next generation. It provides a novel moral-experiential framework for the diffuse suffering many have not been able to articulate, given the narrow range of recoveries otherwise available and demanded, offering instead the relational vocabulary of healing, woundedness, and traumatization instead of individualized culpability and criminalization.

Woundedness and healing have a markedly different ‘feel’ from contamination and contagion, in part due to their intertwined conceptual heritage in the Chicano/a canon. Gloria Anzaldúa, in her most well-known text Borderlands/La Frontera (Anzaldúa, Cantú, and Hurtado 2012), wrote powerfully of the border condition as an herida abierta, an open wound, referring not strictly to the geographic United States/Mexico border region but to the division within ancestrally mexicano persons residing in the United States. Coming to constitute a major orienting trope of the post-colonial condition of mestizaje or nepantla – what could be glossed in English as mixing and melding – healing and woundedness signify an unsettled and uncertain in-between. Nepantla, in Mexica/Aztec cosmology, is a metaphysical vector of indeterminate in-betweenness, productive and generative in its non-linearity and openness (Maffie 2015).

Worth noting here is how the wound hemorrhages in order to heal – on the skin between a purported inside and outside, itself generated by that interface – as a window into the intimate, relational unfolding of this politics. From this fundamental mutual disclosedness, new forms of moral personhood are capacitated; from these more open forms of moral personhood, what kind of (moral) politics becomes possible? How does this refigured social justice deal with its generative conditions of social abandonment? At stake is a different political modality regarding the kind of being that can change, at what pace, and to what end. The healing of health equity lets different problems manifest themselves relationally, without setting out certain proscribed trajectories of recovery; it allows those who are healing to realize otherwise how they are wounded, and become disclosed differently to themselves and in the world.

"Do I deserve this?" Shi asked, of her survival, of her healing, of her legitimated role to facilitate the healing of others. The fact of her questioning is itself an answer, even more so than any absolute deservingness itself; at stake is not the generation of entitlement but the realizing of social value or worth in locally salient, immanent terms. In Salinas, this is how health and healing are recharting the horizons of political possibility, opening up new frameworks for (re)organizing life experiences calibrated to the world that is healing alongside, and forging new modes of engaging in political action other than liberalism. As such, health equity, to many in Salinas, is indeed "the new social justice," leveraged from the interfaced wounds of poor communities of color – especially on the skin of those whose wounds were shrugged off or prescribed an impossible course of medicine, those who were never expected to recover, let alone survive.
Healing together

The women come together, become together, in the healing circle. On any given Monday or Thursday evening, a collective of women ranging from ‘raw’ to ‘professional’, México, Chicana, African-American, Caucasian, can be found sitting on plastic chairs in a nondescript office at the Bread-Box community center on Sanborn Street, circled around a serape-draped altar decorated with photos of deceased children, fresh lilies from somebody’s garden, and an abalone shell holding a smoldering bundle of sage. One by one the women of the Colectiva de Mujeres ‘check-in’ with each other, disclose their cargas and regalos [baggage and gifts], in front of these sacred objects called the medicine. Bit by bit they are descargando or discharging the heaviness of their years. Committed to healing themselves and their community, they speak of what troubles them but also what...
brings lightness to their lives, without set topic or chronology; in this way, they are healing.

This serene scene, coming together and *descargando,* constitutes a surprisingly critical action in this farmtown-gangland, where silence and abidance have long been the most available, comfortable, and necessary means of dwelling. Being together in circle involves more than a seating arrangement. As I’ll argue in this chapter, it involves cultivating a mode of being-with through which the relational nature of moral experience is clarified, emphasized, and constantly reworked. This mode extends beyond the twice-weekly circles to contour the Mujeres’ fidelities and forms of responsiveness to support each other on respective, but intertwined, ‘paths to healing.’

These paths or trajectories take embodied, imagined and narrated form in part through the check-ins, as articulations, however fragmented, of ‘what has happened’ in the novel hermeneutic framework of healing. The check-ins are not simply reports of each woman’s relative wellbeing that day, but complex (re)temporalizations of difficult lives as lived, endured, and shared, coalescing around the emergent ethical imperative of healing together. Efforts at articulating one’s singular path indicate and generate the overlaps and intermeshings of lives and experience. I thus consider healing, rather than being lodged in the bounded subject and mired in a recovery of the past, as dispersed across relations through time as they are mutually disclosed.

In Salinas, ‘recovery’ is used as a gloss for this process in part because of the sheer ubiquity of recovery regimes in the Mujeres’ lives. These are people who have been told in myriad ways over the years, you need to be different, but at the same time, you’ll never change. All have some experience with therapeutic programs, from probation to AA to “Strengthening Families,” and are all too familiar with the idea of ‘working on themselves.’ I am cautious, though, of the implications of calling these ‘recoveries.’ Working on oneself, a kind of self-cultivation, tends to be framed as a lifestyle choice for the liberal (white) subject, what Lauren Berlant (2007:759) called the ever-self-improving, intentional subject, but pathologized, and often institutionally mandated, in terms of recovery for the poor and people of color (Cacho 2012). The ‘recoveries’ involved in healing perhaps should not even be called recoveries, because they are not returns or re-gains of prior pristine states. You can’t draw a straight temporal line between the Mujeres’ pasts and futures, and they don’t simply jump over their woundedness or the details of their abjection.

The remedial mode of this healing is not simply to add a future, but to recalibrate the past and through it, dwell differently in the present. *Descargando* in circle is one of the key means by which they do this critical re-

**Recalibrating rhythms**

As explored in this dissertation’s introduction and first chapter, the possibilities for political action in East Salinas and other abandoned and criminalized California communities are increasingly unfolding in a register of health and healing. I take a Heidegger-informed approach to social action that holds ‘being’ and ‘the world’ in a coeval relationship of mutual unfolding (Heidegger 2008a), a relationality that reverberates in the Colectiva’s dual orientation towards interpersonal and community healing in the name of social justice and building a healthy community. Chicana feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa echoed this in her concept of *el mundo zurdo,* ‘the left-handed world’ drawing together diversely situated people, “the path of a two-way movement – a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society” (Anzaldúa 2009:49). The women work on themselves at the same time as they work within the community, finding that their own healing is predicated upon preventing others from experiencing similar suffering.

There is an energizing novelty to the women’s gathering, such that, as Shi articulated, something like a women’s circle “has never been done before [in East Salinas]. There’s never been a safe space for women, there’s never been where women could just sit down and talk.” This talking, rather than indicating a transcendent and singular ‘subject who voices,’ is alternatively conceived as disclosing, connecting and entangling across traditional bounded subject lines, indicating an assembled ontology of mutual being and becoming. Their ‘sharing’ is not a straightforward co-experiencing, nor even a coherent process of meaning-making, but a collaborative if asymmetrical temporal production of moral modes of dwelling and being along a porous horizon of time. Time is not an empty or immanent qual-
that healing happens in the struggle to morally
of captivation, I am inspired by Zigon (2013) and Jackson (2005) to argue
practice away from particularly sacralized subjects and their relationships
in healing demand more sustained attention. Moving analyses of spiritual
ied as well as an ‘interpretive system’, the social and temporal work involved
in healing demand more sustained attention. Moving analyses of spiritual
practice away from particularly sacralized subjects and their relationships
of captivation, I am inspired by Zigon (2013) and Jackson (2005) to argue
that healing happens in the struggle to morally be with each other, while
the contours of that sense of morality may be shifting. This struggle can be
felt as great vulnerability, and can be in part (but not entirely) negotiated
and achieved through the dialogic process of mutual disclosure, a process
that is only partially conscious and partially narrativized.

The particulars of the healing circle sociality, both ‘street’ and ‘sacred’ as
detailed below, capacitate but do not determine the possibilities for
becoming opened up by the circle. It is not the anticipation of a particular
perfectible ‘healed’ state that brings the women together; instead it is the
acknowledgement “that there’s something going on with us, and we need
to really move on and try to work on ourselves, and at the same time try
to make it easier for someone else, and maybe that means the community,” as
one Mujer, Lizbeth, phrased it. “That’s why we’re very passionate about the
community, I guess, because the negative experience that we have, that we
went through, we don’t want anyone else to go through.” Possible routes and
rhythms towards healing – and thereby becoming otherwise – are ever-
emergent through the women’s cargas and regalos, ‘baggage’ and ‘gifts’,
articulated and received as resources for possible interpretations of self and
world. The healing of lingering wounds unfolds through the rearticulation
of experiences as not just random occurrences or instances of the sufferer’s
own culpability, what William James might have called “disjunctive” expe-
riences (in Throop 2003), but continuously (re)organized and rendered
relatively conjunctive into a trajectory that makes sense and has value in
the emergent moral framework of healing.

Situating the Collectiva’s particular healing circle as composed of ele-
ments of the politicized spirituality of Chicanismo, this chapter explores
the women’s cultivation of an ethical and ontological stance of ‘In Lak’ech,
tú eres mi otro yo, ‘you are my other me’, a process that is based in mutual
disclosedness in circle, steeped in the check-in as a narrative practice of
descargando, but rippling far further. Delving into the ‘path to healing’ tak-
en by one Mujer in particular, Pamela, with its distinctive rhythm, we can
trace the (re)temporalizing work across subjects that goes into something
like healing oneself alongside the world, as she creatively cultivates a sense
of moral subjectivity through experiences near and far, temporally and
socially. But first, it’s time to circle up.

Círculo

I turn now to the Mujeres’ healing circle process to illuminate how the
women cultivate dispositions towards disclosure, a process of mutual open-
ning and becoming towards and through each other and the world. Healing
is understood as dispersed across relations and through (sacred) time, and
coeval with the world as the community heals its wounds. I include sen-
sitizing comments from the Mujeres themselves and phenomenological
theorists peppered throughout, and build towards a deeper analysis of the
check-in as a therapeutic narrative genre.31

Every círculo generates its own particular energy or ‘moodedness’
(Throop 2014, 2015), based on the people that are assembled there and
the diffuse experiences they articulate, but the practices of the circle are
quite constant and rather ritualized. For as harried as the women’s days
have been, these ritualized phases have a ‘grounding’ effect, generating a
pronounced (and very valued) mood of reflectivity, calm, and potential-
ity. At the same time many women have expressed, in discussions after-
wards, great discomfort in feeling vulnerable in facing each other around
the circle – seated simply on a chair, facing everyone else, and being asked
to “reveal what’s inside of my life,” as one of the Mujeres, Pamela, put it to
me during an interview. This complex, fluctuating moodedness is not inci-

31 These observations came out of eight months of participating in the Colectiva’s weekly, and
then twice-weekly, circles, spanning early February to early September 2014. The first proto-circles
were held as convivias, potlucks, in December 2013/January 2014, at Shi’s home, gathering friends
and colleagues old and new, until TCE funding came through and the ACFA could be secured
as a steady host facility. I was invited to join the group at this point, as a woman and member
of MILPA, and did not initially approach it as an object of research. As the circles continued and
my involvement in the women’s lives deepened, I came to realize the importance of what was
happening in circle and the effects it was having on the women’s lives. With their encouragement I
shifted my scholarly attention to the Colectiva, meanwhile supporting Shi in a ‘co-facilitator’ role,
and healing alongside the women, relating to each other as sisters, “the family we choose.”
dental but very much essential to the possibility of healing, and I consider it here in line with Throop’s (2014) meditation on moral moods as temporally and socially complex phenomena that, lying in an intermediary zone of experience between conscious reflection and embodied disposition, may provide a means for shifting moral reflection. “In revealing moral concerns in flux,” he argues, “moods often inhabit an ambivalent existential expanse where the possible, the ideal, and the actual coalesce in rather complicated ways” (2014:70). “You don’t know what to expect when you come to a circle,” Pamela reflected, referring not to the way the circles are run but to the unknown affective energies and issues that each woman will bring to it, and how one will respond to another. In being together in circle, the women open themselves ethically and existentially to each other, arguably through this moodedness. There is an ever-present vulnerability to how the circle and thus each woman may be ‘charged’ in the process of individualized descargando, ‘discharging’, taking on another’s baggage.

Despite this risk, the typical soft and reflective mood of the circle was expected and much appreciated by the women. For many Mujeres the Mondays and/or Thursday nights were the only time ‘to themselves’ they demanded from their families, often struggling each week with suspicious husbands or partners to arrive there. Many of the women described difficult situations at home, struggling with insecure housing and income, unsupportive or abusive family or partners, or worrisome children; their difficulty dwelling in Salinas was deep in both public and private settings. The circle’s “theory of change” beyond the healing of the women themselves held that, through shifting the woman of the household’s stance on healing and social engagement, the healing circle sociality or mode would “ripple outwards” into each woman’s other social circles. Indeed, the healing and social engagement, the healing circle sociality or mode would provide a means for shifting moral reflection. “In revealing moral concerns in flux,” he argues, “moods often inhabit an ambivalent existential expanse where the possible, the ideal, and the actual coalesce in rather complicated ways” (2014:70). “You don’t know what to expect when you come to a circle,” Pamela reflected, referring not to the way the circles are run but to the unknown affective energies and issues that each woman will bring to it, and how one will respond to another. In being together in circle, the women open themselves ethically and existentially to each other, arguably through this moodedness. There is an ever-present vulnerability to how the circle and thus each woman may be ‘charged’ in the process of individualized descargando, ‘discharging’, taking on another’s baggage.

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While the circles officially began at 5:30 pm, coordinations around transportation and attendance often started hours before that. As a co-facilitator I would help make arrangements for those who did not have cars, at the same time as reaching out by phone or text message to remind them of the evening’s meeting and encourage their attendance. Shi and I would arrive at the BreadBox between 5 and 5:30, taking plastic chairs from their stacks at the side of the room and arranging them into a circle based on our estimates for attendance. A small desk on wheels served as our altar at the center of this circle, draped with Shi’s pink and purple serape and various spiritually-inflected knick-knacks and the medicina. Occasionally Shi would ‘sage off’ the room, technically an office for the Alisal Center for Fine Arts (ACFA), to clear some of its energy. A box of tissues was always at the ready, discreet at the base of the altar, to catch the tears (the water element, the women’s element) that would inevitably flow at some point. At the same time in the next room over, a children’s guitar class could be heard playing, the same basic rondalla-style rhythms ever tightening over the weeks and months. Colorful acrylic paintings made in art classes past hung on the walls, alongside filing cabinets and music stands.

Las Mujeres would enter the space, taking random seats around the circle, greeting each other or just slipping in quietly, sampling whatever snacks we had around that day. Often their children or grandchildren would be running around at this point, grabbing handfuls of banana chips and then playing outside or at the recreation center two rooms over. Daughters and granddaughters were encouraged to stay if they were able to participate like everyone else, sitting quietly and respectfully but sharing at least a regalo during the check-in. Perhaps more chairs would be added and the circle expanded, or some taken away, but always at least one would be left open. This chair was acknowledged as ‘the ghost chair’, saved for whoever couldn’t physically be with us but was present in spirit.

Once we seemed more or less assembled, with more concern for attendance than punctuality as we ran on ‘Chicana Time’ a solid 15 minutes late for everything, Shi, the facilitator, would welcome everyone to the circle and introduce the Colectiva de Mujeres. Without doing a round of introductions, we would ascertain if everyone in the group spoke English, and if not the group would be done in Spanish or in a running translation between the two languages. Shi would outline our ‘Agreements,’ a list of values guiding engagement within and beyond the circle; what might elsewhere have been written up as ‘rules’ was instead presented as values and practices to consent to – respect, honesty, willingness, ownership.  

32 The ‘Agreements’ are further an echo of the popular self-help book The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom by Don Miguel Ruiz (1997). This was unofficial required reading among the Colectiva members, as a highly accessible text conveying ‘ancient Toltec wisdom’ for contemporary issues of emotional stress. Ruiz’s Four Agreements are: be impeccable with your word; don’t take anything personally; don’t make assumptions; and always do your best.
to invocations of ‘In Lak‘ech,’ these keyword-agreements tentatively operate as ‘indexical markers of cultural virtues’, evoking broader moral configurations and practices that may still be under negotiation through what is disclosed and discussed in circle itself (Throop 2010).

The Agreements were collaboratively decided-upon by the group and were considered a living document, as new Agreements could be added or old ones rearticulated as the Colectiva continued through time. The one non-negotiable and enduring Agreement, though, is Palabra, referring to the process of having and keeping one’s word. While the format of Agreement rather than rule is in line with the circle’s interpretive and relational approach to engagement and disclosure, the moments of disagreement over Agreements indicate individualized processes of interpretation and accommodation, and its sensitive and slow-to-shift edges. It also indicates the direct-indirectness of the accommodation the circle sociality supports, and the deeply sensitive receptivity sustained to what is disclosed therein.33

After informally re-agreeing to the Agreements, a few moments were dedicated to announcements of initiatives or events happening around Salinas. I would generally announce any upcoming BHC meetings or citywide projects, situating them in terms of the Colectiva’s ongoing projects and outlining some of the stakes involved. Any woman could at this point share any other projects she knew about or was participating in. Women were not forced to be part of any events or initiatives presented, even if ‘we’ the Colectiva planned to engage, acknowledging that different women had different sensitivities and predilections towards certain topics or forms of action.

Announcements were (ideally) brief, concluding quickly to move the circle into the crucial act of lighting and passing the bundle of sage. Lighting the dried herb, Shi would ask everyone to take it in their left hand and waft the smoke over and towards them four times (once for each sacred cardinal direction), and then pass it to the left, the direction of the heart. Standing silently (if against the background noise of the guitar rondalla), this was a variably reverent moment, as each woman wafts the sage smoke differently – sometimes four cursory swipes, sometimes elaborate, deliberate waves to particular parts of the body, accompanied by a deep appreciative breath, sometimes a swirling of the smoke from toe to head. The burning of dried sage as a healing and energy-clearing practice has roots in various Native American traditions as well as New Age iterations, and in the circle was believed to help carry away one’s cargas, the baggage of experience that exhausted with its weight.

Passing the sage was, for most, the moment the gathering would take an air of sacrality, marking the proper beginning of the circle as it focused our attention both inwards and towards each other. It enables the next phase of the circle, the ‘check-in’ and passing of palabra. At this point Shi would introduce our ‘palabra piece’ for the day, an object rendered quasi-sacred through this distinction; it could be a rattle, a crystal, a rainstick, depending on what objects were available on the altar. Whoever holds the palabra piece has the capacity to speak and be heard at that moment; cross-talking and in-between commentary was thoroughly discouraged. Those receiving the palabra would generally hold it and say ‘palabra’ to open their check-in, often closing it with the same invocation or the Nahuatl word ometeotl, ‘all my relations’. Palabra literally means ‘word’ in Spanish, but coalesces connotations much broader along the lines of commitment and integrity to the group and its Agreements through comportment in and beyond the circle. Shi, each time, proposed the practice of checking in through the framework of regalos y cargas, translated as gifts and baggage; one did not have to have a cargo but everyone had to share a regalo. The basic regalo, suggested to those new to the group and unsure of what to say or unwilling to disclose anything in particular, was “being alive.” Passing the palabra to the left reinforced the practice of speaking from the heart.

One by one, each woman would ‘check-in’, with no set rules or characteristics per se for what was an appropriate cargo or regalo. Shi would often start this process with her own check-in, in part to set the scope of possible tone and duration, but also to signal that she too was engaged in her own process of healing; she was the facilitator of the group, having been trained periodically over many years in the La Cultura Cura teachings, but not the sole ‘healer’ among a group of ‘supplicants’, to borrow terminology from Csordas’s study of Pentecostal charismatic healing communities in North America (1997). Shi’s healing-alongside is an important detail that speaks to the mutuality of healing based on disclosure across subjects, rather than a more differentiated or unidirectional healer-supplicant relationship (cf. Waldram 1993). Overall the women’s check-ins ranged from

33 Once, situated in the midst of a conflict between two of the women stemming from their gang-involved pasts to leave behind, I proposed the following two Agreements: to always push further on our own paths to healing, and to be mindful of where each other is at and offer support accordingly. I was careful to phrase it as sentences rather than single words, and as vague if hopeful orientations for all of us to take rather than directed at the conflicting women in particular. Still, my proposal was met with discomfort by precisely the women who were involved in the conflict, who themselves opined that while this should be something we each do in our own healing work, it should not be a binding Agreement for the group to uphold. The seeming serenity of the group’s circles was often underlain with these tense currents, sublated but palpable issues with more explicit expression outside of the circle itself.
acute and recent ‘tangible’ things to longer-durational and more diffuse, difficult to articulate struggles with (for example) motherhood, grieving, or belonging, as this typical fieldnote excerpt suggests:

The check-in was good, emotional, intense… as we each talked about the things on our shoulders and in our hearts. Shi’s man, still locked up and going through it, but getting out in a few months and acting up, being weird in his phone calls and unappreciative in his emails. Esme on Arturo’s trip to Sundance and the risk of an insulin crash, and without her there to care for him, letting that go, trusting that he will be alright. Patricia on her grandfather, nearing the end, her appreciating all her relations. Alma on being tired and broke, kicked out of her apartment, her daughter’s father not helpful. Me, breaking down, getting ready to leave the field, getting ready once again to put so many of my relationships in a state of in-betweeness. Rocio checked in with positive comments about getting to spend some time alone finally, after being treated as a free babysitter for her younger siblings while she was home for the summer from college. Her grandmother Isabel began saying some things about her sons but then got choked up and couldn’t continue, exchanging the palabra for tissues. Josefina was Josefina. She’s dealing with her daughter’s doctors, they don’t want to remove the bullet still. [Fieldnotes, July 2014]

While Shi would ask that we keep our check-ins brief, in practice each woman could take as long as she needed, and this stage of the circle often took over the entire session. So popular and important was it to the women that often those who could not be present would send a check-in via text message, to be be read aloud alongside everyone else’s disclosures.

Each circle-gathering would further have an intended plática portion, a discussion or activity usually facilitated by Shi or the other co-facilitator, Rosa. Some examples of the topics would be our sacred purpose, stereotypes about us (as women, as Latinas), setting boundaries, or illustrating and then interpreting ‘road maps’ of our lives. Some of these topics were adapted from formalized La Cultura Cura curricula (discussed in chapter four) and adapted to the circumstances, but most often the topics and activities were planned by Shi, Rosa and I as a reflection and continu-

ation of what emerged out of previous sessions’ check-ins, picking up on current issues experienced by the women, presented not as direct advice but as a collaborative process of sharing experiences guided by key discussion questions. The specific problem sparking the plática did not ‘belong’ to the one woman checking in with it, in the sense that she directly would not be addressed in dealing with it, but was shown to be related to a bundle of widely relatable issues, a situation of often structural proportions.34

On some Thursdays, technically the consciousness-raising ‘educational component’ evening, the check-ins would be more explicitly held short to make room for a ‘Voice of the Voiceless’ discussion and activity, a project intended to cultivate and elicit each woman’s ‘story’. This storytelling work was fueled by the intention of eventually hosting an eponymous event where the stories would be shared, through various genres and media, with the broader community for consciousness-raising and advocacy purposes. Thursdays in general were devoted to growing ‘la conscientia de la mujer’, raising awareness of the broader forces at work in the systems of oppression in which the women found themselves, suffering and feeling culpable. The connection between the Monday and Thursday evenings was strong, as members of the Colectiva held that “we are all here because maybe something happened and you didn’t get heard; and that drives you to work for positive changes now,” as Shi put it on the first Thursday gathering to generate ideas about what we could possibly do. “And for all the other women who still don’t have a voice, we’ll be here.”

As 7 pm drew nearer, the circle would be closed out through a second saying and then a round of ‘I-appreciations’. Someone would volunteer each time to start the appreciations, approaching each woman one-by-one around the circle (again to the left), looking her in the eye and saying “I appreciate you,” hugging, and then moving on to the next woman, each

34 By way of example: Checking in once with the regalo of being so glad to come to the circle each week, tiny Marta Fernandez, with her bob haircut and effusively giggly way, said “I love this group, because it reminds me that I’m not the only crazy one! We’re all crazy!” Vivified by her bright energy, all of us around the circle giggled along and murmured agreement, though the idea that we were all crazy struck me as problematic. Rather than saying something in circle, because there was no time and space for that kind of dissent, I held onto the dissatisfaction this group, because it reminds me that I’m not the only crazy one! We’re all crazy!” Vivified by her bright energy, all of us around the circle giggled along and murmured agreement, though the idea that we were all crazy struck me as problematic. Rather than saying something in circle, because there was no time and space for that kind of dissent, I held onto the dissatisfaction until later when Shi and I could ‘debrief’ on the circle and plan the next one. Shi shared the concern and proposed we devote a plática to confronting stereotypes about women. “We are not crazy, women are not crazy,” Shi said. “We just have some issues that we’re misunderstood, and nobody understands us. Doesn’t mean we’re crazy, ok. I wanted to kind of clarify with her, but it’s ok. I’ll talk to her later. These are real life issues that happen that, you might think you’re crazy, you don’t, no one else relates to you, or they’ve told you all your life, you’re crazy you’re crazy, it’s like, shit, no I’m not.” I replied, “and then you don’t have the space, the connections, the confianza to do that.” “Exactly,” Shi continued. “You don’t have it. And then right there, the women are getting that. And that’s when we have to correct them, if we hear them we have to say, ah, you were never crazy, those things really did happen. And you know what, we could validate that with our own stories.”
following another. While some women would dash off to return to homes full of hungry kids or grumpy husbands, others would stay behind to help clean up, eat a few more snacks, or chat with each other about plans for the week or something disclosed in circle that still resonated. Conversations would continue in the parking lot as well as through text messages and phone calls throughout the week.

Sacred politics, politicized sacrumality

The healing circle (or 'talking circle') as a social, spiritual, therapeutic and political practice could be historicized numerous ways. Conceived broadly as an ancient practice carried out by Indigenous cultures around the world, it is striking in its arrangement of attention and horizontal relationality (Bazemore and Schiff 2015; Graveline 2000). In its contemporary iterations it has been explored as a means of implementing therapeutic and critical pedagogical programming, in diverse settings like the Canadian prison system and university classrooms (Waldram 1993), as well as restorative justice efforts among Indigenous populations in postcolonial nations (Bazemore and Schiff 2015).

The particular circles (per)formed by the Colectiva de Mujeres twice weekly are funded, through Shi as the facilitator, by The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative, and loosely based on the teachings of the La Cultura Cura philosophy as expounded by Maestro Jerry Tello and his National Compadres Network based in Los Angeles. (This organization and its curricula-based approach to 'Latino healthways' are explored in more detail in chapter 4.) Tello has a background in psychology and La Cultura Cura addresses Latino mental health through psychologically-informed but folk tradition/cultura [culture]-oriented sensibility and imagery, and the circles that arise from these teachings are thus not therapy but definitely therapeutic. The women’s healing through these circles challenges ontological categorizations like those explored in chapter one, the futureless, unchanging, individualizing spacings of farmworker and gang member in East Salinas, by drawing broader temporal horizons, shifting towards a more dynamic tense, and imbuing latent relationalities such as sisterhood and ancestry with a dynamic sacrumality. In this section I explore the temporal aspects of the Colectiva’s healing circles as they echo a Chicana/o political-moral ontology of cosmic connectivity, in order to situate the women’s circle-based check-ins as a form of ethical action through narrative (re)temporalization.

While it is an explicitly non-denominational group open to women of all ethnicities, orientations, and ages, the Colectiva de Mujeres is primarily composed of Mexican and Mexican-American women, ranging from ‘raw’ to ‘professional’ to borrow Shi’s terms, or variably educated on the streets or in college. Many have some experience with one or more group-based therapeutic or rehabilitative programs and are thereby familiar with the idea of working on themselves. The majority of women in the Colectiva have neither participated in other healing or talking circles before, nor purposely explored Indigenous spiritual outlooks or practices. This is hardly seen to be a barrier to involvement, as the Colectiva renegotiates the relationship between ‘sacred’ and ‘street’ ways of orienting oneself in the world that are inspired by the politicized spirituality of Chicanismo, as it has been filtered through programs like La Cultura Cura, as well as echoed through everyday adoption and reorientation of its motifs (cf. Mendoza-Denton 2014). These ways are often familiar, and uncannily alluring, to many of the Mujeres.

Most centrally, these circles are rooted in the traditions and temporality of Chicanismo, emerging as an identity movement of the 1960s and ’70s rallying Mexican-Americans together against their multisited marginalization in the United States.35 Developing alongside African-American Civil Rights struggles and simultaneous to various anti-colonial movements of the day, Chicanismo continues to hinge on the idea of decolonizing oneself: from the hierarchical, discriminatory race/class consciousness of the United States, but also deep in time from the Spanish colonization of the mighty civilizations of the Aztec (Méxica), Maya, and other groups glossed as ‘Indigenous’. This is a struggle that continues in various forms through the valorizing of Indigenous ancestry and revival of particular practices, such as speaking and naming in Nahuatl (an Uto-Aztecan language), performing danza azteca, burning copal for energetic clearing and healing, as well as chronotopic evocations of the southwestern United States as Aztlán, the spiritual homeland of the Méxica. These practices and aesthetics sometimes have syncretic relationships with elements of broadly shared Catholic upbringings, like invoking Tonantzin in place of Santa Maria, or simply exist alongside each other, as in placing saint-specific velás [candles] on a

35 Critically, not all Mexican-Americans call themselves Chicana/o. Few of the Mujeres of the Colectiva would explicitly identify as such, although they would be familiar with many of its elements unmarked as such in their lives – and increasingly so through their involvement in the healing circles. This disinclination to explicitly identify as Chicanas speaks to what makes the circles so welcoming and amenable, precisely that participants do not have to take any particular identity position or social location, aside from being women (or girls). For some of the class and generational barriers involved in Mexican-Americans’ becoming Chicana/os, see chapter four.
household altar next to a somador [diffuser] filled with copal, a Nahuatl word for a resinous amber whose smoke has purifying properties, indigenous to central Mexico and known elsewhere as frankincense.

Beyond the Chicano Civil Rights movement’s heyday in the 1960s and ’70s, Chicanism has been greatly elaborated and shifted through the arts and literature, key to the pre- and post-Conquest traditional poesía of flor y canto, a joyous and creative genre, as well as the collective truth-telling testimonio genre of Latin and South American political struggle. Gloria Anzaldúa is perhaps the most influential Chicana thinker in the post-Civil Rights period, contesting androcentric Chicano historiography while widening the margins of an inclusive, multicultural feminist movement, rendering porous the divides between academia and activism (Keating 2009). Over her career she developed a stance of ‘spiritual activism’, based on an epistemology of metaphysical interconnectedness through commonalities as visionary locations, and an ethics of responsibility to intervene in and transform unjust social conditions. She has re-visioned the role of many pre-Conquest Indigenous female deities and icons, making figures like Coyolxauquihui and Coaltlique newly relevant and even analytically recursive to understanding contemporary ‘intersectional’ struggles of women in particular. Her approach and many of her myriad concepts, particularly Conocimiento as discussed in chapter one and the Coyolxauquihui Imperative as I will detail in this chapter below, are reflected in the Colectiva de Mujeres’s healing circles. Taking its place in the Chicana/o canon, Anzaldúa’s work has these simultaneous temporal qualities, ‘timeless’ Indigenous concepts infused with a potentiality in their accommodation of alternative perspectives and positions, towards a cosmic inevitability of a multicultural movement.

Chicanismo’s entanglements of belonging and belief, colonialism and cosmology, personhood and ancestry generally guarantees that, as Medina points out in her discussion of public Day of the Dead ceremonies in Los Angeles, “in ritual and artistic expressions of Chicana/o spirituality, the political cannot be separated from the spiritual” (2004:206). She further argues that “the claiming of ancestral indigenous epistemology that values interdependency between the living and the dead, between living communities and ancient ones” is the “key to spiritual and physical healing” among this population. The temporal quality of sacred timelessness generated through Chicana/o spiritual practice, what we might call a Chicana/o tense (cf. Fabian 1983, Povinelli 2011), is mapped onto attendant politicized dispositions. This temporality, rather than being inherent to the practice or its adherent, is mediated through social relationships (Richland and Throop 2013). The endurability of the sacred gets folded into the present-everyday as well as projected future, grounding and imbuing the struggle for social change with intensified, sacralized moral stakes, related to healing not only oneself but across subjects and generations, both recent and ancestral.

An important aspect of this Chicana/o tense is the prevailing metaphysics of the movement: in Mayan, In Lak’ech; in Spanish, tú eres mi otro yo; in English, you are my other me. Ushered into its canon and cosmology by playwright Luis Valdez in his seminal epic poem Pensamiento Serpentino (1990), In Lak’ech is the Mayan term for a pan-Mesoamerican Indigenous concept that calibrates one’s being with the other, not collapsing the two but staking the intermeshment of their integrity on moral and ontological terms. Perceptions and judgments of others are redirected, in this metaphysics, towards one’s self-awareness, echoed in the healing circle’s emphasis on another’s experience as a hermeneutic resource for one’s own. “Somos espejos para cada uno. We are mirrors to each other. Así es que no...”

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36 Testimonio is a genre of ‘truth’ co-produced by a speaker and a recorder, and often coalescing the experiences of a collective into an individual life history (Beverley 1989; 2004).

37 Although Anzaldúa is often associated with the feminist heuristic of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; Puar 2012), the interlocking of oppressions along race, class, gender lines, her later writings in particular are very amenable to an assemblage analytic, as she opens space for a “diversity of perspectives” and social locations that “expands and alters the dialogue, not in an addition fashion but through a multiplicity that’s transformational” (Anzaldua 2009:246, emphasis added). She called this the ‘new tribalism’.

38 To what extent is this politically-driven sense of sacredness a transcendence of the everyday, in the sense evoked by Veena Das as away from the ‘concrete, specific, particular, relational, contextual realness of people’s lives and toward the abstract or universal’ (in Conrad 2014:82, emphasis in original)? While Veena Das has claimed that healing or recovery happens through ‘descent into the everyday’ rather than ‘ascent into the transcendent’, Conrad makes an important critique in shifting the anthropologist’s focus to what counts as transcendent in local/ particular configurations, which Veena Das, often achieves the dual movement of moving beyond, while remaining embedded in, everyday life. How the transcendent and everyday (if they even exist conceptually or experientially as such) are related or mediated hints at the local moral

39 Along with rising numbers of Hispanics in the United States identifying as Native American or Amerindian, Census data shows a 50% increase, from 407,000 to 685,000, identifying as Native American, and other data indicates that the number has tripled to 1.2 million if you broaden the term to ‘Amerindian’ (which can refer to Indigenous peoples of all the Americas) (Cohn 2014; Decker 2011; Indian Country Today 2013). This is something very present among Milperos, who may not have been raised in this way but at some point have felt a resonance with the customs, aesthetics, philosophies of indigenous traditions.
In Lak’ech is a sense of morality as Zigon (2014a) has approached it, as an “ontology of relational-being” characterized by *attunement*, the foundational capacity to become engaged and entangled in relationships, and fidelity, the condition that lets the subject ‘stay true’ to and further cultivate her sense of self through the ethical maintenance of these relationships. The women’s particular fiducial commitments to their enmeshed healing processes are expressed in terms of this form of personhood across time and subjects, as the shards of their life experiences, disclosed in circle, become mirrors for others to see themselves and their own life experiences anew. For many this is a novel relationality; as Alma, a young Mujer shifting from a gang-oriented to a *cultura*-based life, articulated, “*I was raised with the philosophy that it’s every person for themselves, no tengo amigos [I don’t have friends] – círculo is a pretty big contrast!*”

Many who had been involved in the circle and La Cultura Cura also often explicitly articulated *In Lak’ech* in distinct moments of fidelity [relationship-maintenance] to each other. It would be invoked when something was given from one to another, as if offering humble justification for why somebody should do something for anyone without immediately receiving something in return; I give freely to you because ‘you are my other me’. Its articulation in this way should be approached as a temporalizing practice with moral-ontological implications akin to Throop’s ‘indexical markers of cultural virtue’, situating a seemingly simple and singular gesture along a broader horizon of sacred time and togetherness (Throop 2010). Valdez’s bilingual poem further compels the reader to situate him/herself en “el gran anfiteatro de los cosmos,” differentiating “Chicano” from “gabacho” [White American/European] time and the movement of the planíets and the stars.

I approach *In Lak’ech* and a Chicana/o tense as it forms the horizon of healing through inquiring into how people together generate senses of temporality and its sharedness, relying upon “various imaginal, semiotic, material, somatic and interactional resources to constitute the very tissue

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40 Translation: We are mirrors to each other. So don’t go around criticizing or mistreating other peoples deal with your own limits. Here I do away with the usual italicization of Spanish words to reflect Valdez’s Chicano aesthetics and politics, and the easy shifting between languages in widely spoken Spanglish.
never any resolution, just the process of healing” (Anzaldua 2009:312). The recoveries possible through the healing circle are non-linear but involve reorganizing past events into new and revivifying cycles and rhythms of being.

This is a more active and creative process than simply ‘opening’ oneself to the group, letting the past spill out to be cleaned up. ‘Openness’ in therapeutic regimes of recovery, such as the women-specific AA group that Kornfield (2014:435) writes about, is often held to be a “central mechanism for making recovery work… accommodat[ing] members’ valuations of candor and emotionality”. In the Colectiva’s circle, ‘opening’ becomes possible because of the ongoing opening of the other women as well, and the check-in is accordingly not a straightforward articulation of exactly ‘what has happened’ to the teller but an articulation that adjusts to and addresses what has already been shared through the circle. It is not opening but disclosedness, closer to what Laurence Ralph calls ‘history-as-emergent’ in contrast to Trouillot’s (1997, in Ralph 2014) binaristic sense of history as either registered or lived. ‘History-as-emergent’ is instead “a contemplative juxtaposition between how life was, how life is, and how life could be” (Ralph 2014:29).

The women work through their experiences through the check-ins, not simply telling but negotiating a broader story about themselves; similar to the process of articulating illness narratives by Mexican cancer survivors studied by Hunt (2000), the women are “involved in a process wherein adversity is incorporated into ongoing biographies in creative and useful ways.” They thereby “reconstruct” a place for themselves in the world “that is in some way better for them than the place they occupied prior to the illness’s disruptive effects” (2000:99-100). Only in this case, it is not an illness but strings of chronic and acute traumas that leave somatic scars, and a place for themselves but also for others who should not have to suffer the same way.

As Jackson notes, stories tell “a truth,” not the truth, about what “actually happened,” which enables people [not only the teller] to live in the here and now with what happened to them in the past,” prioritizing “the existential urge to remaster experience rather than the epistemological need to preserve an exact record of it” (2005:24). Further, story has perlocutory force, works as action, on a listener, as the narrator “moralize(s) the events they recount and seek[s] to convince others to see some part of reality in a particular way” (Mattingly and Garro 2000:10). Mattingly and Garro continue, this depends on the relationship between the narrator and listener, and whether the listener is willing to take up what the narrat-
his institutionalized mistreatment. Chris. This was three weeks after Chris’s funeral. I can only tell the story of Pamela through Chris, but I can only tell Chris through another of Pam’s children, Faith. And to tell you about Faith, I have to start with a check-in made during a circle months prior, expressed in Spanish and sob's by Araceli.

It would have been the 16th birthday of her son, Ernesto, had he not been murdered 8 months prior on a sidewalk just off Sanborn Street in East Salinas. The boy had been walking with his girlfriend, whose father happened to be a shotcaller for a gang held as rival by the shooter. Araceli was clutching a small wooden box with Ernesto’s remains, a black and white photo of him crumpled from months of hugs taped to its edge, and had tried to say a few words as a check-in but little was coming out besides the heaving tears. Descargando. Seated in circle, some looked at her, some desperately avoided looking at her, some fixed their own watery gazes at the altar in the center. Shi had conducted the Rosario for Araceli in the days after his death and, herself not being able to speak so well through the tears, asked everyone to, one by one, direct a few words of love and comfort to Araceli. She would occasionally call for this practice when one or more of the women checked in something particularly difficult and in-progress. We were a big group that day, perhaps 15 or so in number. Alma translated to Araceli in Spanish what some of the women, more comfortable in English, were offering to her. Marta, when passed the palabra, didn’t know what to say except that she was sorry, in that way that Americans offer their own regret for something they didn’t have a hand in.

Though Pamela was not the intended recipient of this ‘sorry’, she was enflamed by it, and spoke out when the palabra came to her. ‘Sorry’ was not okay to her in such situations – ‘sorry’ put a patch on history rather than opening it up. It was at this moment that we officially met Faith, her toddler daughter who had drown more than 20 years earlier, as Pamela spoke of how it can be to be a mother after something senseless like that happens. Araceli was clutching a small wooden box with Ernesto’s remains, a black and white photo of him crumpled from months of hugs taped to its edge, and had tried to say a few words as a check-in but little was coming out besides the heaving tears. 

Pamela was prompted, her trauma triggered, by Araceli sharing her carga. Carga is translated as baggage in the circle but also means ‘charge’, like a burden you are ‘charged’ with; in checking in and passing the palabra, this carga is transferred into a responsibility to be carried by the group. The other women present in the circle can take it up, and depending on their own experiences or disposition towards it, pursue a range of responses. It can be simply witnessed. Or, they could meet it with their own similar experiences; not to tell the other woman what to do, but to attempt to bring distinct but familiar experiences together, diminishing both women’s senses of facing the issue alone, and experimenting with a new order that might make sense in light of the novel framework of healing. “You don’t have to have the answers,” Pamela reflected to me in an interview, discussing her response in that particular moment in circle. “When I spoke out and said I didn’t feel comfortable when people said they were sorry because they never lived my experience, it was truth, it wasn’t offense. The most important thing is that you honor what the other person is. Just because Faith isn’t here doesn’t mean I’m not her mother. And from where that she was buried to where I have to live, I still have to deal with everything, those memories and stuff. So in our circle we get to celebrate those phases and those cycles, and to be able to later on be able to express what it means to be a mother.”

Araceli mostly stopped coming to circle, as I described in chapter one of this dissertation – her world falling ever more apart, soon diagnosed with cancer, unable to continue her work in the fields, evicted from the room she rented, undocumented and receiving only minimal and emergency care – but Pamela continued in circle to work through her feelings around Faith’s death. Through her check-ins she often acknowledged her gratitude that another of her daughters, Rachel, had recently come back into her life from a stint at the Christian Help Center in Vallejo, and was even joining the Colectiva. A year prior, we were told, Pamela had teetered towards suicide, feeling isolated and lost after leaving her work at Soledad and almost entirely estranged from her four children. Faith was dead; Serenity and Rachel were both off doing their own things; Chris was locked up but then lost somewhere in the prison system, his mental illness becoming ever-more entrenched after years without receiving proper care or treatment. “I felt isolated, I lost hope, and there was nowhere to go,” Pamela elaborated to me. “And so I basically wanted to end my life, and was planning on ending my life, and, um, my family heard something in me and decided to come and be around and listen to me for the first time in my life.”

“They came back,” I responded.
“Yeah.”
“Do you mean literally they heard you, you said something, or they felt it?”
“They felt it, and they heard me say that I’m not okay. Sometimes when they’d call, I didn’t want to talk, and you know, I like to share my life. With me, everything is a part of it. I’m a literal person, and everything
matters. And so sometimes the effect it would have would be I would shut down and withdraw or I would try to explain too much, from A to Z, and that was a whole lot.” Pamela spoke differently, was differently, than many people would attempt to accommodate, and I saw her countless times raise her hand or stand up in community fora and civic meetings and have her valid points, expressed in rambling passion and anger, be disregarded. Her ‘opening’ in this way was not enough to be heard and relieved of her pain. But through circle, Pamela found an outlet for descargando, the check-ins seeming to work as a kind of staccato safety-valve to work through her anger and hope. She was ‘recovering’ from the loss of her children in various ways by re-negotiating her relationships to the acute moments of trauma and diffuse years spent reeling, reflecting and elaborating on her being as a mother.

This meditation on motherhood was elaborated at various moments and sites of her disclosures through circle and the Colectiva’s social justice engagements; it compelled her ever-more articulate and resonant statements in public and civic fora around juvenile justice reform, as she clarified for herself and the world her role as mother and advocate. When Frank Alvarado (recently released from over a decade imprisoned and an activist struggling publicly with changing himself) became the fourth victim of police homicide in Salinas in June 2014, she parlayed her son’s experience of long-term incarceration into her concern that Frank be memorialized as a victim of the system. “My son is Frank Alvarado,” she announced. “Your son is Frank Alvarado.” It was not that she was leaving the past behind, but finding new ways to relate it to an evolving sense of herself as healing and diffuse years spent reeling, reflecting and elaborating on her being as a mother.

Supported by members of the Colectiva, and with the visceral remembrance of her constraint in mourning Faith, Pamela planned an elaborate funeral with both methodist and indigenous-Méxica components. The service was held at her church, and Christopher’s body was deposed to the beat of a teponaztli drum and a local Maestro’s voice singing a song to accompany his soul to heaven. One of the most profound moments of this stunning memorial came towards the end of the church
service, as Pamela danced to “Still Standing”, an R&B song by Jadakiss and Monica. Spotting Christopher’s young son in the pews, she told me later, “I danced for him [her grandson], but mainly I was dancing for my son, and I was dancing with my son, because that’s who that we are, and when that I would say ‘get up stand up!’ they thought, some thought, that basically I was trying to be religious. People thought a lot of things. Yeah. That I was using it like in a wrong way. But that wasn’t me using it at all, it was me really feeling that experience of falling down and standing up and I knew I was safe, with all of you there.” Later drawing a connection between being forced to sit down in the hospital waiting room after her daughter Faith’s death, going to the train tracks the day after her son Chris’s death and falling upon her knees shattered by grief, and then dancing so exuberantly, Pamela saw and felt her healing as deeply related to her ability to speak and be heard, but also to move, to flex the muscles that she’s developed through it all rather than be immobilized by the weight of the unconsolidated past.

Re-habilitating Recovery

Pamela’s healing process, I hope, speaks to the question I posed earlier about how healing is dispersed across relations and through time. Her ‘recovery’, or as she puts it, how she recovers everyday, does not have a fixed endpoint, a single path forward, nor a clear vision of a future ‘healed’ state, but involves the constant re-organization and re-temporalization of events throughout her lifecourse, as new resources for thinking and feeling through these domains become available through relationships cultivated in circle. Engaging with Vicky at the juvenile hall, with Araceli over the sudden losses of their children, Pamela could rework and reorganize her brushes with incarceration, loss, and institutional disavowal, recalibrating her moments of suffering into a new rhythm of recovering, framed as healing. Her world did not shatter with news of Chris’s death; She could go on and even get stronger, more engaged in life.

Thinking about recovery in this way – collaborative, creative, unfinished, non-teleological – pushes us to relocate ‘the problem’ or the wound from the ‘morally failing’ individual to their broader situatedness, their thrownness, in a world in which they are already marginalized. Just as recovering from social suffering is not linked to strictly one individual, so too is the wound displaced and shared. This rhythmicity punctures individualistic approaches to social life, moral failure, and even perhaps conventions of social change. When one’s specific suffering or failure is seen to be a social wound that implicates many others, how might these recalibrations push us to think differently about how a political otherwise might be cultivated through people’s shared social projects of becoming otherwise themselves?

Towards this, in the next chapter I delve into the relationship between Shi, the Colectiva’s facilitator, and Wera, a woman that became involved with the Colectiva’s healing and activism activities during the intense period of police-involved homicides in East Salinas. The women hadn’t seen each other in ten years, in ‘another life’ when both were active gang members, but in the flash that they re-met at a sidewalk protest against Mejía’s death they seemed to see in each other the same sorrow and anger fomenting over years surrounded by death but unable to mourn. Each had struck a distinct rhythm towards very different kinds of recoveries – Shi through La Cultura Cura, Wera through prison, parole, and AA – but ‘triggered’ each other in particular ways that challenged each woman’s sense of stability in becoming ‘a different person’. The shape of their emergent activism at this time had very much to do with their affective responsivity to their relations, living and dead, and the unwanted resurgence of ‘old selves’ as their temporally-distinct trajectories at this time intertwined.
In a flash, a trigger pulled, a man dead in front of a supermarket. In another flash, another trigger: two women, a decade since their last encounter, an acute reconnection, the shared experience of losing others’ lives, of never mourning. The trigger, old traumas like kicks in the gut, tripped wires to past states of being, the fear of “the old me that would ride and handle” resurgent in the moment, the trigger.

“For our people this is not about the one or two murders… it takes people back to a place where they’re not their best.”

Juan Gomez, MILPA member

In the grey May days following the death of lettuce worker Osmar Hernandez by a Salinas Police Department officer, a small but growing cadre of protestors stood at the edge of the Mi Pueblo supermarket parking lot where Hernandez’s slain body had lay too long. They emphatically waved signs near the busy streetside, exhorting drivers to honk for justice. I had driven by, fascinated by the as-yet-unseen spectacle of protestors in Salinas, honked, but kept going, with somewhere else to be. But when Shi passed the same group that same day, she stopped, parking her blue Mustang,
It had been ten, maybe 15 years, since they’d last seen each other, “in another life” back when they were both “gangbanging solid.” Wera had dropped her placaso, her gang-given nickname meaning ‘White Girl’, and been ‘reborn’ as Tara on the day she quit drinking. Both had come a long way. But not only did Shi recognize Tara’s blond hair, pale skin, and heavy gait, she also felt she recognized all that she had been through – all the deaths they had grown up with and lived with, and not been able to mourn – as what brought them and kept them there, on that corner. “I felt like I got re-bonded with her because we… she knows that I know what it is to lose someone,” Shi explained to me. “It doesn’t matter if it was– in whose hands. It just matters that it was someone that died, it was violent, and it was a mutual friend. Like that’s all we know.

“So,” she continued, “I think when I met her again in the street, I felt like… like she knew, like I knew how she felt, and she knew how I felt, and how at one point in our lives we didn’t grieve with having a friend being killed, and being left the same way. [Not with] the police, but it was just like, the same dynamics, but different gunmen.” This death was a trigger for both of them, a temporal tripwire, in the sense that ‘what happened’ wasn’t just the particular death, but a sudden jangling cacophony of so many other deaths already suffered, and unconsolidated. “So I think a lot of it,” she continued, “y’know, it might’ve come, a lot of the frustrations and the other deaths already suffered, and unconsolidated.” Wera had been ‘reborn’ as Tara on the day she quit drinking. Both had come a long way. But not only did Shi recognize Tara’s blond hair, pale skin, and heavy gait, she also felt she recognized all that she had been through – all the deaths they had grown up with and lived with, and not been able to mourn – as what brought them and kept them there, on that corner. “I felt like I got re-bonded with her because we… she knows that I know what it is to lose someone,” Shi explained to me. “It doesn’t matter if it was– in whose hands. It just matters that it was someone that died, it was violent, and it was a mutual friend. Like that’s all we know.

Part of me chastised myself, after the fact, for driving past that protest, as if it wasn’t the most important place for me to be at that time. Like Shi, I should have stopped, I should have let it disrupt my plans. As one of the first instances of direct action I’d seen in more than six months in Salinas already, I feared I’d missed an ‘event’ in the Badiousian sense, a decisive moment where the scope of what’s possible shifts, where politics happen, when the social changes. But the police homicides did not stop with Hernandez’s death, actively spanning four lives and four months, and eventually synchronizing with nationwide outcry against police killings of people of color in the burgeoning movement of ‘Black Lives Matter’. In Salinas, the local police homicides set off a period of intense reflection, refraction, and action among the city’s beleaguered inhabitants, a majority-minority population of low income Latinos, mostly mixed-status and farmworking families.

This intensity was especially the case, though, among Salinans who had been gang-involved, many of whom were differently but distinctly triggered by these particular deaths. These killings seemed to generate a wave of activism unprecedented in the long-quiet, but seething, city, where violence against and among its large farmworking and gang-involved contingents is both structural and physical, and social disparities are not easy to stand up against. As persistently criminalized populations, Lisa Marie Cacho (2012) points out, ‘gang members’ and ‘illegal aliens’ (with whom farmworkers are often grouped) are statuses that are “automatically and categorically de-valued,” rendering their personhood illegible, ineligible, unguessable.

In this chapter I argue that these deaths – and other police-involved homicides of black and brown men and women in the United States – can bring silently ‘simmering’ communities like East Salinas to a boil not only because of the seemingly straightforward injustice of police killing people of color. Rather, such deaths have a particularly galvanizing effect because of the way they can trigger a coalescence of generational and particular experiences of criminalization and suffering, from a range of structural inequalities and state disavowals of their socially invalid and illegible personhood. These less-spectacular forms of injustice have not been made into ‘events’, have not been grieved or rectified, but simply borne in the kind of ‘ongoingness’ characterizing denigrated and criminalized life-worlds (cf. Berlant 2011, Povinelli 2011, Cacho 2012). It is the recalibration of these experiences that informs local iterations, in places like Salinas, of

Thresholds of Dissonance: Politics of Eventfulness

“It just, it happened, and shit.”

Shi Cota, Mujer

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As a trope of transformation, the event has gained an analytical primacy as philosophers have blinked into the supposed nothingness at ‘the end of history’, when modernity’s narratives of progress and teleology break down. The event, with its promise of radical rupture and transformation dislodged from history proper, stands at a contrast to these narratives. It has been treated by the grandest philosophers of the 20th century (see Rowner 2015), though it is the particular version of the Event forwarded by Alain Badiou that I work with here (Badiou 2013). Badiou’s Event is, as Joel Robbins notes, particularly “tractable” to anthropologists, many of whom have attenuated his philosophical concept in more ethnographically relative and relevant shades (see Robbins 2010:638; Humphrey 2008; Zigon 2013, Forthcoming).
the nationwide movement against police brutality and the shaping of the New Civil Rights.

In its broader contemporary American iterations, the trigger offers a prime example of moralism claimed as politics (cf. Brown 2001). The concept’s proliferating salience across the nation has given rise to the ‘trigger-warning’, a kind of discretionary label pasted onto classic texts in universities and demarcating new boundaries of political correctness in the blogosphere. The trigger-warning appears, to some critics, to be the nadir of mainstream moralism, a simultaneous politicizing and depoliticizing move designed to protect unassuming consumers from unwanted disruptions to their wellbeing through the resurgence of old traumas, criticized as foreshadowing if not foreclosing certain limited interpretations of the given material (Coyne 2015; Kang 2014). The trigger-warning is meant to secure the reader against the risks involved in being-triggered, and thus signifies the moment when the political potential of challenging, slanted readings of classic texts melts into a moralism of sanguine safety. However, the experiential modality of being-triggered, a sudden living-out of multiple, convergent ‘times’, and its potential implications for social action, demand greater ethnographic attention.

The barrage of triggers set off by the police homicides and resultant public reactions were fertile, formative, but foremost vulnerable moments for many of the Mujeres. In the moments around the shootings, together standing on the corners and sitting in circle or simply staying away from it all, it was their being-triggered at the behest of these spectacular events and myriad other less-impressive happenings in which their ethical processes of self and social transformation could best be glimpsed. Involving, as I will show, a dynamism that involves a preflexive resonance moving into a refractive dissonance, triggers could signal moments of ‘moral breakdown’ (Zigon 2007). As Zigon sets out, moral breakdowns are a shift away from one’s nonreflexive way of being-in-the-world, demanding a response amidst a world that is also shifting. In the grips of what often feels more like repetition, these are creative and productive moments of reflection and decision.

But triggers could also ‘remain’ a lingering affective resonance, a falling-deeper-into-the-world, unregistered as an event or breakdown: simply more insistent on-goingness, “the same shit” in Shi’s words. Here was the trigger’s danger, that one might fall too deep into the ease of its resonance, into a kind of relapse into old, devastating, habits. Lauren Berlant has characterized on-goingness as ‘getting by, and living on, where the structural inequalities are dispersed, the pacing of their experience intermittent, often in phenomena not prone to capture by a consciousness organized by archives of memorable impact” (Berlant 2007:759).42 The political edge of this idea is in the distribution of thresholds of dissonance, as it traces the limits of sufferability. With new possibilities for acting in the world, such as those opened up through a framework of health equity as advanced by the Colectiva and MILPA, inequalities and their living-out become more tangibly problematic, and less abidable.

We might thus ask, how does the apprehension of these triggers chart new polititized relationships between crisis and ordinariness, urgency and on-goingness – what we might call a politics of eventfulness? I borrow the term from Elizabeth Povinelli’s vocabulary of tense, endurance and exhaustion, as she has utilized it in exploring the unequal distribution of potentiality across late liberal social landscapes. Simply put, the content of any event is neither pre-given nor self-evident, but differently appraised based on where and among whom they occur; this has implications for the ethical response leveled in the wake of these relatively eventful events. Certain social imaginaries and discursive divisions of difference are always available to ‘explain away’ or ‘shrug at’ something that happens among certain populations, rendering mostly invisible the slow and soft – but highly lethal – forms of state killing often at hand in situations of structural marginalization and abandonment. In such conditions of lethality, and at the opposite end of the spectrum of spectacularity from something like the Badiousian event, is the ‘quasi-event’, those “tremblings” which “have a different kind of force depending on where they occur in the socially distributed world,” and require different levels and forms of effort to “undo, reverse, move on” from these arrangements/derangements (Povinelli and Berlant 2014).43 Modes of eventfulness, as forms of apprehending agency, causality, and what counts as evental rupturing and what is just borne out, indicate the localized shape of the ordinary (Povinelli 2011:132).

42 Berlant’s definition reminds us not to take for granted what exactly constitutes ‘experience’, drawing a distinction between things that happen and that which is rendered important, memorable, meaningful. As Zigon (2014b) has noted, ‘experience’ is a derived phenomenon, an expression of the temporally-generated possibility for acting, becoming possible in the present recollection of a past.

43 In the interest of immanent critique, Povinelli clears conceptual space for apprehension of the projects that might attempt these efforts of re-arrangements/derangements, drawing connections between the ‘ordinary cruelly suffering’, the untreated infections and the snapped shoelaces, of her Aboriginal colleagues/friends/family, and their endurance and survival as a precarious, and political, achievement. She calls attention to the quasi-events that compose these processes in part because they are not the ones that seem to demand an ethical and political response, or an adjudication of responsibility. They are not apprehended as ‘state killings’ even though they emerge in a context of state abandonment and political-ontological foreclosure. They belong to a different ‘genre’ of (non-)event.
But while Povinelli explores how variable modes of eventfulness are related through discursive and enlivened divisions of difference, I want to focus on how eventfulness, as somatically expressed, might shift, and how this might lead to contestations and more deliberate shifting as a kind of ethical and political action. How are events and happenings, immediate and distant, brought into resonance with each other in a mode of being-triggered? How might the status of a past happening become amplified and otherwise – become evental – in newly emergent circumstances? If a quasi-event is a trembling, that may be responded to but more likely will be borne in the ongoingness of such “ordinary, cruddy suffering” as is often found in marginalized, abandoned lifeworlds, then a trigger is a jangling, shaking us towards a realization of what is occurring as disaggregating, deranging, some degree of catastrophic. They point to what is at stake in one’s particular living-out of an event, sketching the temporal reaches of its situation beyond the urgency of the present. In the ethical and political responses they set in motion, triggers refer us to emerging contours of transformation, the ‘bleeding’ of an event as it scrapes old wounds, “the shape of the scar that keeps changing, fading, and becoming prominent over time, and reopening” (Povinelli and Berlant 2014). How is this reopening lived and claimed not as singular and exceptional, but as part of an ongoing, accelerating, and amplifyng rhythm, and what kind of politics is thereby figured?

I propose we combine the experiential modality of the trigger with a concept of rhythm, towards a politics of eventfulness. As a kind of genre of historical duration, a distinction coined by Berlant (2011) to describe a repertoire of ways of marking time and making history, the trigger leads to a questioning of the official/officiated singularity of the spectacular event of police homicides. As the women’s triggered, affected bodies made the present events ‘sensible’ in terms of a startling recurrence of literally and figuratively foreclosed Latino lives, at stake was the limits of sufferability. These limits indicate available horizons of experiences and are demarcated by the spacing of eventfulness, shifting alongside negotiations of exceptionality and ordinariness. Exploring the Mujeres’s ways of moving through these modes of being-triggered thus gives a sense of not only the politicized nature of how certain happenings come to matter more than others – the ‘becoming’ of events – but also how this might be contested and shifted as a form of social change that does not hinge on emancipation but on historical recalibration.

As I have argued, it is through the temporal ‘happening’ of healing between subjects that something like social change is unfolding in Salinas. It is in shifting the tense of such criminalized populations away from a foreclosing, intractable present, a not-yet, to a future-conditional premised on a reworked past made possible in, and projected outwards from, the present. This takes form through people’s lives in their projects of re-habilitation in the sense of ever-making the world habitable: the pace and rhythm of choosing to do and become otherwise, which also sometimes is to endure and not be again what (or how) one already was. Eventfulness is precisely the shifting rhythmicity of individual lives calibrated to social processes, affective and ethical processes of staking claims to what matters; whose life matters.

**Tracing the Triggers**

Returning to the Mujeres, it becomes clear how Tara, Marta and Shi were all deeply affected by the police homicides, in part through their intimacies and proximities to these and other deaths – as Caroline Humphrey (2008) might put it, they were “plumped for” a rupture in intelligibility, rendering these deaths particularly evental. They are not unique in this way. With some of the most consistently high violent homicide rates in the country for well over a decade, in a small city of 155,000, the persistent presence of death among the still-living brought dramatic rhythms, expectations and valences to life itself in this farmtown-gangland. These deaths – and other

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44 Berlant (2011) has proposed a range of genres of the emerging event, or of historical duration, highlighting that such processes are always political in the way attempts to triage or downplay happenings mark out differential domains of crisis and ordinariness.

45 Humphrey challenges Badiou’s universalist condition of the Event’s ‘truth’ by turning to the term ‘evental’ to look at how people, through their personal trajectories, may be differently able to embrace the contingency needed for an Event to have a radically rupturing (or at least formative) effect. Her theorization of the minute dispositional ‘plumping-for’ that that is involved in individualized ruptures of intelligibility is akin to my focus on developing a disposition towards disclosure. She proposes a focus on the more modest term ‘decision-event’ as “occasions when the multiple strands of personhood achieve unity and singularity” (ibid); here, it is not ‘the truth’ at stake for the subject constituted in the wake of the event, but “fixing, if only temporarily, on ‘who I am’” (Humphrey 2008:357). Importantly, she notes that the effect of evental circumstances is not to sever ties with past ways but to ‘recompose’ or ‘archive’ them (374).

46 Lifeworlds could also be seen as deathworlds in this regard, with the very intimacy of violence in people’s lives (whether directly gang-involved or not) leading to a situation of widespread abidance and endurance, characterized sympathetically as an ethics of woundedness. This woundedness is palpable among some, like Shi, in residents’ caginess around people they don’t recognize, “mugging at them” from their cars. Alternatively, among respected leaders in the spiritual healing community like one Maestra, in the case of the women of the Colectiva de Mujeres, the woundedness is in “the intensity of them wanting to heal, and to just drop their
police-involved homicides of people of color in the United States, a trend that would swell in the months after this period in Salinas — bring silently simmering communities like East Salinas to a boil not only because of the seemingly straightforward injustice of police killing civilians. Rather, such deaths have a particularly galvanizing effect because of the way they can trigger a coalescence of generational and particular experiences of suffering from a range of structural inequalities and state disavowals that have not been made into events, have not been remediated or adequately dealt with, but simply borne in a kind of ongoingness characterizing denigrated and racialized lifeworlds.

“Why am I really doing this, like if I ask myself?” Shi once mused to me, reflecting on her recent activism. “I could tell you it’s for like a lot of the things my friends have went through and have never had justice. Like a lot of my friends have been murdered, and their parents still suffer, because they’re all cold [unsolved] cases… I mean we all have our fire inside of us and I really feel like a lot of it has to do with a lot of the injustice that already had happened, that I didn’t see before, you know? And it’s more of an injustice because law enforcement never really solved none of these cases. Or,” Shi’s voice was getting louder, “they didn’t give a fuck about it! And these were people that we fuckin’ loved!”

In her rising anger, we can hear the echoing trigger, the resurgence of feelings and fidelities, a scraping of old wounds unhealed; she further articulates an affirmation of the value of Latino lives. Still, these are not straightforward relations between old cases and new deaths, but realizations cultivated through affectively intense periods, perhaps leading to breaking down and picking up the pieces — or perhaps not. As Juan, one of the founders of the men’s collective MILPA, would warn me in the ear:

“Why am I really doing this, like if I ask myself?” Shi once mused to me, reflecting on her recent activism. “I could tell you it’s for like a lot of the things my friends have went through and have never had justice. Like a lot of my friends have been murdered, and their parents still suffer, because they’re all cold [unsolved] cases… I mean we all have our fire inside of us and I really feel like a lot of it has to do with a lot of the injustice that already had happened, that I didn’t see before, you know? And it’s more of an injustice because law enforcement never really solved none of these cases. Or,” Shi’s voice was getting louder, “they didn’t give a fuck about it! And these were people that we fuckin’ loved!”

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Tracing the triggers gives sense to the shifting distribution of eventfulness that differently contours these lifeworlds, not only in terms of what is exceptional and rupturing, but what is ordinary as well. How can we account for the tensions between exceptionality and ordinariness in a setting often described by those who live and work there as inducing ‘chronic traumatic stress disorder’ — as though the conditions of life itself are so fundamentally and endlessly disruptive as to render disorientation the standard? Such tracing also draws out a dynamism, a movement, that supports richer understandings of political compulsion beyond a transcendent Aristotelian ethics, heroic resistance in the name of universal ideals. It further gets at the question of what dynamics and stakes are obscured by a more temporally narrow focus on the strikingly immediate events of activism like protests and riot.

Instead of focusing on the events of protests themselves as the ‘political proof’ of social change, I attend to the way these direct actions were figured as part of the prereflexive circulations and refractions of affect, and ensuing ethical procedures, involved in the triggers in the Mujeres’s particular living-through of these and other instances of street-staining violence and death. Turning to more temporally divergent, complex, and minute projects of being and becoming otherwise, in relation to relatively resonant eventfulness, how might we shift the temporal frames we use to grasp emergent political processes, without violent absorption of those fragile projects into the same teleological tropes of history, of pasts that stay in the past, of presents that lead directly to futures?

Disputed Spacings of Eventfulness

“This just doesn’t happen here.”

KELLY McMILLIN, SALINAS POLICE CHIEF

Quoting Salinas Police Chief Kelly McMillin, the CNN reporter, discussing the officer-involved shooting of Carlos Mejía that would fuel a much-filmed protest-turned-riot, repeated the line twice. “He says they do not have a lot of police shootings, but acknowledged that there was this one on Tuesday and there was another one on May 9 that was very similar to this, but he goes on to say that this is just not something that happens there…”

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47 These police homicides in Salinas occurred prior to the murder of Michael Brown, and subsequent days of rioting and militarized policing, in Ferguson, Missouri; it was during these riots, arguably, that the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement took on widespread salience and urgency. ‘Black Lives Matter’ was coined by Alicia Garza after Trayvon Martin was killed by George Zimmerman in Florida in February 2012. It initially circulated as a hashtag — #blacklivesmatter — but has since become the name of the New Civil Rights movement post-Ferguson (Pleasant 2015).

48 This is a question of how we conceive of history and possibility, taking up Wendy Brown’s call ‘to take that which appears to be given and provide it not simply a history but one that reveals how contingently it came into being and remains in being, the degree to which it is neither foreordained nor fixed in meaning’ (2001:104).
McMillin’s actuarial ‘eventalizing’ of these homicides, which were indeed starting to pile up suspiciously at this point, stands in contrast to Shi’s response as we drove towards the scene of Mejía’s death a couple of hours after the fact: “It’s too much already,” she was insisting to me, “it’s just too much. I just can’t…” She was in the midst of keeping herself calm, having so suddenly been triggered earlier that morning by the news of this (yet another) homicide on the East Side. We were coming from a meeting with Rosa in which we’d intended to do some Colectiva planning, but instead was mostly spent with Shi alternating phone calls with Marta and another old homegirl and Colectiva Mujer Leti, and leaning in every so often to tell us more details. She was referring to Marta and Leti as Muñeca and Gata, their old placasos. “They shot, the police shot like a paisa [a recently immigrated Mexican] in front of Delicia’s, that bakery up on Sanborn, Muñeca lives right down the street from it. She lives where the police tape ends.”

Cutting the meeting there, Shi already felt too freaked out and nervous to be at the wheel, and asked me to drive to Marta’s. “It’s too much already,” she sighed as we rolled. “It’s just too much.” Arriving at the perimeter of the police tape, Marta was out on the front lawn while her granddaughter whizzed about nonplussed on a tricycle. Marta had run inside and locked all the doors when she heard yelling and gunshots, and immediately called Shi when she saw Mejía take the bullets, but now was outside snapping photos and surveying the scene. We stood there too, talking to some of the men in ranchero hats sitting at the bus stop in front of the house, them sitting on their hands with shoulders tight, all of us quietly looking to the corner. Preschoolers hand-in-hand with young mamas slowly filtered home past the scene. Police milled about within the taped-off zone, one standing with arms on hips next to Mejía’s lifeless, uncovered, and somehow handcuffed body. Was there an exceptional edge to the ordinariness, or an ordinariness to the exceptionality? We all lingered around her house, coalescing around smartphones watching the soon-to-be-famous footage Marta’s daughter’s friend had taken of the cops’ slow pursuit of the stumbling Mejía, physically filming it ourselves in case it was forcibly blocked or deleted. The day went on like this.

How can something claimed to ‘never happen here’ also be felt to ‘be too much already’? To what extent were these deaths exceptional or ordinary, and how could they emerge as triggering, and as evental, in the oscillation between these conditions? Muñeca’s seemingly instinctive reaction to hide inside and reach out to Shi, and Shi’s visceral anxiety and refraction of the Mejía death in terms of the proximate Hernandez death and perhaps countless others, were aspects of resurgent affective conditions and attachments, assailing but also setting them in motion. Moving through their triggers, in part through their reorientation in the world as of an older generation of gang-involved women (now mothers) with a remaining claim to these streets, and in keeping with the imperative to heal themselves as well as their community, Shi and Marta shifted into a reflexive and creative mode.

These deaths, made differently sensible in the context of their participation in the healing circle and critical consciousness pláticas, were different enough to lead Shi and Marta, but also Tara and another Mujer, Vicky, to go out the next day and stand at the corners of the bakery’s intersection holding fluorescent signs and shepherding children in a peaceful demonstration of community stewardship. These deaths were also though ‘the same’ enough that I could ask a young woman at that rally, in the frenzy of youthful energy and frustration and noise, if she’d ever seen anything like this before. With my gestures and gaze, I was referring to the protest and the hundreds of kids and teenagers pumping their fists in the air every time
and also selfhood, personhood, and subjectivity, “are cultural and historical in nature… borne of a gamut of cultural, political, biological, linguistic, and environmental forces” (Desjarlais 2011:24). The conventional sense of experience, steeped in Western metaphysics, is marked by reflexive depth, temporal integration, and a cumulative transcendence, and upholds the primacy of the purely sensory as somehow more authentic than the socio-political. But such a sense of experience is not a given, and how the very processes of feeling and making sense of living-through the world come about through a range of political forces must be considered.

Desjarlais has coined the concept ‘aesthetic of experience’ to explore the way visceral bodily sensations, say of pain, are given form and meaning through an “implicit, and politically driven ‘aesthetics’ of everyday life” (Desjarlais 1992:65). ‘Aesthetic’ here is not meant to suggest an overly artistic or performative move, but to suggest the “tacit leitmotifs” that “shape the sensory grounds of experiences of suffering and the emotional terrain occasioned by those experiences” (ibid). Writing particularly about Nepali Yolmo experiences of healing, Desjarlais argues that local values of harmony, purity and wholeness were aestheticized and embodied in both prereflexive and narrativized modes. In Salinas, bracketing and giving the name ‘trigger’ to the visceral living-through of something speaks to the immediacy of a high-stakes sensorial situation, an immanence of disorienting conditions like violence, and an impulsive, explosive connectivity. It evokes a kind of in-the-worldness that is not directly linked to culpability, but to ‘being caught up’ in an already-implicating world. Its sociopolitical conditions of possibility involve the chronicity and ubiquity of poverty and crime, of precarity fueled by the ease by which life or livelihood can be threatened, and an exhausted, fraying hypervigilance.

But before it can be bracketed ‘as’ an experience, being-triggered unfolds in the precognitive realizing of the world. Most of the time we are always already thrown into the world in this ‘ordinary’ mode, absorbed by it and its moodedness, and periodically shifting into a reflexive and cognitive mode. The trigger sparks a sudden sense of time folded backwards, a precognitive apprehension of a presently-encountered stimulus that seems, that is, an unexpected and perhaps unwanted repetition. The ‘prior’ happening regenerated in being-triggered may have been chronic or acute, conjunctive or disjunctive; it might have been thought ‘recovered-from’ or it might not have ever been realized as a problem. Possible at any moment, triggers ‘assail’ the individual seemingly from outside but also deeply from the body: a flush of heat and heartbeat at the sound of a man’s voice raised in excitement, suddenly reminiscent of an abu-
sive father; a flood of bitter tears at the lifeworld indexed by someone else’s plácaso when you’ve decisively abandoned your own. The condition could surge at hearing the voice of an old homeboy on the phone, him just getting out of prison, newly palpable freedom husky to your ears, asking you for a place to pass through, inviting you back in some way to that life you thought you left behind.

In a fundamental sense, triggers demonstrate the uneven terrain of temporality, that time is not an empty or homogenous container to be filled and followed. Senses of time are constantly and unevenly generated through our prereflective as well as more conscious encounters with ideas, bodies, happenings in the world in a present mode of facing the world; moreover, these temporalities are numerous and polyrhythmic. Henri Bergson has written of the simultaneity of fluxes at work in any given moment or duration, using the example of sitting on a riverbank: at a minimum, there could be the flow of water, the flight of a bird, and the “uninterrupted murmur of our deep life.” These temporalities can be singled out into strands or resonate as if unified, in moments both memorable and ordinary. Against the idea that these ‘strands’ of time are fundamentally linear or ‘unspooling’, as if time and experience were mathematically accrued to the subject instead of variably constitutive in a process of subj ectification, triggers involve sudden ‘jumpings-in’ of pasts and prioritize certain fluxes. Thus even what we consider the palpable present is actively cultivated in what strands or rhythms of time we perceive and generate, in prereflective as well as narrativized modes, to move through encounters and actions.

Through a cultivation of a reflective disposition and acumen comes the willingness and capacity to be shaken by this feeling and to move with it into a space of “moral breakdown.” Zigon has theorized the moral breakdown as “the moment of ethical dilemma,” when one’s comfortable and unreflective way of being in the world is disrupted; “one must perform ethics” to slip anew into that unreflective state (2007:136). What is often at stake with the trigger is one’s sense of recovery, a make-or-break moment. That life you thought you left behind.

Thus not only are triggers affectively dense and intense phenomena, they can also take on rich ethical dimensions. It might begin with an edgy suspicion that something “is gonna crack off” at an otherwise peaceful civic meeting, or that city councillors and public servants “are trying to gangbang on [you] at the city hall,” as one MILPA man, Daniel, put it, reflecting on the municipal meeting the night of the Mejía shooting. He and I, other MILPA men and a couple of Colectiva women, were gathered in a small office to organize a collective response to the shootings. Daniel’s narrative illuminates many dimensions of the trigger. “And I just freakin’ almost lost it, you know what I mean? If it wasn’t for these girls that were like, hey Daniel, come talk to the media real quick, I think I probably would’ve ended up getting arrested yesterday for some stupid stuff, you know. Because he really pulled my triggers, you know…” Daniel elaborated, sketching the perhaps-unwitting intervention performed by ‘the girls’ that called him back to himself as the Daniel they knew, the Daniel who needed to speak with the media as a smooth-talking MILPA representative. He added, weary but determined, “we have to be careful not to get sucked in by all the things we did before.” Daniel’s reflection on his ‘triggered’ refraction of present circumstances through old moral frameworks expectations and possibilities – sensorially apprehending a civic meeting situation in terms of a gangbanging way of being – reminds us that the ethical is incipient but not inherent to the mode of being-triggered; the affective dimensions are often exhausting and all-encompassing, and without a dispositional

49 This pursuit of the trigger’s source is, arguably, a particular ethical directionality made possible in a moral framework of healing. Its interrogation stands in contrast to the ‘signposting’ of the trigger-warning more broadly in the United States, which “ineluctably leads to a bland homogenization of all literature, and a stifling of challenging viewpoints…” (Coyne 2015). In this sense, triggers are to be preempted through interpretive guidelines, which can also boil the body away from great texts, rendering them a few hyperpoliticized plot points, prioritizing and universalizing the particular traumatized reading. The trigger warning is meant to secure the reader against the risks involved in being-triggered, and thus signifies the moment when the political potential of challenging, slanted readings of classic texts melts into a moralism of sanguine safety. However, in the emerging politics of health and healing in Salinas and other marginalized ‘wounded’ communities, triggers do not arise from texts but from happenings in the world. Less avoidable, triggers are turned-towards and highlighted as telling moments ripe with potential for personal transformation. In Salinas, there seemed to be less concern with avoiding triggering circumstances, but instead with cultivating the disposition and interpretive framework to identify and manage the triggers in a manner consonant with the overall tenor of their healing process.

50 This was actually a future-oriented anticipated recovered self, a Daniel who had changed.
‘plumping for’ the disclosure of (apprehension and reflection on) ‘what’s going on,’ might be endlessly absorbing.\footnote{But the trigger, as an experiential mode of being-in-the-world, is not something that only belongs to the triggered. One’s trigger reaction might remain undetected by others – if one knows how to manage it. However, I often saw how triggers were sensed/brought into sensibility by others: perhaps through noticing someone’s sudden quietude or shrillness, and their frantic inability to make decisions, or say a sentence without every other word being a variation of ‘fuck,’ or simply act as you have come to expect of them. In Salinas, I found that to point out someone else’s being-triggered is to show a certain kind of charitability for their sudden unusual behavior, a concern that takes into account their being as stretched along more than the present moment, as encompasing a horizon of time, but slipping on the particular ‘when of the present ‘now.’ For example, Daniel, shifting between the reflection on his own trigger the day prior and an attempt to reckon with Shi’s absence from that meeting, explained her sudden erratic behavior in terms of triggered modes he could recognize by knowing already the scope of her life and employment history: “She’s jumping in, kind of like the looper, going from like the first responder mode, to MILPA mode, to gangster Shi mode. And so, our prayers are with her and the blessings like that, that she stays strong and level-headed.” His responsiveness to Shi demands a further ethical move, to accommodate the hermeneutic of the trigger into his and others’ ability to ‘make a difference’ during the period of homicides through maintaining themselves and their precarious recoveries. “This is what we’re trying to get at here,” he continued; “how we can identify [these mode-slippages] and not get sucked in.”}

The temporal incongruities that jumble together and are sometimes ironed out in a process of being-triggered have political-moral implications when brought into an analytic of the distribution of eventfulness and shifting stances on sufferability. Triggers come in aspects of both grander and more quasi-events, not always tightly in sync with (or directly caused by) more broadly spectacular public happenings. These situations produce what Massumi (2015) calls ‘intensities,’ prepersonal affective presences that are apprehended and refracted by individuals. Experimentally expressed as resonance, we can consider them as degrees of the quasi-events described by Elizabeth Povinelli in contrast to events as the “things that we can say happened such that they have a certain objective being,” quasi-events are those more minute happenings that perhaps “never quite achieve the status of having occurred or taken place” (2011:13). In other words, they are often overlooked or taken for granted, despite their very real exhausting effects in already tensed lifeworlds. The exhausting generally doesn’t demand an ethical response the way the spectacular does. As such, the trigger may go unnoticed even as it wears the triggered person down.

What is crucial now in this context of an emerging politics of health and healing (and across the United States, of Lives Mattering) is how triggered quasi-events are made sense of, apprehended and grasped, and folded into a local ethos of responsiveness and responsibility. Like the ‘rupturing event’ and the ‘steady certainty of progress,’ triggers suggest a particular cadence of how change could be initiated and taken up, bringing events into relation with each other, as a rhythm. The homicide that opened this chapter, that of Osmar Hernandez, was not a random death to Shi and Tara, but in the familiarity or repetition signaled by their being-triggered, evoked a slew of other losses. Triggers, in relation to events, suggest a sense of progress that does not hinge on emancipation but on continual renegotiation of sometimes repetitive, sometimes radical moments. The radical potential of the trigger as it is figured in Salinas is in its rendering recalibrated affective historicities the font of different potential for what has been too long suffered, and what will no longer be abided.

**Lifelong Homegirls**

“I’ll just go just to like, y’know what I mean? Just to back her up.”

*Marta Fernandez, Mujer*

In what remains of this chapter I explore the emergent eventfulness of Tara and Marta’s lives as it was refracted by their triggers and subsequent actions framed by healing in relation to the Salinas police homicides in the summer of 2014. The stakes involved in their relative engagement both come down to fidelities to their homegirls, to Shi, and to others they’ve lost or might lose yet.\footnote{The orientation of this fidelity – to each other rather than to the event itself – further differentiates the approach to eventfulness taken here from Badian’s event, as that source of Truth to which subjects become fideliuous.} Both struggle to maintain a sense of contemporary integrity for themselves – to not fall apart or fall back – in the face of the becoining repetition and finality of death all around. They simply apprehend ‘how far they’ve come.’

Shi, Tara and Marta came up together “in another lifetime”; it didn’t matter that they had taken different paths since then to arrive at what felt like a shared present condition of “being totally different,” as Marta phrased it. The ten or fifteen years that had passed between them all had borne numerous respective attempts at moving on from their gang involvements, and they often tripped out at the fact that now they were all coming together around healing; it was something they never saw coming. Stirred – triggered – by the police homicides in the summer of 2014, however, they came to frame their reactions in terms of still needing to do a lot of the ‘work’ of healing from those erstwhile years. In the time they were more heavily...
and that they could now be “official friends without using happily surprised to find that both she and Shi had “completely changed, ’ Having seen her around but “not actually conversating” in years, Marta was fuckin’ people show up there, “ she came through “just to back [Shi] up. ’

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of recoveries and the devastating rhythms that threaten to become a life’s I constantly heard apprehensions like this around the triggers emergent

have happened like this [deaths] before, in the past, it’s like we never talked about it.”

Though Shi, Tara, and Marta now felt themselves to be different people, they remained very much of that generation through the careful relationships of loyalty and avoidance, the fidelities, they still maintained with old homegirls and -boys, and the deep moral repertoires accordingly cultivated. Each had ’fallen out’ of their gang lifeworlds for a time, stepping away to pursue diverse rehabilitations. In the years between gangbanging and reuniting, Tara had endured waves of incarceration, probation, and addiction recovery like AA and Victory Outreach. Invited by Shi as they rekindled their friendship after Hernandez’s death, she joined the Colectiva for much of the summer of 2014, adding it to her busy schedule of self-maintenance. She was just finishing a stint at BI Incorporated, the private company contracted by the Monterey County corrections authority to administer probation, and I would often pick her up to shuttle her between their workplace, her AA sessions at a church just off Sanborn Street, the Colectiva’s healing circles, and weekly city hall meetings. Very open about what she continued to endure, Tara spoke of living through countless deaths of friends and family, near and far. In particular, her husband was murdered while she had been locked up, and she felt she never got closure let alone a chance to mourn. She miscarried during that time, due to “stress and sorrow. I bottled it all in,” she told a group of us at a meeting to orga-

nize a Colectiva response to the homicides, “and when something like this happens, it gets all stirred up again. The danger is that it might explode.”

I constantly heard apprehensions like this around the triggers emergent from the homicides, the fear of slipping back into old ways, the fragility of recoveries and the devastating rhythms that threaten to become a life’s repeated refrain.

Marta, occasionally still known by her placaso as Muñeca or ‘Doll’, had joined the Colectiva de Mujeres when Shi founded it months prior to the homicides, and despite her doubtfulness about “what kind of colorful fuckin’ people show up here,” she came through “just to back [Shi] up.” Having seen her around but “not actually conversating” in years, Marta was happily surprised to find that both she and Shi had “completely changed,” and that they could now be “official friends without without any, like, using each other, for money, for drugs, or to go fight somebody.” Marta, a feisty Mujer with an infectious and endless giggle, expressed a hard-won sense of recovery, as patched together through various stints in rehab and prison. As a major recovery, 14 years she’d been free of heroin, though in that time she’d been to jail numerous times for drug possession, sometimes on behalf of boyfriends; “I had to take the blame,” she told me in an interview, “because you can’t go telling on people, you gotta suck it up and take it like a champ.” Her other major recovery was from her anger, a fire that was stoked by times spent in frictional rehab clinical settings where “they want-
ed me to do stuff like headling and arts and craft stuff and you know, like, when you’re trying to get yourself clean and you miss your kids and you’re scared and you don’t know what’s gonna happen, and pretty much they just pulled you out of your world.” She continued: “As bad as your world is, that’s your world and it’s what you’re used to.”

Both Tara and Marta went to the intersection of Sanborn and Elkington with Shi the day after Mejía’s death, spending the afternoon equipping children and youth with fluorescent papers and slogans, and shepherd
ing them safely across the traffic lights. Over the honking and cheering of cars and kids, Tara’s ragged voice could be heard calling Calmense!!!, ‘calm down!’ Marta took a more backstage role, taking photos and Facebooking the event the whole time, a point of coordination for those near and far. As more and more youth, then adults, came and spread to the four corners, and as the day drew towards night, the mood shifted, becoming heavier, edgier. The cops showed up and the intensity soured. As Marta related it to me later, “I went inside as soon as the cops got there. They were gonna like, do the whole pepper spray thing… when the riot gear came out, I was like, Ithinkthisisasaboutmetogooooo.… Yeah. And um, yeah. And well I knew Shi didn’t, Shi was gonna stay there, so I just took Shi’s daughter with me… I was like, I’m gonna be the bigger person and like, know when to stop,’ she laughed, “before I get jailed again.”

Knowing when to stop not just at that protest but for good, Marta mostly stayed away from subsequent direct actions participated in by other Mujeres. She knew her triggers well but hadn’t completely mastered their management, and did not want to risk “all [she’d] accomplished”: her sta-

ble job and a burgeoning romance, and important maternal connections with her granddaughters. Not wanting to be another statistic, and in loyalty for Shi and the Colectiva as “her thing,” Marta’s actions were less active but still indicative of her pursuit of becoming other than she had been. For example, during this same summer while the East Side was in disarray and Marta was staying away from the group, she found out that someone had pulled a gun on her daughter. Her daughter was gang-involved but making her way out of this involvement, trying to stay out of jail.
Marta was enraged that someone had threatened her daughter, and instantly took familiar action. “I had called every Tom, Dick and Harry that I know, that I know-know, and told them: ‘my daughter, she’s so-and-so’s daughter, our daughter, we’re known, and this happened. And it was a guy.’ They’re like, ‘oh, tell us who it was so we can handle it,’ right… but I didn’t know, and she didn’t tell me.”

Marta soon found out that the person who had threatened her daughter was the son of one of the other Mujeres in the Colectiva. Though still furious, she called off the hit, because the “circle taught me, uh, not to bring women down, because you know, instant motherly reaction I would’ve been over there beating the fucking shit out of her because she can’t keep her kid. But then, y’know, I had to take a step back, defuse the situation.” She confronted the other Mujer about it some days later, quietly outside of a church. Marta explained that, “me being the very… hitting person that I am… I stay away… that is why I… because, gotta suck it up, one more time – I do a lot of sucking up, god damn it – and I confronted her, but I… dude, I waited. I waited.” Marta’s job kept her busy during the Colectiva’s scheduled healing circles, but “even if I could go, I wouldn’t go, only because I wouldn’t want to for some reason flip a switch. And then people are gonna be like, ‘oh, yeah, see, that’s what you get when you get a bunch of Mexicans together, all stereotypical, on the East Side, typical.’ I don’t want to be a stereotype!” She laughed again. Even though Marta stayed away from the circle and the Colectiva’s activism, her apprehension and action in relation to her triggers during this time demonstrate a connection between her recovery and her sense of contributing to a changing, improving, East Salinas.

Tara, on the other hand, became a regular fixture at any and all protests, even as the acclaimed narratives of desired social change multiplied and entrenched along old sociopolitical fault lines among opposed community groups. Simply speaking, Tara was everywhere, addicted to the action, spilling herself out on her wordy protest signs, waving her white bandera at drivers while howling *Pítaleece!!* PÍTALE papa, no tengas miedo!! [Honk!! Honk papa, don’t be afraid!!] She could also often be found at the twice-weekly healing circles whenever she could arrange a lift. She saw the circle as a setting that was crucial to her ability to keep putting herself out there, keep working through and with her triggers. She had an exuberant, playful presence, but in circle often became very sincere and stoic. Touching on some of the affective and ethical stakes involved in her grieving and activism, she once checked in with the *carga* (baggage) that “I feel so exhausted, um… I feel like some emotional stuff, about what’s going on in our community, it brings it home, a lot, and a lot of things bringing to mind, also what’s happened in my past. It brings up a lot of guilt… to do with, you know, everything, that life; I know people doing life behind bars, people I’ve lost that are now in heaven, loved ones… and I’m just feeling a lot of grief right now.”

She continued:

I have a lot of grief. Back in the day, you had to be big and bad and not let your emotions show, because then you’re weak. And they could walk all over you and you couldn’t show your emotions. And now that I made that change to turn my life over, I’m being willing to open up and just let everything flow out, and you know, losing two of my friends [Hernandez and Mejía] to whatever reason I lost them to, just brought all these emotions back. And then… [she pauses, and starts crying] because not only did I lose friends, I lost family, you know. People who grew up with me know what street life family is. I’ve lost people from my family, people who love me for me, in their own way. But they’re still family. It’s hard, it’s hard for me. I was talking about last night that it’s funny, because I have a voice, I never knew what my voice was before, I been screaming and yelling trying to have somebody hear me when they’re yelling at me, and now I know what my voice is, now I know I was blessed to have a voice. And I will be heard. My community will be heard. And I won’t stop. I won’t let nobody knock me down. I won’t be that quiet individual that I used to be. That’s really why I believe my higher power gave me the voice that he did. Um… what it put me through, but in allowing me to feel and go what I’ve gone through my whole life, I can be that voice to help others, you know, coming from a background with a dysfunctional family, interracial dysfunctional family, growing up in the streets and going through what I did, it’s up to me now.

But as Tara found ways to manage her exhaustion by “reaching for the sage instead of the bottle or the blunt,” she faltered as other developments and dissolutions in her life impeded her ability to reflect, focus and heal through the grief.

Though she openly embraced as well as struggled with how to make sense of the aforementioned past deaths in taking on a new voice-oriented
I take seriously this faltering to eventalize in light of the progressive fading away of Tara from the Colectiva and the protests. She became hard-er and harder to reach, without any stable address, with her phone only working sporadically. My repeated efforts to reach Tara all failed, even as I left the field and continued periodic attempts to ‘check-in’ with her via Facebook (on which she was inactive for large periods of time). When I returned for a short visit to Salinas in April 2015, some seven months after leaving, among the first things I asked Shi when being welcomed back to her pad was whether Tara was around. Shi responded that Tara “fell off.”

“She what?”

“She fell off. She never got over the Mejía stuff. She got tripped up on it and stayed there.”

**Progress Amidst Exhaustion**

In their own particular ways, the police homicides opened a possibility of shifting these women’s gang-cultivated abidance of indiscriminate death, towards a newfound availability to let the past and emergent happenings take on a novel eventfulness: an insufferability that demanded healing through concerted ethical action, whether positive and energetic (like engaging in protest) or negative (as in Marta’s staying away). Still, I recognize that neither Marta’s nor Tara’s ways of working through their triggers seem particularly explanatory of how social change happens. If anything, they seem to showcase one side of the spectrum of why certain social projects proceed, as Povinelli asks, and why other simply stay wavering in potentiality. They suggest some of the challenges involved in becoming available to the triggers that do compel important ethical procedures and actions, but can also lead to exhaustion and world-collapsing, suffocating absorption. This absorption dampens the dissonance necessary to move things there so she could leave lighter. She didn’t think she’d be able to be ‘present’ and that’s also how she checked in. She didn’t want to say anything when the palabra came to her but Shi insisted. “Are you at least glad to be alive and here?” she asked, giving Tara the default Colectiva check-in regalo. Tara mumbled back, “I don’t really feel like I’m here.”

During the activity I sat with Tara and encouraged her to string up some beads, even though I knew she had just finished telling me an hour ago that she didn’t feel she had anyone. I could see her tearing up again, staring down at the string in her hands. “I don’t have anyone,” she said quietly. I tried to build her up, being positive, replying, “I know it might seem like the wrong time to be doing this, that you don’t have anyone, but actually it’s a good time to do it, because there are people who care for you, there have been people in your life who love you – don’t forget them. Put them on this bracelet.”

She strung up a bunch of calavera beads – skulls. I don’t know if they represented anyone in particular, but there were many more than four.

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53 A comparable inability or unwillingness to compartmentalize came during another Colectiva activity called ‘Tortilla de mi Vida,’ where each woman had to divide a ‘tortilla’ (piece of paper shaped like a circle) into four, writing in each segment the name of a person that tied wine bottle. Eventually something came back to her, and she started to fill in the panels. The first one simply said “PAIN,” the third “HURT.” She asked me to draw lightning bolts, in red and black, in between. Despite all the specific crises she’d suffered, she could not compartmentalize and eventalize them; they were all a commingled haze of pain and hurt.

Immediately prior to this circle, I had picked her up at BI, and we all sprawled or sat on the floor, digging for markers in plastic bins, giggling at our drawings but also becoming quiet and focused as we reflected on simply four things that had come to matter to who we felt ourselves to be. Sitting nearby, I looked over to Tara, who was alternating between being rambunctiously picky with the markers’ shades, and concernedly silent as she hovered over her still-blank four-folds. She couldn’t think of anything at first, feeling so emptied out by everything with yet another recent police homicide, of a man named Frank Alvarado. She likened herself to an emp-tied wine bottle. Eventually something came back to her, and she started to fill in the panels. The first one simply said “PAIN,” the third “HURT.” She asked me to draw lightning bolts, in red and black, in between. Despite all the specific crises she’d suffered, she could not compartmentalize and eventalize them; they were all a commingled haze of pain and hurt.

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into an ethical mode, swathing suffering in ever more ongoingness. Such less-than-spectacular accounts of being and becoming otherwise speak volumes about the moral and material conditions in underserved and criminalized settings like East Salinas, conditions which can add critical densities and intensities to practices and experiences of civic participation and activism.

It is the primacy of these rubrics of participation and activism though, the recognizable practices of direct action, that occlude not only our anthropological understandings of other ways of seeking change, but can also hem in meaningful actions on the ground. Stine Kroijer (2010) has complicated our sense of what happens at something like a protest-event, critiquing the classical ritual lens through which it is often viewed. Even Victor Turner’s sense of ritual as opening up a liminal phase of possibility reiterates a linearity of social drama, as the state of the social is measurable different in a before/during/after trajectory. She argues instead for the “body’s indeterminacy and openness to an otherwise in the here and now,” locating the future in the (temporary, episodic) materializing of activists’ political goals in distinct protest experiences (140). Similarly, I have explored a mode of being-triggered in this chapter in order to open up some of the multiple fluctuating temporalizations at work in the Mujeres’s struggles to find the right key in which to apprehend and articulate their issues. The more recognizable forms like protest were the ones that made it to the newspapers and earned them a sense of public stewardship, and a feeling of ‘doing something.’ But the protests were just one aspect of an alternative process of social change through healing, a transformational politics not predicated on teleology or rupture, but on recalibration.

Let’s go back to Shi and Tara, and their chance encounter after Hernandez’s death, as their mutual-triggering and subsequent responsiveness led them onto so many beating-hot stripes of pavement that summer. Their triggers, and the contested eventfulness to which they were articulated, were framed in terms of coming together to say ‘ya basta’, enough already, and in doing so, to engage in healing themselves and their community. They generally refrained from making specific demands about the desired outcomes of these actions – they distinctly did not want something so simple as the police chief to step down, claimed by contrast by the many anarchist activists that flooded into Salinas from the Bay Area at this time. Instead, affectively and reflectively engaging with the rhythmicity of their triggers, their incipient organizing logic was one of recalibration rather than emancipation. It largely focused on dealing with what they had been through, what had happened to them, without a distinct sense of what that could intend or imply for the future. The protests were not, as could be assumed, simple political rituals with a linear ontology of social (dis) aggregation, but drew on multiple, fluctuating ontologies of time (Kroijer 2010). Shi and Tara drew (or projected) parallels between their distinct but resonant rhythms of living, suffering, recovering and changing, and the acceptable, just, distribution of eventfulness in the aggregated ordinary of East Salinas.

The key to the future may well be the past, or more specifically ways of presentifying and refracting pasts. It is not a linear or straightforward history that led to Shi and Tara becoming activistas, but rather the affectively and ethically affirmed alternative historicities made actual and urgent through their being-triggered. This is an aggregative history that can be de- and re-aggregated as new discursive and material possibilities are encountered; this history, like the history Wendy Brown describes at the end of modernist imaginaries, “does not lead forward but is rather the retrospective record of conflicts that yield an emergence” (2001:105). It is more specifically ‘genealogy’, Brown argues, tracing the concept’s own genealogy through Nietzsche and Foucault, as a discourse of history that “neither prescribes political positions nor specifies desirable futures, [but] aims to make visible why particular positions and visions of the future occur to us” (109-110). Turning to the past is not regressive, especially if we loosen our attachments to a conventional sense of progress.
Josefina’s Love of Aztec Stuff

“I love Aztec stuff,” Josefina stated, matter-of-fact, while lounging on her living room couch. A horror movie played loudly in the background. We had been discussing the Xinachtli Rites of Passage program running in the Colectiva’s twice-weekly circles, drinking iced coffees with the cool breeze blowing through the former Norteña’s sparse, clean apartment in the new projects in central Salinas. Xinachtli (pronounced “Shee-nacht-lee”), meaning ‘Germinating Seed’ in Nahuatl, is a 12-week curriculum combining broadly Mesoamerican beliefs and practices, designed for teenaged girls making the transition to becoming noble women.54

Josefina was, by then, already in her late 30s, as with most of the other women in the Colectiva de Mujeres participating in Xinachtli, but the curriculum had been adapted by the group’s facilitator, Shi, with the women’s lives in mind. She reasoned that those in the Colectiva were

Figure 5 - Sage and poster paper, the essentials

54 The Xinachtli curriculum was authored by Maestra Sara Haskie-Mendoza, and she continues to provide facilitator training for the program across the United States.
women, of course, but had been thrown into adulthood too soon. They had not, she felt, reflected on some of the important things that a woman should, and had not been through the rites of passage that brought them into this era of their lives ‘in a good way.’ Enthusiasm for the curriculum’s weekly topics and creative activities ran high among the women, who felt like they were engaged in something important. Indeed, the Xinachtli curriculum had sparked Josefina, whose usual diffidence, her “I’m kool off dat”-ness, subsided when it came to her curiosity with these Native ways.

“Yeah? So what makes you love Aztec stuff?” I asked Josefina in response.

“Because I’m Indian and I always want more. I wanna know more.”

I’d known Josefina for some months already, and I could tell she was into Xinachtli, but admittedly I didn’t expect to hear her flat-out declare “I’m Indian.” Josefina was the lovable cabrona of the Colectiva, the disgruntled teddybear with her arms crossed in every circle, listening, watching, but not so often speaking. Her past in general was characterized as a time when she had “a black heart,” as she put it; “when I didn’t give a fuck.” It wasn’t something she talked about, but then again she never really said much about who she was or how her life had been.

“Did you always know you were Indian?” I asked.

“Yeah. I’m a Yaqui Indian,” she clarified, making reference to the Yaqui nation that resides in northern Mexico, their territory blurring into Arizona’s Cherokee reservations across the border. “I knew I was Indian from a long time ago. My parents, they told me when I was adopted, like, they told me when I was like four or five.”

“So they just said, ‘you’re a Yaqui and that’s that,’ or did they tell you what that meant?”

“They told me I was Indian, half Indian, and half Mexican. But they told me I was more Indian than Mexican.”

“I think Alma is also– she has Yaqui blood. And Luisa,” I said, listing some other Mujeres. “And so does Shi. Her mom is Yaqui.”

We thought of Shi’s tiny mother, her long black hair. “Her mom looks it. So Shi’s Yaqui too?!”

55 “In a good way,” a ubiquitous phrasing, indicates the ‘red road’ or Native American Church-sanctioned way of engaging in social action and belief.

56 Perhaps the Urban Dictionary offers the most accurate description of ‘cabrona’ based on my understanding of the term in Salinas: “A woman who is stubborn, independent and very opinionated. She tends to not care what the rest of the world thinks and would be considered a badass bitch” (Urban Dictionary n.d.)
Even prior to this, through centuries of colonial and nationalistic mestizaje in Mexico, alongside periodic and systematic fetishization and marginalization of things (and people) indio, what remained was often unmarked (Decker 2011; Cohn 2014; Indian Country Today 2013; Rodriguez 2008).

Like the crafting of Josefina’s rainstick from the various facets of her life, this sense of immanent Indigeneity is being reassembled in creative ways. A growing number of people with Mexican heritage seem to be becoming more overtly involved57 in their Indigeneity (Decker 2011; Cohn 2014; Indian Country Today 2013). Much of this Indigenizing shift might be described as palpable and anecdotal, for example in the growing audiences at México (Aztec) New Year celebrations, the proliferation of Danza Azteca groups and scholarship (Aguiar 2009), and the rise of collectives like MILPA and the Mujeres. It’s found in the ever-widening canon of Chicana/o art and literature, exemplified in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and, as this chapter will reflect, Cherríe Moraga (Moraga 2011).

Even further, it’s reflected in recent expansions to the national Census – an important technology of racialization and many would argue, Latino exclusion – which now offers ‘Mexican Native American’ as an available category of race.58 For decades, the Census’s narrow racial categories have precluded the official registration of Latinos’ difference, their literal and figurative counting as part of the nation. Latinos, as with all Census takers, have been asked to officially identify their race as either White; Black/African American; American Indian/Alaska Native; Asian; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander; or ‘Some Other Race’; many do not consider these accurate options reflective of their self-identification. Critically, in 2010, within the Census’s racial category of ‘American Indian/Alaska Native’, the available tribal sub-groupings were diversified, and the broad ‘Latin American Indian’ grouping was replaced by a range of geopolitically-specified ‘Indians’.59 At this point, ‘Mexican American Indian’ became an officially identificatory possibility. Based on the 2010 Census, those who officially identified their race as Mexican American Indian now technically form the country’s “fourth largest tribe” (US Census Bureau 2012; Indian Country Today 2013).

For some Mexican-Americans, this Indigenous identification may be a bureaucratic technicality; for others, a political statement. Among many Mujeres and Milperos, regardless of what they marked on the Census, some have turned to their Indigeneity – inspired by curricula like Xinachtli – as a way of understanding themselves and the world. Turning to their Indigeneity, they can realize a kind of immanent ‘otherwise’: that they can live, they can be, differently, in a setting that seems materially the same as it has been their whole lives. The world about them, technically the same, comes to seem (newly but ‘timelessly’) different as well – perhaps not “enchanted,” a term often associated with Native American traditional storytelling (Palmer 2003), but marked with different pockets of possibility and constraint. The magnitude and mode of change is both subtle and, I argue, ontological.

Figured on the ground in Salinas as a reconnection and a remembering, and here as a reassemblage, turning to their Indigeneity came to form grounds, resource, and goal for the Mujeres’s healing and community engagement. Pursuing this familiarity – turning the immanence of their Indigeneity from potentiality into actuality – was encouraged through participation in the healing circle, curricula and trainings like Xinachtli, and broader spiritual engagements like sweat lodges and teepee ceremonies. This immanence and its pursuit, though, were also institutionalized through philanthropic and county-level funded support for the La Cultura Cura Network. The Network, which I explore in detail in this chapter, designs and implements curricula like Xinachtli and other ‘culture’-oriented trainings across a significant range of local social settings; some voluntary, some mandated. Proliferating across the city and county – and elsewhere in the state and country – La Cultura Cura’s influence in local processes of ‘Indigenizing’ demands deeper analysis.

57 Involvement here, following Bernard Williams (Williams 2012), signals the depth of being taken up with something like Indigeneity as part of a moral ground or social project.

58 The Census has a long history as a technology of identification and racialization among Latinos, and especially those of Mexican ancestry, in the United States, and has sparked various flashpoints along the continuum of Mexican-American struggles for belonging (Omi & Winant 2014; Rodriguez 2007). Generally not quite fitting with the Census’s racial categories, Latinos have generally been grouped together with Whites for statistical and legal purposes. This has entailed a range of political implications in different eras, from assuaging their integration in the 1950s to making discrimination against this population a legal (but not actual) impossibility in the 1970s (Haney-Lopez 2003).

The addition of a separate ethnic distinction of ‘Hispanic/Non-Hispanic’, peripheral to race, has not solved the demographic dilemma, even entrenching the problem of miscategorization for those who take offense to the ‘Hispanic’ label as an imposed and inappropriate distinction based on the (colonial) Spanish language. A 2011 New York Times article, suspiciously titled “Hispanics Identifying Themselves as Indians,” evokes the discrepancy as follows: “Hispanic is not a race,” said Mr. Quiroz, whose ancestors were the Quechua people, of the Central Andes. “Hispanic is not a culture. Hispanic is an invention by some people who wanted to erase the identity of indigenous communities in America… We don’t believe we have to accept this identity just because we speak Spanish” (Decker 2011).

59 The other three are “Central American Indian,” “South American Indian,” and “Spanish American Indian.” No legal criteria such as status cards are required to identify as any of these categories of Indian.
The implications of these processes are essential to understanding the particular form of social change unfolding in Salinas and similarly marginalized Mexican-American communities in majority-minority areas. Noticing and nurturing an immanent Indigeneity needs to be brought into legibility as a form of political action at the register of ontology. While ontology often is understood to signify a realm of deep, immutable difference, I operationalize it in this chapter from a phenomenological foundation: to call attention to the domain of being-in-the-world, the coeval co-constitution of beings that make up a world and a world through which beings are and can be. This must proceed through acknowledging the socioeconomic disparities wrought through domains like race, class, and gender, an awareness that the “social distribution of potentiality,” the social landscape of Being, is a rough, hummocky terrain (Povinelli 2011; Bessire and Bond 2014).

I am aware that examining ontology in relation to politics is a fraught affair in critical theory today, at a time when many anthropological ‘Ontological Turn’-ers are going down a radically essentialist rabbit hole of post-humanism (de Castro 1998; Kohn 2013; 2015), and political theorists stand gaping at the emptied shell of liberal politics as we know it (Brown 2001; Brown 2015; Scott 2014). However, perhaps loosening these disciplines’ narrowed focuses and entrenched divides sheds light on sociopolitical projects in our midst that work through and on registers of Being; neither grandiose social experimentation nor distant tribal happenings, but the subtle, sometimes seemingly banal, social and individual projects of changing oneself and changing the world.

Emergent Mexican-American identification as Indigenous is one such project marked by an important intertwining of ontological and political aspects. I approach it here through its temporal conditions. As Chicana poet Cherrie Moraga has argued, in her *Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness,* “the Indigenous movement in América remains the one viable political” for Mexican-Americans to challenge the “genocidal policies” and lingering forms of colonial consciousness around social inequality (Moraga 2011:31); “our children,” she writes, “must remember that they were here first and are always Xicano, Dine, Apache, Yaqui, or Choctaw” (ibid:7). However, this Indigenous turn is distinct from an identitarian ‘Indigenous movement’ in itself. I explore it in this chapter as a grassroots ontological turn, offering aspects of an alternative ancestral temporality to those who have sometimes disavowed their own recent, troubled pasts – those to whom the state gaze has been more likely to ascribe a ‘culture of poverty’ or criminality rather than a valuable multicultural. More than a

straightforward, if retrospective, search for origins, such Indigenizing can be seen as *genealogical* in both the conventional sense of descent, but more critically in the sense of destabilizing the personal and political present, by situating its emergence in the contingencies and conflicts of the colonial past (Brown 2001). As an aspect of a social project of healing (Povinelli 2011), this immanent Mexican-American Indigeneity broadens foreclosed horizons of contingency and possibility, opening up for people like Josefin a welcome, amenable mode of *belonging differently to time* (cf. Stevenson 2014).

**Post-Identitarian Project of Chicano Indigeneity**

This is not the first time in recent history that a sense of Indigeneity has been cultivated, somewhat consciously, towards effecting a kind of social change among people with Mexican heritage in the United States. Most prominently, the Chicano movement of the late 1960s/early 1970s actively constructed and articulated Mexican-American difference along the contours of an Aztec-rooted Indigenousness, setting them apart from both whites and African-Americans in a binaristic Civil Rights era (Haney-López 2004; Rodríguez 2008).60 As Rodríguez points out, the college-educated generation of Mexican-Americans involved with the coining of the term ‘Chicano’ in 1969 had little knowledge of the Indigenous side of their *mes-tizo* cultural heritage, yet “began to pay homage to their pre-Columbian roots” (Rodríguez 2008:205). Influenced by both the Black Civil Rights struggle in the 50s and 60s, and as well by the burgeoning anti-colonial movement in the global south, the Chicano Movement nevertheless saw its means and ends as unique. Its activists “found within their indigenous half that sense of difference that they sought to strengthen and expand in the consciousness of the average Mexican American” (García 1997:71). The Movement sought perhaps most keenly to craft a coherent identity

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60 Ian F. Haney-Lopez (2004), discussing the genealogy of Chicanismo’s Indigeneity as critically bound up in Chicanos’ legal and political claims to a valuable, defendable difference, writes that “the association between Chicanos and Aztecs, Mayans, and so on ultimately involved not just a claim about culture but an assertion of race,” linking timeless ancestry laden in bloodlines to contemporary political belonging. A tautened vocabulary of Mexican racial difference, construed as immanent and thus deeper than culture (even as culture, materially and socially, was its vehicle), encapsulated an ontological stance on capacity and value that lay dormant beneath acculturation and Americanization. The apparent primacy of this difference of race, and the (moral) failure among some Mexicanos to realize it, was used “as a shorthand to criticize certain political viewpoints and social aspirations” (Haney-López 2004:207).
for themselves, out of the amalgamatory tendency of cultural nationalism (Rodriguez 2008:208; García 1997). This is something el Movimiento, as it is affectionately still known, struggled with then and arguably never attained, contributing perhaps to that much-constraining, impossible demand for Latino unity behind taunts like the Latino Sleeping Giant (Beltran 2010; Alarcón 1990).

This impossible demand highlights an often unaddressed element of the first-wave Chicano Movement: its differential appeal across the strataions of class and culture among those of Mexican heritage. The Movement’s adherents, Rodriguez (2008) points out, were primarily college students from among the most assimilated Mexican-American families. As García carefully phrases it, Chicano activists and scholars “believed that their strength would be enhanced by a small, progressive middle class not yet removed from its working-class origins” (García 1997:68). While much of Chicanismo’s rich cultural and artistic productions are “working class oriented,” the Movement tended not to be taken up by those who composed the working class themselves, or who faced additional constraints in upward mobility. This may be in part because they may not have needed a name and a political impulse for what was already involved in a way of life.

Many Mexican-Americans in Salinas, including most of the Mujeres, are of working class families, with parents who labored in the fields rather than attended college. As a result, most in Salinas do not grow up ‘Chicano’ let alone strongly, proudly ‘Indigenous’. Most Mujeres, at least early in their participation in the Colectiva and its circles, would not self-identify as Chica. What is thus critical to note about this wave of Indigenizing in Salinas is the relative non-activist upbringing and dispositions of many involved. Instead, it is resonating strongly with those who have been ‘Americanized’ and gang-affiliated. While what we might want to recognize as a reprise of Chicanismo’s rich cultural and artistic productions are “working class oriented,” the Movement tended not to be taken up by those who composed the working class themselves, or who faced additional constraints in upward mobility. This may be in part because they may not have needed a name and a political impulse for what was already involved in a way of life.

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Es La Cultura Que Cura

In Salinas, a significant and driving resource of this social project of Indigenization has been La Cultura Cura, described to me as a philosophy and a way of life and here specifically understood as a service-providing network surrounding a core organizational structure. It is, in part, out of the politico-conceptual realm of the post-Civil Rights period that La Cultura Cura grew, through its founders’ participation in the Chicano movement’s heyday of 1970s East Los Angeles, but also its hangover: as the strong movement and its activism petered out, Chicanismo’s worldview and principles were diffused and taken up in other sites and lines of work. Activists, themselves mostly college students, became professionals in various fields, especially academia and politics (Rodriguez 2008:213).

While Chicanos assuming positions in institutions of power like universities and local governments did not fully revolutionize either system, having them in these decision-making positions has nevertheless been “pivotal” for improving the lives and futures of Mexican-Americans. A number of them, like juvenile justice advocate and La Cultura Cura associate Marcia Rincon-Gallardo, proved invaluable interlocutors to me during and after my time in the field. La Maestra, as she was often respectfully called, explained to me that “without having us in those very important positions of power, we’re still talking to a lot of people who don’t understand us.” She cited Joaquin Avila, an activist-turned-lawyer who brought the City of Salinas to enforce the Voting Rights Act in 1989, which led to the election of former activists-turned-politicians Simon Salinas to the city council, and Fernando Armenta to the county board of governors, among others.61 Rincon-Gallardo herself sparked her life’s work through her involvement in outreach for the Voting Rights Act in Salinas and nearby Watsonville. She noted to me that despite these resonant victories of the Movement, “the piece that was missing from this the whole time” has been “the healing-informed piece. It’s been really hard to come by.”62 It is in part

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61 The 1965 Voting Rights Act forced city governments to reform from at-large to district elections, in theory leading to greater political purchase in minority and marginalized communities. Monterey County was one of three counties in California to be covered by the VRA’s Section 5 protection, yet as late as the 1980s it had not transitioned to district elections. Lawyer and activist Joaquin Avila won a lawsuit against the City of Salinas in 1989 to redistrict the city, and shift its electoral representation accordingly. The win resulted in two of six city council seats apportioned to the heavily Latino East Side. “Slowly that’s how they started building the machinery to now have Fernando Armenta, Simon Salinas, like, you name it, even on the board of education, all the Latinos that are now sitting on those boards, it’s all because of this landmark lawsuit,” Maestra Marcia Rincon-Gallardo explained to me. “When you’re talking about social justice, change, that was pivotal.”

62 She continued that “still, a lot of people still think of it as too touchy-feely, or ‘what does that have to do with politics,’ or, you know. Um, but I think you’re kind of hitting on the heart of it, which is that for social justice change to occur, something needs to happen with us too, and moving away from feeling like – like we don’t have an impact, that us solely as a unitary, single individual, or that we have so many issues that to join a group of people, um… our woundedness impacts the group so much, or everybody else’s woundedness, impacts it so much that you really don’t get anywhere, right? So that, in fact, doing the healing work, not only for yourself but as a group collectively, helps you, move things, so that you can find consensus and unity to then move forward on issues that you agree on.”
through well-placed Chicana/o activists-turned-professionals like Rincon-Gallardo and Armenta that La Cultura Cura’s teachings have been implemented from the interstices of civic institutions in places of entrenched conservatism and structural racism like Monterey County and Salinas – though not without challenges posed from individuals within these systems as well as Chicano communities.63

While taking clear continuity from the Chicano Movement, La Cultura Cura’s post-Civil Rights genesis and its recent proliferation are furthermore symptomatic of historical shifts in political possibility and liberal techniques of philanthropic governance (Brown 2015; Kohn-Arenas 2015). In particular, the network and its activities are grounded today in the terrain of health. As I outlined in chapter one, health has provided a critical interface of competing ideologies of social justice and state abandonment, a ‘fundable’ frame for intervening on disparity and engaging wary would-be participants in a kind of depoliticized, morally amenable social action. The La Cultura Cura Network has developed, and to a certain extent professionalized and codified in their curricula, a pan-Indigenous cosmology for present struggles facing underserved Latino communities. Founded by psychologists, the ‘health’ in question may be seen as mental health primarily, but La Cultura Cura works through a “Medicine Wheel” philosophy of interconnectedness to link mental health to physical, emotional, and spiritual health. The holistic breadth of their approach has, in part, enabled the network’s core staff and trained affiliates to take key leadership roles in Salinas’s philanthropic and civic structures. These staff and affiliates facilitate and offer guidance on projects at multiple levels of governance that well exceed an explicitly mental health mandate.64

Regardless of these administrative and political engagements, health remains La Cultura Cura’s foundation and focus. This is in part due to contemporary, Obamacare-era foregrounding of health as a socially salient problem, but it is also a result of earlier funding possibilities. The network’s founders were initially employed in one of the first Latino-run mental health clinics in LA County in the 1970s, serving heavily Latino East Los Angeles, during an era of rising multicultural policy.65 Compelled by what they saw as inappropriate and irrelevant mental health care being provided to Latino families, the network’s early organizers pursued the question of “what traditional populations did when there was not ‘health care’ in that organized way.” Conventional health care, they found, individualized the sufferer from their community and context. “This was,” network founder and central Maestro Jerry Tello told me, “the opposite of what our families needed.”

Tello and the organizers began researching old texts and speaking with elders, finding that there were “certain ways, out of our own families, across families and cultures… across the board” that they could develop into a “philosophy, framework, model.” Following the elders’ encouragement and blessing, these frameworks were eventually turned into multi-week curriculum programs, like Xinachtli or the original and more common Joven Noble, extending beyond the East LA clinical context to reach new audiences in effective ways.66 As targeted ‘rites of passage’ programs, La Cultura Cura’s curricula gather elements from a variety of traditions, such that a curriculum like Xinachtli can resonate with those who have Aztec, Yaqui, or Native American Church-informed sensibilities or predilections (whether they realized it beforehand or not). They highlight the relevance of ‘traditional knowledge’ to contemporary lifecourses, across demographics, and generally culminate in a message of social justice and participants’ responsibilities to improve their communities.

It is in part through the implementation of curricula like Xinachtli, and the suffusion of its moral metaphors, aphorisms and stories known as ‘teachings’ among variably situated participants, that a new movement conceived with ancient roots is felt to be rumbling fresh. Ollin is a Nahuatl word for ‘movement,’ referring to an oscillating and centering modality of change, one of three modes of

63 Rincon-Gallardo, for example, has increasingly brought her spiritual practice into her professional advocacy work, launching an Indigenous-based juvenile justice thinktank named NOXTIN after the Nahuatl word ‘justice’ for all. NOXTIN’s approach, as one participating advocate puts it, “brings [the advocacy] back to a place at the beginning of time,” contextualizing criminalization of Latino and Native youth in a heritage of colonialism. But in the years prior to this launch, Marcia described facing repeated barriers and sanctions from her colleagues for bringing her spirituality into the workplace, people who have felt a range of discomfort and threat from her beliefs.

64 These range from fine-grained involvements like mediating disputes between foundation-funded grassroots CBO staff, up to facilitating city government-wide discussions around Governing for Racial Equity (alongside nationally renowned thinktank Race Forward), as will be discussed in chapter five.

65 This era needs more research in terms of policy provisions and its implementation, adaptation and stretching on the ground.

66 As Flores (2013) notes, for the precursor project to La Cultura Cura, the National Compadres Network, and the curriculum Joven Noble, Tello drew on the pre-Colombian codices Florentino (VI), Mattienzes del Real Palacio (VI) and de la Real Academia (VIII) to build “an alternative formulation of Chicano identity.” These codices are primarily concerned with proper conduct for men and are based on “a sense of respect and interconnectedness founded on spirituality” (Carrillo and Tello 2008:46).
change in Aztec metaphysics. The image of the Ollin, like an earthquake, provides a way of figuring an extension of an earlier Chicano Indigeneity with the critical “healing component” added. It’s my central contention here that ‘healing’ should not be seen as a simple addition but as a transformative aspect that, in effect, is shifting an older form of identity politics, the Chicano Movement, into a more diffuse but potent politics of an otherwise, addressing the widespread effects of structural racism and the foreclosure of Mexican-American lives. The tremors of this Ollin can be pinpointed at seemingly less-activist institutional junctions, where the La Cultura Cura curricula and trainings are implemented.

### Institutional epicenters

La Cultura Cura’s curricula and trainings, and the fact of the Network itself, coalesce in a substantive and purposive way many of the otherwise diffuse and experiential aspects of Chicano Indigeneity. The Network ‘puts it to work’ in particular ways, specifically related to health but often leaning into justice. According to Tello, the Network has trained over 1,000 participants across the United States and Mexico, collaborated with numerous organizations, and been involved in White House discussions around the federal My Brother’s Keeper initiative to support boys and men of color. It has been officially present in Salinas and Monterey County since 2009, and is strongly supported by The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative, fitting squarely within their ‘Health Happens Here’ mandate. The Mujeres’ and Milperos’ adoption of and living through “these ways,” through running curricula like Xinachtli as well as holding healing circles facilitated by those trained by La Cultura Cura, is taken as part of the foundation and proof of the community’s healing and changing. But what kind of change is being effected through their trainings and teachings? How are their post-Civil Rights era ideas on the value and dimensions of Chicano Indigeneity infused into their training material, and taken up in participants’ forms of consciousness and capacities to dwell in Salinas’s ongoing conditions of abandonment?

Though Wendy Brown (2015) has condemned the bureaucratization of social movements through NGOification, and Mexican-Americans and Native Americans involved in Indigenous spiritual communities have criticized this packaging of otherwise timeless and boundless Indigenous teachings, it remains that these curricula are quietly being run in county juvenile halls, probation alternatives to detention, and behavioral health departments, as well as community-based organizations like the Colectiva de Mujeres and MILPA. They are bringing a kind of Indigeneity into settings usually reserved for ‘rehabilitation’, a setting where participants have been told they have done something wrong, and need to reform their ways of living. In the fractures affected through the 2011 California Prison Realignment Act (AB 109), which gave counties more responsibility and flexibility in administering probation programming, reintegration, and rehabilitation for many low-level crimes, as well as ongoing renegotiations of the contours of health and governance in the wake of 2012’s Affordable Care Act, these settings have become fertile interstices for the emergence of an alternative politics of healing.

According to Maestro Tello, these private, county-, state-, and federally-run institutions have based “their own structure of health, mental health, juvenile justice systems on a top-down model,” providing their own standardized “diagnoses” as to what is wrong and how it should be fixed. Rehabilitation programs end up reiterating and entrenching participants’ culpability, rather than reworking it; they institutionalize the transformation of a social problem into pathology and criminality. They individualize and isolate, cutting participants out of the world they’ve emerged from, and thereby fail to generate viable means of moving forward into a future. In contrast, La Cultura Cura’s curricula train participants to find value in character, spirituality, culture, legacies.71

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67 In addition to Ollin, the others are Malinalli (twisting, unifying, strengthening) and Nepantla (middling, synthesis). None are teleological or culminating, but ongoing and shifting (Maffie 2015).

68 Ollin is also a ‘day sign’ in the Aztec calendar. As such, Ollin is considered a “day of the purified heart, signifying those moments when human beings may perceive what they are becoming.” It is “a good day for transmutation, which arrives like an earthquake that leaves in its wake the ruins of rationality, order and the preconceived.”

69 It should be noted that there are many Indigenous Chicanos who are very critical of the La Cultura Cura methodology, who feel it is a co-optation of a sacred cosmology to the benefit of a select few. This deserves more attention, but is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

70 Tello has been the lone Latino voice in My Brother’s Keeper initiatives, which have long been very African America-centric as well as, problematically, based on Moynihanian logic of black pathology (Coates 2015b; Greenbaum 2015). Tello noted to me that what else set them apart from other representatives in these discussions was that LCC is rites-of-passage-based, and does not subscribe to the same model of success; “It challenges the My Brother’s Keeper paradigm, which has been about formal education, doing well in [liberal] systems. We say: it’s about character, spirituality, culture, legacies.”
their pasts rather than acute and individualized fault. This value is intergenerational and trans-subjective; it is ascribed to more than just ‘the subject’ in the present, but rather to the sweep of genealogy spanning past and future as embodied in participants today as they awaken to their cultura.

Among a cohort of people who have been gang-involved, realizing this genealogical sweep is part of a moral process of pursuing a kind of change with integrity and continuity to conceptions of who they – across generations – have been. Critically, these are often people who have in some ways been denied a sense that they have ‘a culture’ in the positive valorized sense with which culture, in light of highly selective liberal multiculturalism, shines its way into contemporary, late-liberal, political configurations. Elizabeth Povinelli cites multiculturalism as late liberalism’s response to the challenges its faces from new social movements like anticolonialist and pan-indigenous solidarities; multicultural policies, in ‘recognizing’ difference, contain and tame it in a safe demarcated space that serves the coherence and richness of the nation (Povinelli 2002; 2011) This effectively forecloses progressive possibilities for any kind of actual challenge to power from cultural or identarian politics (see also Blaser 2013:556).

But while such conservative liberal policy may have provided the initial conditions of possibility for La Cultura Cura to be founded, grown, and funded, there are significant differences between these curricula and their counterparts’ usual interventions and approaches glossed in the administrative language of ‘cultural competency’. These differences hinge on the range of participants addressed, as well as the way culture is put to work to mean intergenerational experiences and expectations. As participants find parts of their pasts that they can be proud of – perhaps, like Josefinna, reaching over or past more recent and regrettable aspects – they realize continuities between ancestral experiences and their current forms of struggling. Cultura ‘cures’ in entailing a different sense of the capacity for, and rhythms of, change, at a fundamental level of potentiality and actuality – at the level of Being.

I turn now to detail one particular La Cultura Cura ‘base training’ session run by Maestro Jerry Tello, held in Salinas in April 2014. I argue that La Cultura Cura’s paradigm and programming, as a kind of social initiative beyond ‘cultural competency’, is a key site of ontologizing as a political action; it takes up and invites others into an ontotheoretical social project of healing predicated on Mexican-American Indigeneity. This assertion is based on the premise that ontological alterity is neither incommensurable, nor immutable, nor distant, but in our midst and available for intervention. I explore how the La Cultura Cura teachings address and shift a sense of what exists in the world, as well as how it exists, along what temporal and relational vectors. This process can effect a shift in being akin to what Lisa Stevenson has called belonging differently to time, opening a “possibility of building a different relationship to what is, what has been, and what may be” (2014: 136). Different from revivalism, belonging differently to time, as I understand it here, involves resituating oneself across different temporal and relational horizons and thereby interrogating the balance of experience and expectation, constraint and possibility.

“What if someone told you, m’ijo, you can heal generations?”

Some months into my fieldwork and with the Colectiva de Mujeres hitting its stride, Shi arranged for me to attend a ‘base training’ in the foundations of La Cultura Cura philosophy led by the Maestro Jerry Tello, the Network’s founder and central teacher. These trainings had “changed my life,” Shi told me numerous times, and grounded the Colectiva’s principles and practices of healing. Though she was already implementing these teachings in her facilitation of the Colectiva, we planned to run their Xinachtli curriculum in the coming months, and she was preparing me to co-facilitate it with her in circle.

Though it was my first official La Cultura Cura training session, I had crossed paths with the Maestro many times before. He often visited Salinas from his base in Los Angeles, working closely with MILPA and the Building Healthy Communities umbrella to make presentations, facilitate community and CBO-internal healing circles, share teachings, and run ‘base trainings’ like this one for new and returning audiences. These trainings were periodic, by-invitation-only, and held in English but peppered with Spanish in addition to Nahuatl. They gathered an impressive range of audience members.

Though I carpooled there with Araceli, one of the Mujeres, in fact I had brought all my ancestors into the room too. This is what she and I, and the assortment of Behavioral Health county administrators and managers, mental health service providers, juvenile justice advocates, and some unaffiliated gente (‘regular community members’ like Araceli), were alerted to, as we sat in the impressive, plantation-style Harden House conference room in North Salinas, listening to Maestro Jerry Tello tell us stories. These were ostensibly stories about La Cultura Cura, but were very much about the world, himself, and ourselves.
The Maestro, in a black button-up shirt with PALABRA in white letters on the back, began the three-hour training by introducing himself, by saying it was an honor to be here with us – but also by acknowledging all of the relations we were all bringing into the room too. “Everywhere we go,” he told us, “we bring our ancestors with us.” He whipped up a vision of all our grandfathers and grandmothers crowding the room around our tables and chairs, piling up at the door, a vision we were invited to share and cultivate for ourselves. Later, the Maestro would close the session with a similar invitation, picking up a skin drum painted with an eagle from the altar positioned in front of his PowerPoint projection. He struck the drum softly, like a heartbeat, asking us just to listen and feel our grandparents’ heartbeats alongside our own.

In between these ancestral invocations, he told us stories of his own family, the father he’d inherited his black Chicano-style hat from, and his mother who would stand in front of the stove stirring the frijoles, beans. He spoke about his youth, and about going off to college, living the ubiquitous Latino immigrant success story of parents sacrificing all for a child’s education and growth. We heard about the psychology classes he took at college, and the ways they prompted him to reevaluate his childhood as well as his parents, or more specifically their adeptness as such. Reframing his life in terms of ‘Western psychology’ and its deficiency models, the Maestro described becoming alienated from his parents, from his home – from himself.

One day – he related – he found himself telling his mother about what he’d been learning.

“What is self-esteem?” he remembered her asking.

Tello told his mother the standard psychological answer he had memorized for his classes, about confidence in one’s worth and abilities, and a sense of self-respect.

She replied, “oh, our children have plenty of that. Here, have more beans.”

“No, ma,” he demurred; “we don’t have that,” according to all those models and statistics he was learning that cast Latinos in denigrated, deficient terms. Parents, he was learning in school, were supposed to be praising you with lots of love, lavishing you with explicit adoration, and he never got any of that. He became ashamed of his Spanish tongue, his Mexican blood. ‘And what are the beans gonna do for my self-esteem?’

The answer came to him years later, when he could no longer get those “magical beans of hers,” prepared the way generations of his family had made them. He realized then that those beans were the self-esteem, the love. The frijoles, the beans, not only represented but gathered the close connection across family members and generations, a fidelity (cf. Zigon 2014) that had been diminished in the various institutionalized acculturizations of the children and grandchildren of families destabilized by migration and national borders. He thought of the sight of mama secretly crying over her frijoles, carrying the weight of her untold burdens, and his father’s alcoholism, fueling the forgetting of his unspeakable traumas. These cargas and regalos, baggage and gifts, were his inheritance. The struggles of his family, but equally so their cures, were all already within the household, their bloodline.

Storying a world that was deeply familiar to most in the audience, filled with relatable and memorable details, Tello connected his attitudes and challenges with his parents’ and ancestors’ suffering, positing an intergenerational flow of experiences. He spoke us into this horizon, inviting us to see our lives as situated across time and individuals. The audience was spellbound. With this feeling of trust and attunement firmly established, Tello made a critical parry.

“So what happens if you didn’t receive the gifts of praise and love,” he asked; “What happens if your grandma was wounded, your mama was wounded?”

The simple question struck the lodestone of a psychoanalytic deficiency model of the subject, locating one’s issue across generations as well as in an evermore external culprit. It wasn’t something ‘you’ did – it was something that happened to you, the you that was more than just you: the you that was a dynamic inheritance of prior generations. The people caught up today in the intertwined judicial and behavioral health systems were acting out of an inherited woundedness that he traced back to the colonial encounter, a 500 year festering of Cortes’s fateful excursion into the Aztec Empire in the early 16th century.22

Tello continued, “we ask, what’s wrong with that person? And we incarcerate, medicate, negate, educate… and education is not all bad, it is good, but it does not heal.”

He explained how each of these ‘-ating’ interventions, from multiple angles and aspects, further served to limit that person in their failure, to tell that person in the intervention’s own terms why he was wrong and how he had to change. The Maestro thus pinpointed an individualizing neoliberal

22 This colonialism, as Cherrie Moraga has written, is “a lived condition, not strictly a juridical one; a colonialism of consciousness and spirit traversing the interlocking institutions of life in America” (2011:41).
state apparatus that designated, faulted, and responsibilized problem people, generating an individualized, Americanized "ontological armature" (Blaser 2013), in which the problem inhered in a particularly culpable body that could (maybe, but probably not) be solved in isolation.

Tello, in this training as in the Network’s curricula, urged us to pose different questions from the usual “what’s wrong with that person?” Instead, he said, we should ask, “what happened to you, to take you away from your sacredness? What if” – and here his voice went quiet and husky like the master storyteller he was – “what if someone told you, m’ijo, you can heal generations?”

Curing through Being

That breathtaking query; what is at stake, when a respected Maestro tells you that you can heal, you can work on, you can change, something that is greater than simply yourself? What latent capacity and connectivity is he calling you into, what reality is he ‘inaugurating’ (Stevenson 2014)? The Maestro, and La Cultura Cura, work through such storying to posit a certain way of being, an intergenerational Indigeneity already-there and thus immanent. This positioning is persuasive; it is generative. It is ontological.

In arguing that the Mujeres’ and Milperos’ turn to ‘la cultura’ should be analyzed for its ontological dimensions, as an active and power-claiming process of ontologizing, I am taking an approach to ontology more phenomenological than post-humanist (Heidegger 2008a; Zigon 2014a; Povinelli 2011, 2012; Bessire and Bond 2014), and sensitive to jaggedly unequal sociopolitical landscapes. It is what Webb Keane (2013) would call ‘weak’ ontology in its consideration of ‘what exists’ and its implications in a sociopolitical situation, rather than the more popular (and polarizing) ‘strong’ version that claims radical alterity and incommensurably different worlds.

In a similar schematization, Kohn (2015) identifies two contingents of the overall ‘Ontological Turn’, the narrow and the broad, as well as a host of ‘other engagements’ with ontology that do not share the same foundations or concerns with the trend, as it takes critical cues from STS. These broad-turning ‘other engagements’, “ontology in that other sense,” Lisa Stevenson writes (Stevenson 2014:204 fn9), tend to be more concerned with Being, and pertain primarily to the human as constituted in relation to the world one is already thrown into.

It is the temporal dimensions of Being most concertedly addressed through the myriad La Cultura Cura efforts, of which Tello’s training session above is but one example. Martin Heidegger’s (2008a) concern with a “fundamental ontology” in his Being and Time grounds this analysis, specifically his attention to the temporality of Being, with an eye to how it might be attenuated into a ‘soft’ version (Vigh and Sausdal 2014:52). Briefly, Being always unfolds across more than the individual, bodied ‘being’ itself, more than the strictly bound subject. Heidegger calls the being whose Being is an issue for it Dassein, German for ‘being-there’, thus indicating the fundamental situatedness of any being in a social world. This world, and Being-in-it, is not simply spatial. Being unfolds, or simply is, across a tripartite and ex-static (out of itself) temporality; beings, Dasseins, are thrown out of and pulling along a past (the ‘having-been’), projecting towards and anticipating a future (the ‘not-yet’), and thereby ‘making present’ in all the (mostly non-conscious) daily activities of Dassein’s life. While the contours of Dassein’s engagements with the world, their care and concern, may and will differ in different sociocultural configurations, Heidegger argues that these temporally ek-static modes of generating being and world, “being-in-the-world,” form the core foundation of Being for all beings, however they might be socially situated.

Might there be other ways, though, of being in time and moving through it, rendered conjunctive or compromised because of socioeconomic constraints, intersectional disparities, divergences in existentialia? While Heidegger’s dogged avoidance of explicit social or political engagement is troubling for a range of reasons, for the present analytical purposes it is also where the limits of his ontological approach can be located and worked on. For example, Josefina’s unwillingness to use her lived past as a resource or template for how to move forward, let alone to speak of it.

73 M’ijo or m’ija is a term of endearment for ‘my son/daughter’, not at all reserved for parents.
When one cannot or will not pull through one’s personal past – one’s long-comfortable way of being in and knowing the world – into the present and towards a future, how is that trajectory towards a future foreclosed, and how might that person’s sense of Being be affected? How can we stretch the way we operationalize ontology to reflect the way sociopolitical conditions are historical relationships, lived out through disparately distributed conditions like culpability – and subject to shift?

In very different ways anthropologists like Mario Blaser (2013; 2014) and Jarrett Zigon (2014a) have attempted to theorize more mutable conceptualizations of ontology and its operationalizations. The changeability built into their approaches is essential to avoid essentializing and pathologizing difference, and draws attention to the political potential of a range of ontological engagements, such as the Maestro’s base training discussed above. Blaser, perhaps one of the most conceptually thorough interlocutors of the Ontological Turn, has argued that different worlds come into being, in part, through storytelling, stressing “the extent to which the terms ontologies, worlds/worlding, and stories are synonyms” (Blaser 2013:552, emphasis in original). Drawing associations between Indigenous ways of knowing through storytelling, as well as actor network theory perspectives that look at the situated enactment of multiple realities through practices and ways of speaking about them, Blaser coins the term ‘storied performativity’ to capture this process.76

In this light, the Maestro’s suggestions in the base training, and written into and wrought out of the network’s curricula, were not only beautifully crafted tales but deeply propositional ways of seeing the world and being in it; “after all,” as Carrithers reminds us, “an ontology is nothing other than a set of propositions urging a particular viewpoint on reality” (2010:160). These propositions coalesce ‘ontological armatures’ – like the aforementioned Americanized, culpable, unchangeable individual, or the ever-mutable (Aztecified) inheritor of intergenerational experiences – that give form to cosmology and causality. The Maestro ‘storied the world’ (Blaser 2013) and called all of us into this being, an interpellation that felt give form to cosmology and causality. The Maestro ‘storied the world’

76 This approach to political ontology takes its concern with the “practices, performances and enactments” of ontologies dislodged from specific groups or geographies; “one can speak of a given worlding or ontology as long as one can trace its enactment,” Blaser writes, against assumptions that, for example, “indigenous identity automatically translates into an other-than-modern ontology” (Blaser 2013:553). He insists upon the non-human actors that are entangled in this world-making process, although much of his framework seems driven by the human. line shook and foundations beneath our feet split apart, opening space, opening time. Generating a room full of ancestors, measuring our heartbeat alongside theirs, and linking contemporary struggles with intergenerational experiences of trauma, Tello’s stories addressed and ‘enchanted’ realities in Salinas.

What kept them from being strictly romance or nostalgia was the sense of coevalness they engendered, with regard to the problems experienced by “our ancestors, our community, our gente [people],” ourselves. Feeling the presence of one’s ancestors was not cast as a novelty but instead, reorganizing contemporary beliefs in subjectivity, kinship and agency, to render legible a connectivity between their experiences and one’s own. In Zigon’s terminology (2014a) we were invited to attune to our ancestors, with attunement naming the fundamental capacity to allow Beings (Daseins) to form relationships and ‘tune in’ to others in our midst, not in terms of mood or thinking but in terms of being-with. Furthermore, situating our ancestors as ‘already with us’, Tello subtly issued a demand to build a more active and reflective relationship with them, if we were to be included in this collective ‘we’ he was generating. Fidelity, the other ontological capacity set out by Zigon, is the maintenance of those attuned-to relationships in various ways (neutral, negative, positive), in service to a Being’s idea of itself and its moral concerns through time, to its singular life trajectory. Shifting from the process of worlding to the contours of the being-in (and of)-the-world, Zigon maps out Being as essentially relational, being-with attuned-to others with whom she is always already entangled, and to whom she maintains varying degrees of fidelity that serve her idea of who she is and where she is going in life – even as this ‘destination’ is fundamentally unstable and subject to transformation as the ontological assemblage shift.

What both Blaser and Zigon’s approaches make possible is an awareness of the power in the ‘ontological armatures’ a society posits and lives out as fundamental – and thus their potential to shift in relatively concert-ed ways. These ‘ontotheoretical’ efforts are not solely restricted to radical social projects or situations or even distant geographies, but in the midst of governance ‘at home’, the senses of personhood and worldliness made differently available or possible through laws, education, or healthcare that are unequally distributed based on the poverty of one’s postal code or the color of one’s skin.

Lisa Stevenson addresses multiple moments in one particular type of ontotheoretical project in Life Beside Itself (2014), her ethnography of the Canadian government’s attempts to colonize and administer the Northern territory of Nunavut. Connecting the history of Canada’s colonization
through care with the contemporary suicide epidemic in its far north, her work coalesces a number of the concerns with ontology and temporality brought out in this chapter. Her conceptualization draws out the temporality of being, or rather the temporalities, the multiple rhythms of existence that can become entangled, disambiguated, or muted through institutional and ideological efforts towards shaping a population.

Stevenson echoes other theorists and historians in asking whether it’s possible that “territory is a minor trophy of colonialism—when compared to the dominance of time?” (2014:133). Not only command and revision of space has been at stake in colonial endeavors but also the temporality of the colonized at multiple levels. We might consider the colonized’s casting as ‘backwards’ in a civilizing teleology, where the “truth of some would be increasingly judged in terms of a past perfect being,” as Povinelli writes in her work on social tense (2011:27), as well as the enforcement of a 24-hour regimen of European clock time that replaces the Arctic sun’s natural rhythmicity. Stevenson focuses part of her archival and ethnographic inquiry on the Inuit’s selective adaptations to clock time, which “homogenizes and empties time of its subjective and emotional qualities,” and, in that way, stands as a cipher for the Canadian government’s anonymous forms of colonial care (2014:133).

Through various attempts at ‘caring for’ this population, such as tuberculosis treatment and residential schooling, Stevenson argues that many Inuit “were forced into a new way of being in time,” no longer able to hunt when they wanted, for example, but forced into a 9-to-5 rhythm (2014:134). However, she also links this adherence to clock time to another register of temporality; in describing her informants’ longings to escape the perpetual boredom and feelings of futurelessness they experience, and to return to traditional ways, she notes the active cultivation of a longing (kajjarniq) towards a future where they can be Inuk on their own terms. Knitting together past and future, kajjarniq nevertheless involves being fully present in a current moment that is both beautiful and ‘correct’, like family trips to the tundra to hunt caribou in the summer, when the sun hardly sets, and children and adults roam and enjoy themselves well past the advised early bedtimes of the education system, for some brief moments “existing in a time out of time” (137). Stevenson situates kajjarniq not as a nostalgic yearning for being in a different time, but as a mode of belonging differently to time, “to have the possibility of building a different relationship to what is, what has been, and what may be” (136).

I hear the Maestro’s storytelling-training in the same spirit: in invoking the power of la cultura and the ongoing relevance of our ancestors, to uplift one’s Indigeneity in a context of racialized, pathologized culpability is not to be nostalgic for simpler times. It is rather to cast backward and forward in time a new balance between experience and expectation, to generate a way of being otherwise by attuning to active and agentic ancestors. It opens space for forms of experience and expression that “emerg[e] from an ancestral knowledge that a story told within the body can cure,” challenging the “privatized Gringo concept that our illness is somehow individual, as is our cure” (Moraga 2011:41). As I have argued, this was an especially rich resource for those with troubled pasts or who had been gang-involved, like Josefina and many of the Mujeres, who were trying to rearrange their pasts into workable foundations forward (if not actively ignoring them). Those who would like nothing more than to dissolve many happenings of their recent pasts and never speak of them again, are alerted to the already-there foundation, a little further down, of their Indigenous ancestry.

### Preambles to unutterable parts of life

I admit that in situating Josefina in the introduction to this chapter, I could have included more detail. While it’s true that she never said much in circle or other gatherings, she did choose to entrust me with ‘her story’, as she put it, over the course of two official interviews and countless visits to her breezy pad to chat and hang out. I could have thus told you some of these other events from her past: the frilly dresses with which her physically abusive mother hid Josefina’s bruises; the fights she put up as a teenage Norteña gangbanger sent to juvenile hall in deep Sureño territory; the preteen daughter she loves so much with a bullet still lodged in her back from a random shooting years ago when they were living in a trailer park; or her motivation for sharing the details of being raped, with me and presumably the audience of my research, so that no other woman would have to think of something like that as their own fault.

Josefina fought daily to keep these hurts and details of the past, in the past. She deeply feared ‘being triggered’ by old ways now rendered bad habits, but struggled with how to positively bring about changes, rather

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77 This image stands as a sharp contrast to the more quotidian lives of her informants, whose struggles and boredom in the present reflect a systemic denial of the brightness or viability of their futures. She writes from a context of a youth suicide epidemic, positing suicide as an answer “in one temporality to a question that cannot be posed in another: what if the future cannot redeem the present?” (Stevenson 2014:147).
assumed their mutual gang involvements to be a factor in their domestic altercation. Fighting one evening and calling police to the scene, an officer noticed it immediately and viewed below her elbow, plain for all to see. When a neighbor overheard her and her boyfriend years ago to escape the familiarity of her past, she had her gang affiliation, NSW, tattooed in plain sight.

And finally, in a fundamental way, even though she had moved to Salinas from Watsonville three years ago to escape the familiarity of her past, she still has her gang affiliation, NSW, tattooed in plain sight.

Belonging to Corinthian Colleges, Inc., was known for “pushing students into high-cost private loans knowing they would likely default” (The Salinas Californian 2014), and was shut down in 2014 by the federal Department of Education. Some months before this shutdown, they had called and convinced her, but she was midway through her first semester when they were finally forced to close due to widespread corruption that could be summarized as ‘preying on the poor.’

Some of the women are pursuing their Indigeneity through sweat lodges, teepee ceremonies, and other Native American Church practices with a multiethnic but primarily Chicano spiritual community based at a nearby ranch. For Mujeres like Josefina, it was enough at that time to experiment with different Indigenous arts in terms of her own self-expression, and to know that before and through all the shit she went through in a lifetime of adoption, abuse, violence and gangbanging, she always has had, always will have, Yaqui blood.

Others, like Alma, in her early 20s with a young daughter and Norteño friends and family, have refracted what they’ve learned through curricula like Xinachtli to track ‘unhealthy’ patterns through their parents’ and grandparents’ lives into their own. They make changes to their lives not in terms of self-improvement but as ‘breaking the cycle’ of poverty, violence, dependency. Hardly a clear or fixed achievement, Alma’s Indigeneity is a striving towards living “in a good way,” and she oscillates towards strength and wounds as inheritances with intergenerational stakes? How might this, on a wider scale, make that landscape of disparity shake like an earthquake, like the Ollin?

A Politics in the Fidelity of the Frijoles

Reassembling a sense of themselves as Indigenous (rather than strictly Mexican or Mexican-American, or more pressingly ‘bad’ or ‘crazy’ or ‘wrong’), many Mujeres came to see their conditions of struggle, culpability and marginalization as the inherited generational wounds or traumas of colonialism. Seeing themselves as bearing out the psychic scars of colonialism, healing their own pathologization is rendered all the more critical, as it becomes bound up in an ethics of responsivity to these ancestors. Tello told us: “you can heal generations.” He didn’t even need to say “you should.”

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example, from starting Danza Azteca; ”I don’t really know the meanings [of the movements] but I know there’s meanings to them that are really beautiful and really powerful as well, so that’s something that I’ll learn over time,” she said.

But even as calls like Moraga’s to “remember that [we] were here first and are always Xicano, Dine, Apache, Yaqui, or Choctaw” resonate in many Chicana/o communities of practice and belief, the way this immanent Indigeneity is being storied forward and reassembled in the world attracts its share of detractors. Nearly a year after I left the field, Alma described to me an incident where an elder Maesta, visiting a chanupa (peace pipe) ceremony held by the Colectiva de Mujeres at Josefin’s house, was asked to share some teachings with the group. The elder later expressed, to mutual contacts, that she didn’t feel the women of the Colectiva “would take care of the teachings right.” Alma was disappointed in the elder’s response, lamenting that “kind of ego, like, ‘you guys are not fully Native American’… I think that’s not okay because we come from there, you know? There’s a mixture in our blood, but we do come from that. That’s where we are originated from.” Her partial and in-process knowledge of and adherence to ‘these ways’ doesn’t preclude their mattering in her life, as her Indigeneity is conceived as an immanent fact. She reorients her sense of historicity and reorients her sense of being at the same time.

Moraga and Anzaldúa have also noted, and lamented, the divides between Chicana/o and Native American groups. Anzaldúa, noting that the rifts between Chicana/os and Native Americans in Ethnic Studies departments of American universities often polarize and embitter members of either faction, argues that in maintaining these divisions “we open old heridas, wounds of genocidal colonization and marginalization that have never formed scabs because they’ve continued to bleed for centuries… the underlying case is systemic racism and internalized racism” (Anzaldúa 2009:284–5). While not calling herself an indía, but claiming an Indigenous ancestry, Anzaldúa articulates her vision of “a new tribalism” where multiple lived features are foregrounded in modes of identification than strictly race. More critically, Moraga rues how boundary-policing Indigenous peoples continue to subscribe to the “bitter colonial history of government-imposed definitions of what is ‘Indian’” (Moraga 2011:14).

Part of my aim in this chapter has been to bring the Mujeres’s ‘immanent Indigeneity’ into legibility as an ontological shift, and not as ‘plastic shamanism,’ political opportunism, or a replica of an erstwhile indentarian attempt (cf. Aldred 2000). It is something else, something otherwise. More than an Indigenous identity for certain singular people to try on, the Indigeneity inaugurated through La Cultura Cura teachings opens connectivity to ancestral beings and doings; Maestro Tello invited to see ourselves as being able to ‘break the cycle’ of trauma that kept our mamas crying into the frijoles, and thereby generate a different world, today and for ‘the next seven generations.”79 The present world, the potholed and sidewalkless streets of East Salinas, comes to be seen as a place populated by both people and ancestors, where the the past stretches well beyond one individual’s lifetime and skin and continues to surface. These surfacings are not to be overcome but dug into, rearranged.

The creative work is in bringing this out. The teachings generally resonate with other experiences and incipient realizations held by listeners, who ‘hear what they need to hear that day’ and build on it over time, slowly and quietly assembling it into their way of being. Tello asks his audiences to share in the social project of generating themselves as intergenerational, and the world as wounded and able to heal. Just as la cultura of Chicanx Indigeneity is posited as immanent among the Mexican-Americans of Salinas, so too es lo que cura, so too is that which cures. It’s all in the fidelity of the frijoles they’re already eating.

Critically, even those who have not been categorized as criminal and made to feel culpable – like the behavioral health staff in Tello’s training session, or the county government employees who have been conscripted into the county’s Governing for Racial Equity initiative as facilitated by La Cultura Cura – or those who have no genealogical basis for claiming Chicano/a or Indigenous identity – like me – are asked to consider ancestral and historical relations as grounds and impetus to engage in cultura-based healing and social action. An Indigenous way of seeing in and being in the world, “a good way” as it is often described, is storied forward as a framework available and pressing for all. This is posited as no less than decolonizing. A seemingly benign mental health training session suddenly develops a different edge, an unusual, non-teleological vector, even “ekstatic” in its blending of past, present and future (Heidegger 2008a). The Ollin rumbles and breaks our expectations of the session, and our settled sense of the contemporary, apart. Cultura is not ‘included’ but, in its infusion to an increasing number of civic domains in Salinas, has a transformative

79 “Seven Generation thinking” is a broadly Native American ethics of responsibility, whereby contemporary decisions should be considered in their consequences for the seven generations of life to follow. He was inviting us in his audience to situate ourselves along a timescale longer than the technical living of their own lives, as a process of inheritance. The onus of the problem today is dislodged from the particular culpable body, who is called into being as the coalescence of a bloodline, as such as a capable healer and ‘changementer’, with a heightened responsiveness and responsibility to ancestors past and progeny future.
effect of Indigenizing shared social practice. It comes to form part of the hermeneutic framework through which we see and be in the world.

The politics of this grassroots ontological turn is thus not one of recognition, a performance of Indigeneity to be valorized in itself as worthy of respect and protection, nor does it make a claim to a ‘governance of the prior’, dignity or worth based on longevity. It opens up, rather, a means of shifting everyone’s temporal coordinates of being, their ‘social tense’ (Fabian 1983; Povinelli 2011). Even those we don’t conventionally think of as colonized, are colonized, have been colonized, actually, by a way of thinking that constrains our attunement to ancestors and each other, by the way historical relations of inequality have been institutionalized and normalized. As I will argue in the next chapter, the message is clear: we are all wounded. And we are all activists of healing.
We always come back to circle, Juan told me. Through turmoil, through achievement, through subtle shifts and fits and starts, the circle expands and contracts, but it never goes away. We always come back to it.

But before one can come back to it, one has to come to it in the first place.

Healing circles and Richter scales

The long, heavy days after Salinas’s third police homicide gave rise to a flourish of activism along latent factional fault lines. Veterano marxist Chicanos held angry, angering rallies calling for the “racist” police chief to resign, circulating hundreds of sturdy wooden signs, RESPECT DIGNITY JUSTICE stenciled in black on white. Visiting Bay Area anarchists scrawled Fuck the Police on placards and buildings and harassed locals to wake up and stand up to their exploitation. In explicit contrast, the healing collectives MILPA and the Mujeres, they – or rather we, for I was right there with them – held community healing circles, inviting everyone from paleteros to politicians.
With rallies for peace being held across the street from anti-police protests, children’s demonstrations turning into teenage riots at dusk, and a city-wide march through the streets that saw cardboard caskets decorated with Mexican paper flowers, residents were spilling over with tension, ambivalent affective energy. Each faction tried to harness and steer that energy through different modalities, aesthetics, and imaginations of change, but traction was elusive. What we all wanted, it seemed, was simply for the violence to stop — but with so many competing strategies of change cluttering the path to progress, the period mostly felt disorienting, and stultifying. The groups grappled and postured among each other, and everything seemed to be quaking in place.

It felt like impasse, and it stung like failure. Some groups pointed fingers for the stalemate while others threw up their hands in resignation. While blame was leveled across the factions, everyone failing in light of the lack of clear progress, in retrospect the flaw lay in the way we thought we knew change, the registers of activism through which we sought it, the horizons of struggle we charted in vain. We could not find our footing at the grassroots amidst these expectations as the shelters offered by liberal politics were crumbling around us. Meanwhile, a way was being made otherwise.

Throughout this dissertation I have made reference to the Ollin, the sacred earthquake of the Méxica, in moments when my friends, colleagues and informants in Salinas perceived some sense of social transformation. Can we think about Ollin, earthquake, itself as a model of social change and informants in Salinas perceived some sense of social transformation. Can we dwell together amidst this Ollin, shaking and creativty, its rubble for relationship-building and “reparative thinking” that is transformative in its levelling violence, trading its catastrophe for vision, ambivalent affective energy. Each faction tried to harness and steer that energy through different modalities, aesthetics, and imaginations of change, but traction was elusive. What we all wanted, it seemed, was simply for the violence to stop – but with so many competing strategies of change cluttering the path to progress, the period mostly felt disorienting, and stultifying. The groups grappled and postured among each other, and everything seemed to be quaking in place.

Fragmented struggles

Conditions of fragmented struggle and entrenched inequality, like those in Salinas, can often seem impassable, impossible to overcome. This intransigence is part of a broader impasse in late liberal democracy, rued by political theorist Wendy Brown (2001; 2015) as a time when our narratives of purposive and progressive history, and the sovereign subject of rights-based freedom, have broken down. Their pretense of universalism has been revealed, but not yet replaced, and they continue to circulate through our attachments as fetishes. Moralistic injunctions to act according to these habituated liberal teleologies and tropes, but bereft of a clear sense of purpose, have hollowed political projects and undone democratic publics, generating “radical political disorientation” and “political paralysis” in its midst, an affective antithesis to hope and possibility delineated by frustration and despair (Brown 2001:29). As it becomes ever-harder to “continue imagining the present as though it were merely waiting for its own dialectical overcoming,” disorientation and despondency occurs across scales, registering as ideological, affective, existential (Scott 2014:6). Amidst the futureless frustration and tragedies of revolution and its heroes, downtrodden political affects appear to form the signature expression of this impasse, the register of this historical moment, saturating actors and initiatives across the spectrum with torpor (Brown 2015; Scott 2004, 2014; Cvetkovich 2012:6; Berlant 2011).

Where the “old horizons have collapsed or evaporated and new ones have not yet taken shape,” David Scott’s decree that the old but enduring “modalities of imagining social change… no longer serve us” seems easily acceptable (Scott 2004:168). However, this set of ruins presented by Scott is not an empty void but, as anthropologist Deborah A. Thomas reminds us, a landscape whose horizons are always being charted. “New futures are constantly being imagined and emplotted,” she writes (2011:230), but these go unnoticed as we continue to be oriented, in nostalgia, tragedy, or frustration, to the kinds of spectacular, revolutionary, or simply recognizable movements that many – at both the grassroots and the academy – continue to seek. These new futures are not being plotted in some radically different register, but through engagement with resources already available. Outside of and through liberal political formations, what ‘something more’ might be legible, in what registers? And critically, how might that legibility be cultivated?

The impasse in Salinas during the period of police homicides, and the impasse of late liberal politics, shared much in the way of unmanaged affective overflows against a frustrating, horizonless fuzz. The effects were not just politically limiting, but existentially exhausting. As Mujeres like Shi, Pamela, Tara and I tried to pick our way through the clutter of activist options, these multiple engagements left us depleted and annoyed, with little demonstrable progress. As Shi attempted to articulate it to me, after one particularly frustrating press conference, “I just don’t know where it’s going. It’s not leading, it’s not gonna lead, I don’t know where to.”
As a former Sureña, married to a locked-up Norteño, mother of two boys on probation, daughter of an erstwhile junkie, Shi has had her life unsettled endlessly by the application of ‘justice’. How could she, or anyone with similar experiences, have any belief in concepts like justice in the abstract? She is one of those many people that liberal democracy has mostly served to disqualify from enfranchisement conferred by citizenship, to dispossess even from a certain sense of personhood. One can’t be dispossessed by liberal democracy or its ideals of sovereignty, dignity, or justice when, as persistently criminalized through lived and generational experiences of state disavowal, one barely ever really had purchase on it to begin with (Cacho 2012).

Simon Critchley (2013), in his attempt to theorize ethical subjectivity in the face of radical political disorientation, begins his argument with the premise of political disappointment, "the sense of something lacking or failing [that] arises from the realization that we inhabit a violently unjust world," and its distinct tangibility at the present conjunction of corroded liberal institutions and the fear-based war on terror. This claim is the foundation of his critical, and compelling, rethinking of political motivation based on an 'infinitely demanding' ethics of the "hetero-affectively constituted" subject, whose sovereignty is "always usurped by the heteronomous experience of the other’s demand" (10-11). This conceived ethics – "the creation of interstitial distance within the state, the invention of new political subjectivities" – is politics (13). But where in this radical ethico-political valence do we situate those whose disappointment has been preempted by entrenched disavowal and dispossession by the state – those like Shi, who never believed in justice anyway? How could this (non)position figure in the generation of alternative horizons of struggle?

**Something’s Happening**

Instead of pursuing a more recognizable register of activism, Shi, and the Mujeres and Milperos of the city’s two healing collectives, were attempting to effect change in their lives and community through a social project of healing that had few explicit conceptions of justice and little clear sense of the future. Healing, instead, as a means of interpreting the world and oneself in it, engendered a relational and “reparative” approach to history (Thomas 2011), the legacy of colonialism as criminalization, and the reworking of personal and historical narratives into new means of morally living and being together. In practice, these reinterpretations were discrete, subtle, and processual, coming through active listening to ‘the teachings’ and engagement with the activities of La Cultura Cura in circle, to each other’s check-ins, and in reflection. Healing comprised an idiom to gather this range of different and inchoate forms, a kind of hermeneutic giving coherence to the feeling that something – and something important – was happening, where it might otherwise be overlooked or illegible.

They could arrive at the salience and urgency of this hermeneutic of healing, I argue, through their generational experiences dwelling in the subject-space of social death, the “children in the broom closet” of late liberal carceral California (Gordon 2008b; Povinelli 2011; Cacho 2012; Zigon Forthcoming). From this condition of social death, which is relational and never complete, they have assumed what Berger and Gordon have called the “stance of undefeated despair,” the familiarity “with every sort of rubble, including the rubble of words” that preempts disappointment as well as fear and provides “a position from which to carve out a livable life when everything is organized to prevent you from doing so” (Berger 2006, in Gordon 2010:18). Through the hermeneutic of healing, disparate and everyday experiences of injustice can be named, circulated, and reclassified – and critically, their witness can be both epistemologically and ethically demanded of others. The raising, leveling, and possibly accepting of this demand potentially enlists others into not only this project of healing, but this world as wounded and wounding. This can lead perhaps to the development of alternative ethical frameworks that might constitute a durable form of social change, beginning with an attentiveness to the very happening of something important where it may not previously have been legible as much else than a fleeting feeling, a mood, an inchoate affect.

I find it useful to think about this diffuse sense of something happening, as registered through emotional ambivalences as well as what could
Milperos’ empirical efforts to ‘grow’ it, involving a range of others in the community and local government into community healing circles to realize, reflect on, and respond to their proximate woundedness: their sharing of the wounded and wounding world of Salinas. Such invitations were issued informally and constantly amidst Mujeres’ and Milperos’ own relationships, with friends, family members, and new contacts almost always being brought into circle. Informal invitation is also how I became a member of first MILPA and then the Colectiva de Mujeres, as well as how they came to form the focus of my doctoral work. Invitations, however, also took more concerted, urgent delivery in the aftermath of the police homicides, in the opportunity provided by the seemingly obvious injustice of state representatives killing questionably risky Latinos, as our healing circles were scaled up to accommodate the community at large.

Unfolding in a context of concerted activist efforts, but made available in a way seemingly outside of more overtly political action (in the liberal way that is conventionally understood), these circles should not be seen as apolitical moralizations, but rather as openings on a political otherwise to which others are invited. These invitations into the healing circle should be seen as epistemological and ethical demands – acts of enlisting others into a way of knowing the world and each other and accepting a certain relational place accordingly, through the hermeneutic of healing.

Critically, in the deadlocked frustration of the experience of impasse, these community healing circles were broadly seen as failures by both their Building Healthy Communities planners as well as antagonistic activist groups and frustrated community members. The circles, many held, failed to make clear progress in an already-impassable political field, and attracted the ‘wrong’ potential political subjects. But considered from another angle, through my own reflections on ‘reckoning with’ others in circle formations, and in light of reflections of city officials and community members involved in a subsequent municipal initiative called Governing for Racial Equity, a different register of progress (otherwise) becomes palpable. The liberal criteria through which the community healing circles were determined failures precluded many at the time, myself included, from seeing the unspectacular, drawn-out, and otherwise less-legible processes of worldbuilding at work: of socially distanciated individuals emerging from their own situatedness to become oriented to the situatedness of others. There was a subtle, aggregative

Relationalities if not revolutions

To better understand the relationality of this otherwise, and to attempt to give it some kind of name, in this chapter I focus on the Mujeres’ and Milperos’ empirical efforts to ‘grow’ it, involving a range of others in the social project of healing. This ‘growing’ was inaugurated through inviting others in the community and local government into community healing circles to realize, reflect on, and respond to their proximate woundedness: their sharing of the wounded and wounding world of Salinas. Such invitations were issued informally and constantly amidst Mujeres’ and Milperos’ own relationships, with friends, family members, and new contacts almost always being brought into circle. Informal invitation is also how I became a member of first MILPA and then the Colectiva de Mujeres, as well as how they came to form the focus of my doctoral work. Invitations, however, also took more concerted, urgent delivery in the aftermath of the police homicides, in the opportunity provided by the seemingly obvious injustice of state representatives killing questionably risky Latinos, as our healing circles were scaled up to accommodate the community at large.

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81 Not all who were invited to the circle would become a consistent member. I saw many shrink away from the magnitude and depth of experiences disclosed in circle; a disinclination often described with compassion by Shi and other Mujeres as “not being ready for the healing.”
violence of this informal, less spectacular kind of ‘inviting’ as an active enlisting, an affective and discursive positing of a wounded and wounding world that others, however unwittingly, are already involved in.

Hermeneutic approaches and actions

Rather than considering progress through teleology, measurable change over time, I want to consider the thickened relationalities and refracted ways of knowing made possible by the circulation and adoption of this hermeneutic of healing. While initially available for conscious use as a means of interpreting a given social event or text, like the community experiences of police homicides in Salinas, a hermeneutic can also be understood in the phenomenological sense posited by Heidegger, as an existential mode of understanding the world and being in it (Heidegger 2008b; Braver 2014; Ramberg and Gjesdal 2014). The German philosopher considered this kind of understanding as a deeper and ‘more authentic’ register of human life than simply a ‘way of knowing’, concerning rather how Beings tacitly make their way through the world.

While that fundamental level may be inaccessible to the ethnographer, perhaps its expression can be detected in peoples’ different ways of moving through the world, relating in ever-shifting ways to space, time, and social counterparts. I am interested here in the space somewhere between the adoption of healing as interpretive mode and its saturation of one’s way of being-in-the-world alongside others. In offering a means of reworking historical experiences relationally, healing entails a sense of “history-as-emergent” through a creative and reparative approach to its rethinking and reenactment in the present (Ralph 2015; Thomas 2011). This can generate deep shifts in terms of the temporal and relational dimensions of existence, which in turn has effects on how one is and can be in the world, on how one encounters others there, and together how they dwell. Following Zigon (2014c; Forthcoming), I see this dwelling differently as politics otherwise, with healing as a modality of being-in-a-world that ever-wounds.

By naming healing as a phenomenological hermeneutic that shifts the range of what can be considered a possible happening, I am participating in what we could call the happenability of healing. In this way, I follow Zigon’s critical hermeneutic approach to analyzing concepts in the field not for what they are ‘supposed’ to mean but what they point us towards, seeking clearings from which to thereby “disclosing possibilities that are already there and partly shaping what is or is not yet fully possible” (Forthcoming:25). As such, to be as clear as possible, this is a critical hermeneutic approach to a phenomenological hermeneutic-in-action, namely healing as a modality of being. In what follows, I focus on this latter phenomenological hermeneutic-in-action.

For now, I focus on the epistemologically and ethically reworked relational spacing as the mutable, growable dimension of politics otherwise—the way people come to know each other differently and thereby be-with-each-other in-the-world differently too. I conclude that our engagements and analyses must retain a fundamental openness to the myriad forms these attempts towards the otherwise will take—an acceptance that growing any kind of otherwise will change its very composition. And here, combining this hermeneutic approach with a liberatory epistemological stance exemplified by Kristie Dotson and the lineage of Black Feminist thought (Dotson 2014; 2015), I hold that this means changing the way we perceive and produce knowledge about change, each other, and ourselves. And what better place to begin this process than squarely within the impasse itself?

Impasse as Clearing

To begin from an impasse, rather than become bogged down in it, holds an the impasse is not inherently an obstruction but an opportunity for pause and appraisal. As such it may also be a clearing, a “site of potentiality” as Zigon phrases it (2014a), through which different aspects of a political context—people, ideas, feelings, settings—can become otherwise oriented to each other, and differently known. I consider the impasse and clearing here as two contemporaneous potentialities laden in perhaps any extended present where the future is unknown, its horizon obscured by the detritus of the past cluttering the present, with no clear path through or forward. An impasse, as Lauren Berlant writes (2011), is decompositional, disaggregating that which was thought to be cohesive into its elements; a clearing, Zigon notes (Forthcoming:111), is a gathering of aspects, temporarily coalescing. The impasse occurs “when the social relevance of what we’re doing and thinking is not clear” (Cvetkovich 2012:22), and in the clearing conditions can be reconfigured creatively, through a mode of experimentation rather than expectation. Cvetkovich and Berlant, writing out of the aforementioned Public Feelings project in affect theory, find great fertility in the affective murk of impasses, and explore the relationships between emotional states and political-historical moments. “The (productive) impasse,” Cvetkovich writes, invites us to see it “as a singular place
that’s a cluster of noncoherent but proximate attachments that can only be approached awkwardly, described around, shifted” (2012:20).

This dissertation has, in part, developed an ethnographic mode of attention to shifting moral conditions and their lived dimensions in order to bring legibility to emergent forms of social change, especially those that become gathered under the heading of ‘healing’. I have argued, primarily through attention to the Mujeres’ ever-shifting ways of being-in-the-world and the otherwise they have generated through their Collective, that the pace and tense of social change, wrought as ‘building a healthy community’, is tied to lived temporalities of recoveries and processes of becoming otherwise. But there is an off-kilterness to this coevality, a gap between individual healing and community healing that belies an easy relationship of growth or scale. In other words, the otherwise does not grow straight, up, out. Treating this particularly situated impasse as symptomatic of the broader impasse of liberal democratic politics, but moving through it with analytical attention to its local moral contours and the siting of its “tiny displacements” (Agamben 1993), perhaps new insight can be gleaned on how, as a clearing, the rubble of liberalisms is being creatively shifted to bring about and broaden forms of the otherwise, forging new paths to different futures.

What does it look and feel like to dwell at the impasse of politics, and consider it instead as a clearing? More sharply, how are those present called to dwell there, alongside? With this in mind, I turn to the failed community healing circle event, Palabra Comunitaria, paying attention to the moments of tiny displacement in the unfolding of the event both as it was and was not supposed to. This was a key site of circulating both ‘public feelings’ coalescing from the recent homicides as well as the hermeneutic of healing as a means of those experiences’ interpretation and transformation.

Passing the Palabra

The church foyer was buzzing as dozens of people filtered in, finding their ways to the trays of free burritos and pan dulce. I was running around making sure the dozen or so reams of poster-sized paper were fixed to the wall in the right places, functional Sharpies below them, ready to record people’s needs. The chairs were as yet in rows towards the pulpit, where first Pastor Jimenez would give a prayer, and then Maestro Jerry Tello would offer remarks on this being a ‘Time of Healing’, before breaking out into smaller healing circles oriented to the papers spread around the room. I was busy with a flurry of final administrative details when Kendra, another member of the Colectiva de Mujeres, pulled me aside before the formal program began. With great concern, her voice quiet but agitated, she asked me if I’d noticed: “there are way more systems folks than gente here.”

I looked around and saw a sea of suits networking with each other: elected politicians, county staff, agriculture bosses. She was right. The people we called ‘systems folks,’ those who staffed local state and agricultural institutions and were its local faces, had saturated an event intended for ‘gente,’ the monolingual México/ano/a-next-door. My stomach dropped with a dread familiar in those cutthroat days just after Mejía and Hernandez’s deaths, rife with factional antagonism and stress. How were the headline-hungry local media and our activist adversaries, those old-school labor activists and anarchists from the Bay Area, going to spin this, our inability to engage the proper political subject, another failure of our group and its unusual paradigm of healing? But more urgently, as Kendra pointed out to me, how we were going to facilitate our breakout healing circles if these systems folks were just going to bring their own agendas? Speaking in their slogans they would thwart the stated ethos of the circle, its invitation to speak from experience rather than expertise, its subtle demand to disclose.

With moments to spare before Palabra’s formal program began, we scrambled to find some other facilitators to commiserate and strategize about how to proceed. Where Kendra and I saw a critical problem, others like Chuy and Rosa saw an opportunity. Nonplussed at our concern, they framed the crisis instead as a moment for those who work in local structures of governance to heal themselves as well. Chuy, a union organizer and writer in his late twenties from Southern California, cited the critical pedagogy of Paolo Freire, saying this would be a means of humanizing everyone involved — gente as well as systems, both ways. As Juan often repeated, “the systems folks need healing too.”

Kendra and I were slightly reassured, but mostly still disappointed and frustrated. And so the program began. Pastor Jimenez gave a long blessing, and Maestro Tello told a beautiful story, about the many ways we and our ancestors had all been wounded through and by history. This was a time for healing, we were reminded. I listened, distantly, to the stories I had heard Tello tell before, but that were fresh for many in the audience: about the child who struggles in school and on the streets, who needs to be hugged rather than scolded, and to whom we need to ask what has happened to you rather than punish for anything he did. We had to understand the situation differently, coming to know that child as wounded, and the world we populate as wounding.

After the applause to the Maestro’s enchanting story, we broke out
into our circles, based on preassigned numbers under each chair, gathering around each poster-sized piece of paper along the walls. Some groups seemed more concentrated with systems folks then others, but all were mixed, it seemed, as I glanced about the room. It was my first stint facilitating a circle, and I was nervous about how I would introduce the idea of the healing circle to a fresh group of people. Our group comprised a range of folks. Among them was Dollie, a resident of the nearby town of Seaside; Cesar, the head of the local labor council; Krista, a policy analyst for the county health department and fellow Canadian; Tenoch, a member of MILPA, formerly gang-involved, now part-time construction worker and juvenile justice advocate; a Christian priest who refused to hold the tremor of Veracruz quartz I had brought as a palabra piece; Pamela, an outspoken Mujer from our Colectiva; and Patty, the mother of another Mujer, Tara, who lived around the block from both the church and where the third homicide happened.

My disappointment melted away in the adrenaline of attention, all of us assembled to do something together. Addressing them and recent events through a vocabulary of healing and woundedness, I reminded them first of the group’s purpose, which was, our guidelines held, “to reflect on recent events, and identify what we all needed in order to move forward together as a community.” I introduced the crystal as the palabra piece, describing the honor that came with holding it and speaking, and the truthfulness of feeling and experience it should help express.

With looks of earnestness, and bodies that adjusted to the openness and proximity afforded by seats so arranged, members of the circle one-by-one situated themselves in some way in relation to the homicides and the state of affairs in East Salinas more broadly. They spoke of and through various sentiments and affects, frustrations and sadesses and angers, sometimes crying and other times becoming indignant and heated in their expression. Those who were less connected to the events or life on the East Side accounted for this distance in their disclosures, but acknowledged what others more proximate were feeling and situated their own reactions in this divergent but related space. Those who expressed ambivalence at the injustice, careful not to say the deceased deserved their deaths but to flag instead the problem of ubiquitous violence in the community more broadly, took the cue to reflect on their own position within the mess and suggest how they themselves could do something differently. And in this space, we also heard how deeply some people felt their mistrust of the police and government lay, and the feeling that the community was alone against the indiscriminate and unpunished violence of its representatives.

Mostly unknown to each other before entering the circle, being-together in this way brought these participants in relation to each other, in relation to the event of the homicides. Whether Kendra or myself would have categorized them as gente or systems folks, they made use of the enframing vocabulary of healing, and built on each other’s disclosures to establish continuities and illuminative contrasts across their disparate social contexts. They gave room to each other, to let each other breath, cry, express, and be, and together generated an intensity that seemed reverent of each other’s expressions.

Aside from bumpiness brought in through the intransigent priest, who sat with his arms closed and a suspicious look cast at those around him, my mixed-folk circle went off without a hitch. Other facilitators reported similar feelings of ease, engagement, and thus success from their circles, although there were of course some systems folks trying to push their own agendas and services on others. We had all filled our poster-sized papers with a variety of ideas about what people needed for themselves and the community to heal, points that would be typed up, summarized, and circulated, to form the basis of further organizing efforts through subsequent Palabra Comunitaria circles. While nobody would claim anyone had been healed, at least it appeared that people took well to the framework we offered, of their being-affected-by the homicides in terms of shared if situated woundedness that required collaborative solutions to heal. And in a basic way, the gente and systems folks had come to see and sit next to each other, and this was not without its novelty.

Still, almost immediately, the Palabra Comunitaria event was widely viewed as a failure. Building Healthy Communities staffers themselves saw the presence of too many systems folk as a failure of outreach efforts, to not engage the unaffiliated gente and, it was argued, afford them the space they needed to desahogar, vent, and have the truth of their suffering transformed into action. Antagonistic activist groups, and some frustrated gente alike, located failure in the lack of clear output or emphatic next steps. Despite the palpable moodness to the circle, that something was happening in coming together in this unusual way, the competing feeling that nothing was happening by way of measurable outcomes was just as strong, and much more articulable.

From the clearing

While Palabra Comunitaria was held to be a failure for attracting too many systems folks and not enough gente, in bringing these differently distrib-
uted individuals into closer proximity and enlisting them into a dialogue-turned-discursive regime through the language of healing, the seeds were sown for these relationships of accommodation to grow. More than words, healing and woundedness constituted a lens, a framework through which to interpret individual and social problems otherwise than individualized issues or diffuse injustice, a tacit alternative theory of knowledge with implications for being.

From this angle, the event and its organizers actually staged a subtle epistemological coup d'état. At an impasse of entrenched community politics, or a clearing in which a number of aspects – people, ideas, affects – composing that field were gathered and available for reassembling, the hermeneutic of healing could be discursively circulated amidst the diffuse political affects of frustration, rage, and grief. Interpreting them otherwise, through this hermeneutic, those both facilitating and participating in the circles could issue a demand to know and dwell otherwise of all involved, those residing in or serving Salinas, and especially those ‘systems folks’ that comprised local government.

Without claiming a strong Whorffian hypothesis, as if language structures thought and behavior, the language of healing and woundedness offered cues to an emerging ethos. Like “indexical markers of cultural virtues” (Throop 2010:15), semiotic vehicles of moral experience coalescing that which has been inarticulable and imbuing it with a morally purposive ‘-for’ structure, this language shifts the orientation to and organization of experience. Building on slow familiarization with La Cultura Cura over many months and sometimes years prior to the homicides, during and after this period I noticed the audible adoption and utilization of a conceptual vocabulary of healing and woundedness among those who worked in and amidst systems and CBOs. Chuy, for example, who held a background in hard-edged labor organizing, and who prior to this period I had never met, turned-discursive regime through the language of healing, the seeds were sown in these healing circles with a subsequent citywide initiative called Governing for Racial Equity, which brought police officers and city officials into healing circle (Valenzuela 2015).

You can’t empathize with the otherwise: knowing and recognizing differently

New lenses through which to see Salinas were desperately needed. With the repeated problem of police seeing Latino laborers as out-of-place and erratic, and deeming them dangerous enough to shoot and kill, it became clear that all in Salinas were not ‘seeing’ or sharing the same reality. In circle and to the side, East Side residents professed to feeling their brown bodies under threat by a state gaze that saw them, mis-recognized them, as inherently criminal, interpreting their clothing or accessories, comportment, skin tone, haircut, anything, as indices of their being criminal – in the more benign form of an undocumented migrant, or more threateningly as a gang member. They felt criminalized, and as such not simply indignant but vulnerable. The difficulties they already felt dwelling on the East Side, the risk of being seen by police as a gang member (and treated accordingly) for perhaps something like wearing red or blue in a certain area or having their hair shaved a bit too close, were enflamed and amplified at this time, as the stakes were revealed, in their lethality, as imminent and apologetic killing.

Many Salinans, with their statuses (or that of close loved ones) as undocumented or (formerly) gang-involved, were situated squarely on the more dispossessed side of what has been called America’s ‘empathy gap’, the chasm in compassion for fellow citizens or fellow humans made glaringly visible in the wake of widespread police homicides and the jaggedly divergent reactions to them along racial lines. Brittney Cooper (2014), writing in Salon.com about much of white America’s ‘inability to see black people as human, as vulnerable, as people worthy of protecting,” argues that this is not strictly an issue of empathy, or an ethical willingness to understand or identify with the other’s suffering, but of epistemology; “a framework problem, a problem about how our experiences shape what we are and are not able to know.” In this argument, empathy as ethical expres-
inwardly-dwelling subjects of agency and personhood. It is specifically to spacing of social death is already to effect an epistemological intervention (Povinelli 2011, Gordon 2011). To theoretically shape and work with this law-abiding citizenry, their physical integrity as well as their wellbeing 2011:13). Social death is not a fixed state but a “relational idiom of power” that works to “create a moral distance, to create an impassable, uncrossable breach… a breach of kinship between those people who are or know themselves to be capable of being subject to such a death sentence, and those people, ordinary as they may be, who are not yet able to imagine such a fate for themselves” (Gordon 2011:13). Social death is not a fixed state but a process of social negation, where systematic relations of domination and exploitation are individualized and pathologized, thereby making those problematic persons into non-persons, and obscuring the relations of power that generate the condition itself (Patterson 1982; Gordon 2008b; 2011; Cacho 2012).

While I take Cooper and Dotson’s cue to see these as epistemological rather than empathic or ethical dilemmas, rather than relying on a straightforward racial designation of this disavowed humanity, I believe the concept of ‘social death’ allows for a more robust analysis of this epistemologically abandoned zone and the kind of politics that might emerge from it. As Avery Gordon points out, social death is not an individualized state but a “relational idiom of power” that works to “create a moral distance, to create an impassable, uncrossable breach… a breach of kinship between those people who are or know themselves to be capable of being subject to such a death sentence, and those people, ordinary as they may be, who are not yet able to imagine such a fate for themselves” (Gordon 2011:13). Social death is not a fixed state but a process of social negation, where systematic relations of domination and exploitation are individualized and pathologized, thereby making those problematic persons into non-persons, and obscuring the relations of power that generate the condition itself (Patterson 1982; Gordon 2008b; 2011; Cacho 2012).

In the United States, the socially dead are the criminalized (and racialized) populations of undocumented immigrants, terrorists, gang members, and prisoners (Cacho 2012) – or those who live as such due to proximity. These degraded statuses form the basic foundation of the liberal order in its mandate to contain them and thereby protect the rest of the law-abiding citizenry, their physical integrity as well as their wellbeing (Povinelli 2011, Gordon 2011). To theoretically shape and work with this spacing of social death is already to effect an epistemological intervention on modernist forms of knowing that only make space for individualized, inwardly-dwelling subjects of agency and personhood. It is specifically to shift from these bounded subjects, the agents of their own heroic transformations, to a relational being that transforms-alongside in-the-world.

The logic of transparent recognition, and attendant utopic ideologies of ‘colorblindness’ or ‘post-race’, are “ways of manifesting racial projects and inequalities” in line with neoliberal discourses of choice “that blame individuals rather than social forces” (Bettie 2014:xx). In the case of police homicides, this logic enables people to examine the deaths narrowly in their immediate behavioral chronology, claim that the deceased deserved to be addressed as criminals by the police, and that the police were warranted in their use of force. As Cacho (2012) has pointed out, the widespread slippage to seeing certain people of color and assuming criminality is not an incidental happening, but an effect of the way criminality and illegality have become racialized. Such racializations have become a key lens through which to make sense of social reality, and assign differential values or scales of personhood across populations, in the United States. Drawing attention to media representations of black ‘looters’ and white ‘victims’ in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, she shows how, much of the time, a white person doing the same thing as a person of color in the same physical setting would not be designated or recognized as criminal.

For Latinos in heavily racialized and marginalized places like East Salinas, to be stereotyped as an undocumented migrant or a gang member – both criminal statuses – “is to...
Though the homicides demonstrate the extreme edges of this scale of misrecognition, where a monolingual manual laborer shuffling through East Side neighborhood streets can be taken as a threat to life, the less-spectacular quotidian effects inflict considerable “social injury” as well (Ralph 2014). One Milpero, Eddie, who is now in his late 30s, owns a small gym, and advocates for juvenile justice reform, told me during an interview about a time he lost his job as a firefighter “because I shook my friend’s hand” at the popular Salinas Rodeo. “I was with my sister,” he continued, “who’s never been in trouble, and I went and I shook his hand, he’s my good friend, he actually rents a little space from my gym. We’re like best friends. And he was on probation, but because of Salinas PD seeing me, because they have this little [gang enhancement probation violation] code thing that they use, oh he’s a known gang member.” Eddie had previously done multiple stints in juvenile facilities around the state for an initial gang involvement charge that became grounds for suspicion and his repeated incarceration on subsequent minor probation violations.

“I did like nine months for that [handshake],” he said, growing distraught and impassioned at the suspicion of basic sociality he now recognized as criminalization. Violations made up “like, half of my whole time” incarcerated. Noting how stressful it was to “walk that straight line” while on probation and “living in a certain zip code,” how he would drive half an hour away to attend school and work out in another town to feel less recognizable, Eddie declined invitations to get involved in community initiatives or sit in the MILFPA men’s healing circles for some 18 months before finally hearing Maestro Jerry Tello speak in a way that “really touched my heart” and a number of relatable experiences of domestic abuse and addiction.44

A further example of living with anticipations of being criminalized is Shi’s teenaged son, Benito, who has severe epilepsy that is primarily managed by medical marijuana. On the heels of yearslong gang-related probation, he risks violating by “testing dirty” despite the insistent prescription of marijuana from his team of doctors at the Stanford University Hospital. Shi worries about him constantly, and was herself treated as a negligent mother in front of the county juvenile probation board when she pleaded in court for permission for his use of the medication. “If he goes back to juvenile [for violating his probation for medical marijuana use], he won’t get proper treatment for his epilepsy there,” she told me, with tears dropping from her eyes. “He won’t be able to live.”

Such a “range of injurious possibilities” of criminalization, as Laurence Ralph writes (2014:18) can significantly compromise any rights, protections, or legitimations supposedly afforded by citizenship status or claims to humanity, among those who know that the threat and promise of state violence is ever-present in the way their being-in-the-world will be perceived and adjusted or reacted to, given the abiding conditions of dwelling in abandoned places like East Salinas. It forms a condition of resident unwillingness or inability to engage in more overt and antagonistic modes of resistance politics, as their actions of resistance are read by police and state as embodied expressions of their own being a threat to other life as imminent threat deserving of apprehension or even, it seems, evisceration (Butler 2015).

How can this misrecognition be countered – what forms of redressive, reparative, or revolutionary politics are available to those who find (or anticipate) themselves at the brunt end of this encounter? What alternative and communal frameworks of care and action might be cultivated alongside these processes of “becoming aggrieved” and towards what political horizons (Ralph 2015)? Those whose being is ‘recognized’ as such are not only preemptively excluded from the protection of the law or justice, but form the foundation of that punitive system itself. “As criminal by being, unlawful by presence, and illegal by status, they do not have the option to be law-abiding,” and are subjected to a variety of laws that are near-impossible to obey (Cacho 2012:20). Law abidance, Lisa Marie Cacho notes, “is always the absolute prerequisite for political rights, legal recognition, and resource redistribution” in the United States, a baseline criteria for what is considered ‘moral’, valuable, protectable, personhood (2012:8). For this reason, any politics that appeals to the state to recognize, afford or enact a rights-based politics is not only doomed but unthinkable or impossible from the outset among those who exist in conditions of social death, due to prior or proximate incarcerations (i.e., via incarcerated partners or children), or any number of myriad ways their dwelling in East Salinas and the world is made difficult and illegitimate.

This ‘limitation’, though, among the architecture of the impasse, is also an element that pushes the political action of groups like MILFPA and the Mujeres into alternative, epistemological territory through creative navigation. In questioning the very epistemological rubrics of rec-
ognition, contemporary to other groups across American like Black Lives Matter similarly questioning the divergence in ascertaining humanity and misrecognizing black life as a threat to other life, perhaps one important horizon plotted in politics today is that relational register of being-with the other. The novel social formations and demands that emerge from spaces of social death, structurally foreclosed from other more conventional modes of organizing social activism, inevitably rework the moral and political contours of their constitutive relations. The hermeneutic of healing, in this way, frames shared conditions of criminalization, going beyond simply individualized ‘criminals’, drawing others into realization of their proximate role, or complicity, in these conditions, and thus their non-inevitability and the importance of their ‘fixing’ through calibrated actions. These actions, however disparate in their social situatedness, reconfigure the liberal rubble of the present political impasse.

Outward Extensions, Tiny Displacements

How might this reconfiguring go? The scaling up of this space of politics, this relational otherwise, is difficult to measure, not only because it is small-scale and slow, but because it takes different formations based on the individuals assembled and enlisted. Given the deep experiential and relational aspects of this form of the otherwise, I turn next to my own process of being enlisted into the hermeneutic of healing, as it began well before the period of police homicides. I look at the form of being-with that we cultivated together, glossed in terms of conocimiento, and the ways through which we subtly came to build and share a wounded but healing world.

The outward, upward extension of interpersonal healing to community healing – what I am calling here ‘growing the otherwise’ – was always the intent of MILPA and the Colectiva. It was an essential part of its “theory of change” as a philanthropically funded project: for the men and women directly or via a teaching, and always inviting me to tag along. Following his echo throughout this dissertation, became a key informant, gatekeeper, and ties made a welcome space for me. Juan in particular, whose words have circled. Without intending to shift Wednesday night critical consciousness of each other (Anzaldúa 2009; 2015).

A methodology of conocimiento

I did not go to Salinas intending to study MILPA or the Mujeres, and the healing collectives were only in incipient formation at the time of my arrival. I happened to meet the MILPA men here and there in my own ambulating through health-oriented community events, as we noticed each other standing out from the scene in some way. It was Milperos Juan and Daniel, the former in a fedora and the latter always in a bowtie, that first reached out to me, telling me about the beautiful and unusual work they were doing as MILPA, and inviting me to join them for their mixed-gender critical consciousness circles. Without intending to shift my research agenda entirely, I started attending more and more of their circles, out of curiosity and personal resonance, and the other men and handful of women in the collective either in their early twenties or late thirties made a welcome space for me. Juan in particular, whose words have echoed throughout this dissertation, became a key informant, gatekeeper, and hermano [brother], always available to explain something to me either directly or via a teaching, and always inviting me to tag along. Following his lead, the Milperos treated me always to a certain extent as a novelty from Canada by way of the University of Amsterdam, but collapsed the social distance whenever they could like by identifying a streak of Chicana in me (via my Spanish grandmother, my predilection for putting fresh diced
cactus paddles in my salads, or a bit of reckless driving), or pointing out our mutual, if relative, non-Americananness. I was white but anomalously so, and “always down to roll,” and as I began using their Spanglishy healing-inflected lingo to narrate my adjustments to their way of doing things, like “asking for permiso” [permission] to interview other members of the collectives for my research “in a good way,” they laughed with affection.

But even as I quickly came to care for the Milperos and Mujeres, I found myself frequently confused and frustrated by the seeming lack of progress or ability to stick to a thread or topic in the circles I was attending sometimes up to three times per week. I wanted people to get to the point rather than divulging details I didn’t see as relevant, telling stories about who their parents were and where they came from rather than talking about the critical consciousness topics we were supposed to be working on, week after week – the topics that I thought meant action, something interesting happening. I wanted to see through the projects we plotted, rather than watch helplessly as they were derailed when the others became too busy or overwhelmed with their own lives to give the energy the projects needed.

I was also, frankly, very often rendered speechless at the deeply intimate and painful experiences and conditions being disclosed in these circles, not knowing what to say in response, and afraid to sound disingenuous. Growing up in another country with a different skin tone, I did not firsthand share many of the experiences, and grappled to find a position from which to relate. I couldn’t commiserate with experiences of growing up with one’s dad locked up, and I had never really brushed up with machismo at close range. What we gloss as empathy or sympathy, feeling-with or feeling-for, could not satisfy these demands (Hollan and Throop 2008). The men and women around me were not victims and they didn’t want apology or pity, or recuperation into whatever I thought was moral or relatable; they wanted confianza, a trust and basic understanding between us, and conocimiento, a kind of mutual knowing and letting-be. They wanted relationships of accommodation. They wanted to be themselves, altogether, otherwise.

In order to become a member of the Colectiva de Mujeres and MILPA healing alongside the others, and an active participant in efforts to bring ‘the healing’ to others and others into ‘the healing,’ I also had what might be called ‘my boundaries’ broken down and remade. This meant not only ‘expanding my comfort zone’ to accommodate the lives of the women, the relationships and events that composed those lives seemingly so distant from my own – but also finding myself thinking and feeling with what they were disclosing in circle to unsettle my own foundations and limits. In my adjusting to them, they also adjusted to me, and my project of good doctoral research was reoriented through and aligned with their social project of healing themselves and their community. Before I could claim with integrity I was healing alongside the others in circle – a level of participation and disclosure which was demanded of me being-there – I had to come to re-situate myself as part of the same wounding world, even if it didn’t wound me to the same extent it did my friends and colleagues.

In this spacing, our attuning to each other framed primarily on their terms, the otherwise they were enlivening was being grown. Like the ‘divergence’ conceptualized by Francois Jullien in The Silent Transformations (2011), the schisms in our respective experiences or aspirations, pasts and futures, were not presented as differences or disagreements, but as relational shifts allowing other perspectives and possibilities to emerge.

Perhaps someone with different stakes – say, not doing research on healing, and with aspects of her biography she’d rather not dig up – would have stopped coming to circle at this point, unwilling or unable to enter into the discomfort of disclosure or have her life unsettled by these unwieldy demands. Without knowing what would happen or where it all would lead, she might have seen the abundant cargas [baggage] disclosed in group as affective detritus instead of the wide view of conocimiento, the responsiveness in the form of uncertain empathy or last-minute requests for rides and other favors only getting in the way of her research and her life. One more social snarl or impasse to avoid getting pinned-down in. She might not have let the striations in experience, spectral forms of structural abandonment she’d only ever read about, disclosed in circle “haunt” her and pull her into a different and uncertain future (Gordon 2008).

“Haunting,” Avery Gordon writes, registers the present “in which we are inextricably and historically entangled” as well as “incites the longing for the arrival of a future,” however uncertain and imbricated (2008:207). Without this ambivalent and potentiated haunting, this acknowledgement that what I knew and how I acted in its face was something than can and should shift, I – as a researcher – could not have realized that what was happening through the healing circle was politically consequential. In this affective intertwining, being moved by what moved them too, I could come to see that what they were expressing in circle was precisely the endless litany of ways that ‘justice’ in its many collusions oriented and disoriented their lives. Rather than appealing to respect, dignity, or justice in the abstract, I could see that these visceral burdens that they carried as their own but circulated and shared through the circle and its hermeneutic of
healing were themselves the valences of struggle, the horizons of the otherwise.

This is not a heroic activist-anthropologist methodology but an outcome of my reckoning with their ‘something-more’, attuning and aligning our stakes and being. Participant observation, however sensitive the researcher and her instruments of perception, does not leave space for (or entail) the researcher decentering her own way of seeing, form of knowing, mode of being. And this may be precisely the disorientation needed to cede the epistemic turf of our informants, to come to see and know the world as they do, and perhaps be differently in that world based on this new knowledge and ethos. When researching social projects and ideas about justice, especially in a historical moment of urgency around state violence and communities of color, in the midst of America’s so-called ‘empathy gap’, we need to “hold ourselves” – and our epistemological precepts – “accountable too” if we are to avoid recuperating these uncertain, alternative projects into already-recognizable abstractions (Cacho 2012).

Such a process of dwelling in the impasse and doing politics otherwise demands the unwieldy ethical knowing of reckoning, letting the ‘something more’ of these emergent politics unsettle us, our ways of being and knowing, in order to be able to perceive how that same unsettling is happening across broader social scales. This might be conceived as “letting things be as they are” while realizing that doing so will always change the way oneself, and perhaps the endeavor of engaged anthropology, mutually is or can be, recentering the responsibility from “those deemed dangerous, undeserving, and unintelligible” to rehabilitate, towards their accommodation by those who live diagonal to them (Cacho 2012:168). It means changing ourselves and our terms of analysis at the same time.

From recuperation to shared vulnerability

Though I would not present my fieldwork experience as emblematic of how the political otherwise of healing could be grown, I do believe that it holds at least some hints about how different forms of being-with can emerge and enlist others to ever-incrementally build new worlds. Those of us who are not deemed dangerous, undeserving, unintelligible need to adjust our own sense of these conditions, calling into question the fundamentality of epistemological foundations upon which these judgements stand – even if simply in revealing them to be foundations (or ‘foundationless foundational claims’, to borrow Blaser’s [2013] phrase).

While this might begin with gestures of accommodation, more attentiveness is needed to how adjustments are made across these shifting proximities. In addition to my own process of becoming enlisted into the social project of healing, as I discussed it above, I conclude here by considering subsequent engagement by some civil servants and community members and leaders involved in a particular iteration of this project, a series of commitments and engagements known as Governing for Racial Equity, or GRE. Governing for Racial Equity in Salinas took form in the months after the summer period of police homicides, its genesis retrospectively rooted (that is, claimed) in the community-wide healing circles like Palabra Comunitaria and has been formalized and elaborated over the past two years.

Governing for Racial Equity (GRE), as an initiative of the Seattle-based organization Race Forward unfolding in different counties across the United States, has provided since 2012 a space for county/city staff and community members to “develop a shared language to understand and address how structures and institutions can unintentionally perpetuate racial inequity.” The project’s siting in Salinas innovates by incorporating healing through the collaboration of Race Forward with the National Compadres Network/La Cultura Cura, as led by the Maestro Jerry Tello, introduced in depth in chapter four. Staff from The California Endowment and East Salinas Building Healthy Communities, in the post-homicide period of struggle and impasse, enlisted key city staff into GRE trainings; within months this enlisting was extended into a weeklong training period for both community members and CBO staff, and civil servants.

This training was designed to “bring people to a point where both sides could see the other side as vulnerable,” in the words of one BHC organizer, and to “recognize the discrepancy” between life as lived on the East Side and other parts of town (Valenzuela, Bradshaw, and Ortiz 2016). Civil servant Gary Petersen noted that he saw “people deeply pained when they understood that it [unfair, inequitable conditions in Salinas] wasn’t them, but they are part of something that has been historically inequitable and harmful and unfair. People know each other differently now from this. The web is being woven. I’m setting up a meeting between MILPA and Mayor.” Reflecting on their GRE training, ‘systems folks’ speak in a language of healing and wound-edness, and express personal vulnerability and pain at realizing their imbrication in the problems that seem to plague East Salinas; they foreground similar feelings of vulnerability, unsettling, breakdown, and reaccommodation (Valenzuela, Bradshaw, and Ortiz 2016). As the Salinas City Manager Ray Corpuz (Corpuz 2014) described the effects of the GRE training,
Apportioning neither blame nor righteousness, the model of social transformation supposed through ‘growing’ the healing de-individualizes problems, pathologies, and charismatic solutions, and demands implicatedness and being-with as a first step forward. While more time and research will be needed to assess the strength of the scaffolding of healing being used to build (and heal) the wounded world, these initial relationships and acknowledgments of shared dwelling provide critical openings for new projects to unfold. As differently situated people and aspects are enlisted into this wounded world, this otherwise will inevitably be grown in different, nonlinear, directions and orientations. Growing any kind of otherwise will change its very composition. In Salinas, its elements have already coalesced in different configurations, and will continue to do so, making space for different projects of healing: a skate park on City property, advocacy to decriminalize certain misdemeanors through California State Proposition 47, photography exhibitions of GRE endeavors curated to build “emotional awareness,” and dissertations about the politics of healing.

The very fact that some Milperos and Mujeres envisioned growing their circles as a naturally progressive move, and therefore a measure of the group’s success and marker of their continued fundability, attests to a certain lingering belief that real, worthwhile, meaningful change happens only when small change is scaled up. In dealing with my own aspirations and disappointments for the political import of the healing circles to be recognized by others, both within Salinas and among anthropologists, I have often considered the relationships that many of my informants and I cultivate(d) and sustain(ed) to be most significant, whether they have endured or were more ephemeral. What matters perhaps is the living-out of this hermeneutic of healing alongside others, in whatever form it takes, as both epistemology and ethical demand. This approach requires the reflexivity to jettison our expectations, from both grassroots and academia, that political projects should unfold the way we want them to, composed of the right people, and capable of being scaled up to change the world. It requires reckoning with liberal expectations and tropes, not outright rejecting or resisting their rubble but investigating the strategic manipulations, repurposings, and rebuilding of the world they might make possible, dwelling a little differently at the impasse ourselves.
On a hot and polluted strip of sidewalk in South Salinas, between a 7-11 and the site of Frank Alvarado’s death, the fourth police homicide of 2014, Shi hoisted a yellow Bristol board in the air with one hand, and tugged at the leash of her chihuahua Chloe with the other. The sign simply said Ya Basta: enough already.

Throughout this dissertation I have aimed to illuminate the moral conditions of life and possibilities of politics among a people and a place that have been considered not yet. Abandoned by the state and plagued by violence, East Salinas and its residents have felt futureless and at fault for it, like the Latino Sleeping Giant never quite waking up to its power. Interrogating this foreclosed futurity, my approach throughout has been to parse the multiple alternative temporalities through which people in Salinas, and particularly the Mujeres, engage in a coeval process of healing themselves and the world around them. I have drawn attention to their ways of dealing with and being in time, amidst conditions of slow and spectacular state killing, in order to conceive of emergent forms of politics in terms of their possibilities for moral dwelling. But primarily, I hope, I have unsettled the place of futurity in our understandings of politics, and made a case for the past and its recalibration as an essential resource for social action otherwise.

The reader may recall Shi’s enthralled diagnostic at the end of the introduction: “It’s actually history,” she told me, how the women were coming together, and doing something different. “Whatever it is, it’s happening… And I’m just going through it, like… I can’t witness what’s happening but I think years later I could see, like, this is what’s happened!! Or someone could be like ‘this is what happened, you didn’t even see it because you were in it!!’” In her words and ellipses, Shi begins to articulate some of the driv-
ing concerns of this dissertation: questions about the contours and contents of history, and the feeling of being a part of something important without knowing quite what it will become, the uncertain but palpable horizons of struggle encapsulated in the unassuming and promiscuous gerund ‘happening’. It is with further meditation on these points that I wish to conclude.

History, brought into alignment with a social project like healing, is a resource for political action, a fount of potential in the face of a seemingly-foreclosed future. To accusations and figurations of East Salinas as not yet what it could be, the Mujeres say ya basta, and recalibrate the elements of their lived pasts to show that they are always already more than, always exceed the actualities of the present, our potentiality not only anticipatory, but also ex post facto, and creatively so. Claiming the present as a historical moment is a powerful assertion, and speaks to the temporalization at work in any encounter with, or expression of, historicity. As the past is carried into and lived out in the present, sometimes as an exhausting and burdensome carga and other times as a source of energy, it comprises an essential aspect of being, being-in-time, and belonging to its long but shifting shadow in some way; recalibrating time means recalibrating one’s essential way of being in it, and that can constitute a significant form of change, existentially and interstitially, socially and politically.

To designate something as history in the present is to claim an ambiguous but critical futurity for it; it is to maintain a fidelity to it in concept while remaining open to the shapes it might shift through and to. We – we anthropologists – can approach social change as a historical question, something that can only be assessed against a long horizon, almost mathematical in terms of relative distance and ‘actual meaningful change’. We can alternatively pursue the experiential textures of feeling a part of a changing social, oneself and the world coeval, becoming, and what this might entail. This flexibility of form is the otherwise of the social project, in this case the politics of healing, and introduces both productive, illuminating dynamics and significant challenges for anthropological engagement. It invites our own unsettling, disorientation, and reorientation in tune and time with our informants, making ourselves available to be haunted and transformed in the process, and coming to dwell otherwise in the world and academia. Without this, we risk reproducing only what we think we can already recognize, rather than pursuing the less-legible as it unfolds, as it gathers – or simply and without expectations of such dynamics or limitations of language, as it happens.

Early in this dissertation, I situated the women of the Colectiva de Mujeres at a threshold of potentiality, the edge of the not-yet. A threshold is a limit that has to be crossed for another condition to become actual, out of what was prior simply possible – for the something-more of social life to becoming something-else. We might think the threshold together with the horizon, the metaphor of possibility and potential, that guides our navigation in the world as well as our abstractions of political pursuits. So: where, or when, or how, is this threshold that is the horizon, this becoming-actual of political potential?

The horizon, I hold, is happening – is happening. Health happens here, the Building Healthy Communities slogan decides. Healing, in happening, across all manners of moments and registers, gathering beings across time, is the horizon in motion, the threshold blooming.
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Summary

In the small farmtown-gangland of Salinas, California, the sun shines, the strawberries grow fragrant, pesticides coat fields and lungs, and another shooting is reported on the evening news. For many of the city’s Mexican-American inhabitants, as in many poor and majority-minority communities of colour around America, life is exhausting and change seem out of reach. “In Salinas, we are frozen, stuck, you can’t just do stuff like activism... everything is so controlled, or so political, that you just can’t do anything,” as my key informant and hermana (sister) Shi would tell me. People feel locked up in their own neighbourhood, tapado, closed up and silent. Simple acts of dwelling are compromised amidst persistent criminalization of lifeworlds and status-categories like farmworker or gangbanger, assumed based on skin, clothing, comportment.

In a state more carceral than caring, the city has proven a magnet for philanthropic funding and community-based programming. But being persistently criminalized makes engaging in many liberal institutional settings, let alone in public, a problem. The way we think of politics or activism privileges certain practices: standing up, voicing out, actions most people I know in Salinas are neither comfortable nor able to do. And so, despite significant philanthropic investment and many good intentions, participation levels in community settings can run low. Like the discursive trope of the ‘Latino Sleeping Giant’ that has yet to wake up, the place and its people are often described as not yet what it and they could or should be, and stuck at this threshold of potentiality with no clear way to cross it.

Such a foreclosure is actually our opening: it demands we turn an eye to what else, at the interstices of neoliberalism and neglect, might be happening. It demands we think differently, think otherwise, about progress and politics.

In this dissertation I look to emergent, uncertain, and experimental forms of political engagement at the contemporary conjuncture of state disavowal of the poor and problematic, and “the new social justice” of health equity and healing. I bring a sustained ethnographic focus to the lives and relationships of members of a fledgling social project in Salinas, a women’s healing collective named La Colectiva de Mujeres, and consider the political contours of what they call their healing. In this collective, healing ‘happens’ through disclosing, circulating, and recalibrating the affectively intense and morally ambivalent experiences of participants’ lives in twice-weekly healing circles. Through healing, they shift the conditions of being and dwelling in Salinas, effecting an alternative form of social change that demands a rethinking of our usual political anthropological terminology and approach. I thus develop here a conceptual framework of the otherwise, as inspired by critical and continental theory, to perceive and address this emergence. This need to think otherwise about political possibility and progress is not unique to Salinas, but a sustained problem/ongoing conversation across political theory and activist practice at the so-called ‘end of history’, in the detritus of the demos, amidst the disappointment and frustration of too many failed revolutions.

Novel registers of being political are being cultivated and articulated, and healing should be considered among them. Resonating with techniques and tactics of the contemporary ‘New Civil Rights’ movement of Black Lives Matter, but from a distinctly Mexican-American or Chicano foundation, healing constitutes a new way of engaging in an old civil rights struggle. Healing, in Chicano discourse, indexes ongoing historical relationships of inequality. It articulates the legacy of New World colonialism as criminalization, injustice that wounds, from which we all must heal. I consider it here as a Heideggerian hermeneutic, a means of interpreting the world, and thereby being-in-it, differently. I track how, especially in the wake of four police homicides of Latino men that rocked the city during the period of research, the relational idiom of healing and woundedness came to frame the events and implicate others in the remediation efforts, shifting the field of what counted as a worthy, mattering experience, a happening. Through tracing healing in this way, we glimpse how new political possibilities come into existence, and how people become open to an otherwise in their midst.

In these pages we draw close to the women of the Colectiva, mostly (but not entirely) Mexicanas and Chicanas in their late 30s, mostly (but not entirely) formerly incarcerated and gang-involved. Many find them-
selves having somehow, surprisingly, survived so far – despite losing children, friends, lovers to the entrenched conditions of slow and spectacular state-sanctioned killing, and the social death of abjection and negation. Their twice-weekly healing circles have emerged as radical spaces of disclosure and difference in this farmtown-gangland setting where silence and abidance have long been the conventional and comfortable moral modes. Through invigorating a precolumbian, pan-Indigenous framework of intertwined being-in-the-world, the women of the Colectiva excavate and recalibrate their recent and ancestral pasts, while simultaneously engaging in local grassroots action around police injustice, in a coeval project of making the world re-habitable. In contrast to the commonly circulated teleological trope of the Latino Sleeping Giant and persistent social tensing of Salinas as not yet what it could or should be, shifts in lived conditions were happening along different temporalities, through different rhythms. Healing is the way they say ya basta, that's enough, to the persistent lament of that not yet.

Troubling the telos of conventional ideas of social change, I consider the multiple temporalities at work in the Mujeres' healing, and show throughout the dissertation how the pace and tense of social change is tied to lived temporalities of recoveries and processes of becoming otherwise. To this end, each chapter engages with temporality in some way, building on existing work on social tense, ethical temporalization, triggers, belonging-differently-to-time, and the historical genre of impasse, among others. Where possible, I work recursively with many of my informants' concepts, like conocimiento, mutual knowing, Coyolxauhqui, the neverending cycle of healing, and Ollin, movement. The chapters are laid out to trace the social project of healing from its broadest sociopolitical foundations, down to its most minute phenomenological jangling, back outwards through the interstitial epicenters of its growth and spread. Rather than orienting to a particular future, I show how the politics of healing involves considerable reconsideration of history and genealogy, and recalibration of morally ambivalent happenings into new horizons of possibility. My recursive, reflexive approach to emergent political formations has further implications for the idea of engaged anthropology, and the disclosive and generative qualities of ethnography itself.
Een dergelijke uitsluiting is – in feite – onze ingang: het dwingt ons om aandacht te schenken aan alternatieve gebeurtenissen op het snijvlak van neoliberalisme en verwaarlozing. Het dwingt ons om anderszins te denken over vooruitgang en politiek.

In deze dissertation kijk ik naar de ontlukkende, onzekere en experimentele vormen van politieke betrokkenheid en participatie die plaatsvindt met de huidige samenloop van de verontachtzaming van mensen die door de staat als problematisch worden ervaren, en de ‘new social justice’, de nieuwe sociale rechtvaardigheidsstrijd, dat zich concentreert op gezondheidszorg en “healing,” genezing/herstel. Ik breng een ethnografische focus op de levens van en de verhoudingen tussen leden van een opkomend sociaal project in Salinas, een healingcollectief voor vrouwen, La Colectiva de Mujeres, terwijl ik de politieke contouren bekijk van wat zij healing noemen. Binnen dit collectief ‘gebeurt’ healing door het openbaren, circuleren, en herinterpreteren van de heftige en moreel tegenstrijdige ervaringen van de deelnemers die tweemaal per week in een healing circle samenkomen. Door middel van dit proces van genezing en herstel veranderen de omstandigheden van bestaan (being) en wonen (dwelling) in Salinas wat een alternatieve vorm van sociale metamorfose teweegbrengt. Dit dwingt ons om onze gebruikelijke politiek-anthropologische terminologie en benadering te heroverwegen. Ik ontwikkel daarvoor een conceptueel kader van het "anderszins" (otherwise), geïnspireerd door kritische en continentale theorie, om deze ontluikende vormen van politieke participatie waar te nemen en te addresseren. Het "anderszins" biedt een minimaal raamwerk voor steeds veranderende omstandigheden waarbinnen de betrokkenen geen duidelijk idee hebben van wat er zou kunnen gebeuren. Deze behoefte aan een manier om anders te denken over vooruitgang en de mogelijkheden om politiek te bedrijven bestaat niet enkel in Salinas. Het is een doorlopend gesprek die politieke theorie en activistische praktijk doorkruist bij het zogenoemde “einde van de geschiedenis,” in het puin van de demo, tussen de teleurstelling en frustratie van te veel gefaald revoluties. Er worden constant nieuwe registers van ‘politiciteit’ geschreven en geventileerd, en healing zou ook als zodanig moeten worden erkend. Overeenkomstig met de technieken van de huidige New-Civil-Rightsbeweging van Black Lives Matter maar ook met een kenmerkend Mexicaans-Amerikaans of Chicano basis vormt “healing” een nieuwe manier van participatie in een oude strijd over burgerrechten. In Chicano discours verwijst healing naar de voortdurende historische verhoudingen van ongelijkheid. Het articulateert criminalisatie als een erfenis van kolonisatie van de Nieuwe Wereld, een verwondende onrechtvaardigheid waarvan we allemaal moet
Het bouwt op bestaand werk over onder andere social tense, triggers, ethical temporalisation, het op-een-andere-manier-behoren-tot-tijd, en het historische genre van de impasse. Waar mogelijk, heb ik recursief gewerkt met de termen van mijn informanten, zoals conocimiento, Coyolxauhqui, en Ollín. De hoofdstukken zijn zo opgebouwd dat het sociale project van healing gevolgd kan worden van zijn breedste sociopolitieke funderingen tot zijn kleinste fenomenologische trillingen en dan naar buiten door de tussenliggende epicentra van zijn groei. In plaats van het oriënteren op een bepaalde toekomst, toon ik aan hoe de politiek van healing aanzienlijke heroverweging van geschiedenis en genealogie inhoudt, alsmede een herkalibratie van moreel tegenstrijdige gebeurtenissen naar nieuwe potentie. Mijn recursieve, reflexieve benadering van ontluikende politieke vormen heeft gevolgen voor geëngageerde antropologie en etnografie.

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Among a persistently criminalized population of Mexican-Americans in the farmtown-gangland of Salinas, California, healing from the wounds of history has emerged as a critical register of political action, an uncertain and experimental activism recalibrating the pace and tense of personal recoveries and social change. Engaging fieldwork conducted during a string of local police homicides of Latinos, this dissertation focuses on how spiritually-inflected healing circles, and the form of being-with they generate, came to constitute a timely formation of politics otherwise in line with burgeoning activist techniques and tactics associated with ‘the new Civil Rights’ of lives mattering. Amidst the mostly slow, but sometimes spectacular, modes of state-sanctioned lethality at work in places like Salinas — those abandoned, racialized and criminalized communities of color that are strewn across postindustrial America — what kind of politics is possible? In poor communities where life is hard and its management exhausting, where the so-called Latino Sleeping Giant lies ‘not yet’ awake, and where the stakes invested in silence may be illegible to latent liberal sensibilities, through what registers, relationalities, and temporalities is the social changed?