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Anger, Fragility, and the Formation of Resistant Feminist Space

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the role of second-order anger in the formation of resistant feminist space through the work of María Lugones and Sara Ahmed. I argue that this incommunicative form of anger can operate as a bridge between two senses of resistant spatiality in Lugones, connecting the hangout, which is a collective and transgressive space for alternative sense making, and the cocoon, which is a solitary and germinative space of tense internal transformation. By weaving connections with Ahmed's concept of feminist fragile sheltering, I demonstrate that the insulating character of second-order anger need not be equated with spatial solitude. Rather, given its orientation toward a future becoming away from oppressed subjectivity, germinative cocooning can be understood as constitutive of collective, feminist, and resistant spaces. I conclude, therefore, that feminist spaces ought to shelter second-order angers and embrace fragility as a condition of resistant transformation.

KEYWORDS: anger, resistance, spatiality, María Lugones, Sara Ahmed

This article defends the role of incommunicative anger in the formation of resistant feminist space. I read together two accounts of resistant spatiality in María Lugones found in "Tactical Strategies of the Streetwalker/*Estrategias Tácticas de la Calljera*"¹ and "From Within Germinative Stasis: Creating

Active Subjectivity, Resistant Agency.”² While in the former essay Lugones focuses on the epistemological and sociopolitical transformations that can occur when marginalized people form collective and transgressive spaces, in the latter she considers the tense creation of insular spaces for resistant self-transformation and self-knowing. By taking up Sara Ahmed’s claim that resistant spaces are fragile because they shelter world-destructive affects, I suggest that Lugones’s concept of second-order anger works as a hinge connecting these two senses of resistant spatiality in her work. In what follows, I begin with Lugones’s rearticulation of the hangout as a collective space for resistant sensing and knowing. Then, I weave connecting threads between hangouts and Ahmed’s notion of fragile shelters. Finally, I argue that Lugones’s concept of second-order anger, as “a cocoon, an inward motion intent on sense making,” helps to explain what motivates the transformative force of resistant spaces.³ Germinating affects like anger draw the oppressed subject away from dominant worlds of sense while pushing her inward to discover a nonfragmented sense of her own multiplicity. This inwardness need not be equated with spatial solitude; rather, given second-order anger and hangouts’ shared orientation toward a future becoming away from oppressed subjectivity, I contend that germinative cocooning should be understood as constitutive of collective, feminist, and resistant spaces.

Hangouts and the Transgressive Spatiality of Resistant Worlds of Sense

With hangouts, Lugones names the collective space of a reclaimed marginalized agency, which can produce knowledge about the lived experiences of oppression as a form of resistance. Through her concepts of resistant agency and active subjectivity, Lugones proposes that resistant theorizing occurs in the concrete and embodied navigation of life under oppressions, where subjects must travel in and out of different worlds of sense.⁴ Lugones’s use of “worlds of sense,” Paula Moya remarks, “reminds us that consciousness presupposes a sociality—a set of values, characteristic ways of interacting, particular persons who actively inhabit a specific geographical and psychic space.”⁵ Some worlds of sense are dominant and hegemonic because they are supported by institutional structures and cultural norms that give their values and ways of living and knowing the power to define what it means to be a subject, to be intelligible, and to be moral. For Lugones, then, lived

experiences of marginalization can produce a critical consciousness of the social logics structuring dominant worlds of sense from the perspectives of those who do not fit the norm. Specifically, critical consciousness emerges in between multiple worlds of sense, from a perspective and location that Lugones has called an antistructure or *limen*, that is, “an interstice from where one can most clearly stand critically toward different structures.”⁶ She believes that oppressed subjects come to inhabit *limens* as a condition of their need to constantly world-travel in order to survive.

I understand the practice of hanging out, or the transgressive taking over of public space, to be a collective practice of inhabiting the *limen*. Hangouts are liminal in that they are permeable, fluid spaces that defy structural logics, and are thus spaces where resisting intentions can be formed.⁷ Hangouts give place to alternative sense-making practices that undercut pretensions to a disembodied, theoretical critical engagement with power, as well as to an experience of the self as individual and whole. Within hangouts, intersubjective collectivities fulfill “the need of an alternative sociality for resistant intentionality,” one that cannot form in the atomized spaces of social fragmentation common to our institutionalized public—and increasingly to our private—attempts at gathering together.⁸ Crucially, the resistant sense making and communicating that occur within hangouts cannot be read as productive by the terms of dominant and oppressing worlds. Alternative socialities and permeable resistant worlds of sense exist only in transgressing the logics defining the proper inhabitation of shared space, and so the praxis of hanging out can only be read by those logics as “inactivity, disengagement, or [as] nonsensical.”⁹ By promoting hanging out as a tactical strategy of resistant transformation, and one that cannot receive uptake from dominant worlds of sense, Lugones emphasizes her opposition to reformist strategies of resistance. Instead, she calls for a radical delinking from oppressive worlds of sense, which amounts to refusing dominant senses of institutionality, individuality, and intelligibility. Hangouts are formed through the everyday acts of collectively negotiating oppressive terrains where subjects come together in defiance of the norms of social fragmentation. The practices of tactical strategizing that hangouts can birth, therefore, emerge from intersubjective closeness and lingering face-to-face interactions.

Yet for all of this force, *la callejera* (the streetwalker) is imbued with fragility. She, like all marginalized and oppressed subjects, lives in “the midst of the unsociality of her sense,” and this means she constantly risks

the very real dangers of disciplinary violence that accompany being read as unintelligible or out of place.¹⁰ She may also find it difficult to see how the very liminality of a hangout can support, rather than undermine, meaningful connections amongst marginalized subjects for the purpose of resistance. In a recent interview with Mariana Ortega, Lugones notes that, in many cases, “the permeability of the community is hard to see as a source of coalition. It is perceived as a source of danger.”¹¹ Lugones nonetheless insists that this permeability, whether between a resisting space and a dominating space or between different resisting communities, is necessary for the formation of complex and diverse coalitions that can transform multiple, intermeshed structures of domination. Hangouts, because they are liminal, impure, and “highly permeable,” present a model for this kind of fragile and resistant collective spatiality.¹² Moreover, through her analysis of hangouts as spaces for alternate sense-making practices and the creation of tactical strategies against oppressive power, we can see that Lugones uses hangouts to describe a form of collective spatiality that supports epistemological and sociopolitical transformations.

In her work on germinative stasis in Gloria Anzaldúa, Lugones offers another model of resistant spatiality, the self as “cocoon,” which also highlights fragility, permeability, and epistemological and sociopolitical transformations.¹³ Germination, however, seems at first to name an insular and unsocial sense of resistant spatiality that can be contrasted with the public, intersubjective hangout. But, I contend that these two senses of resistant spatiality in Lugones’s work can be fruitfully linked when they are both read through Ahmed’s affective understanding of fragile feminist space. Doing so provides a more complete picture of resistant spatiality in Lugones’s thought as well as resources for navigating through the tensions between self and collective transformations that arise within intersectional feminist resistance communities. Thus, I turn in the next section to Ahmed’s account of resistant feminist affects and fragile sheltering to begin weaving connecting threads.

The Affective Fragility of Resistant Space

Ahmed’s phenomenological account of feminist sheltering highlights the fragility of resistant space in two ways that I find useful. First, she designates spaces of connection between feminist subjects as fragile in the sense

that they are built within worlds they seek to dismantle and transform. “It is not surprising,” she notes, “that if we try to shatter the foundations upon which we build something, what we build is fragile.”¹⁴ This fragility is necessary if we seek to build spaces that are resistant because they allow for the transformation of the self, while they also disturb the ability of oppressive social institutions to function normally. This, for example, is how Ahmed understands the purpose of Women’s and Gender Studies in the university space.¹⁵ We can already hear clear echoes with Lugones’s insistence that resistant spaces like hangouts must be transgressive and illegitimate, and that this creates fragility for the subjects who form and inhabit them. Both thinkers are reimagining the sense of transformative power associated with the transitory and unauthorized creation of collective space. Crucially, however, for Ahmed it is the second salient sense of fragility that describes the active mechanism behind this power: fragility is a necessary feature of feminist resistance spaces because they are built to shelter world-destructive affects like anger.

Fragile aptly describes a subject worn down by repeatedly coming up against forces that oppress her. Ahmed claims that the fragile subject feels sensations of alienation as she moves through the world; she does not fit in the spaces she tries to inhabit, she is misattuned to objects of normative desire, and she experiences what is “in tune as violence.”¹⁶ The fragile subject has to struggle to exist because she cannot or will not take the paths predetermined for her, and this struggle causes breaks in her sense of self. While fragility clearly describes an oppressed state, Ahmed challenges us to think of breaking points “as the very points we might aim to reach,” and she speaks of them becoming moments of “feminist snap.”¹⁷ Her reappropriation of the figure of the Feminist Killjoy—she who snaps at the world—captures this challenge directly. Ahmed thinks through feminism as “a tear in the social fabric” and a feminist subject, the Killjoy, who has “become the point from which things cannot be reassembled.”¹⁸ The Feminist Killjoy is defined by her world-destructive affects, such as anger, sadness, and inappropriate happiness.¹⁹ She literally kills others’ joy with her affective commitment to the world; she gets in the way of happiness.

The Killjoy results from not being able to live up to the expectations of worlds of sense that would render her subservient, quiet, and inferior.²⁰ In other words, feminists kill joy because what typically defines happiness is the result of structural investments made in normative futures—heterosexual, white, patriarchal futures—where a queer, nonwhite, female, and/

or trans* will-to-be has no proper place. Ahmed argues that refusing to desire such futures, and thereby to assert, for example, a queer will to a future defined by queer love and kinship, is often read as failure and so “such an unbecoming is narrated as the loss of the possibility of becoming happy.”²¹ With the figure of the Feminist Killjoy, she operationalizes this unbecoming and disinvestment as a form of resistance. The Killjoy is not made happy by the proper things and is made happy by improper things, and thusly she refuses to be pressed into the path predetermined for her. The very affects that render her a fragile subject also contain potential to be world-destructive and transformative. Ahmed believes that these affects “represent a collective failure to be accommodated to a system as the condition of possibility for living another way.”²² With Ahmed’s Killjoy figure, we can see that it is therefore imperative to build feminist spaces that remain fragile because they shelter, and do not erase or resolve, world-destructive affects. Just as the promise of normative happiness can be a “techniqu[e] of redirection,” so too can the comforts of institutional recognition. Ahmed shows us that transgressive spaces must devise tactical strategies that will allow for the transformative reimagination of the Killjoy’s breaking points or snap moments into sources of resistance.

Anger and the Affective Transformation of Resistant Space in Lugones

Both Ahmed and Lugones articulate notions of resistant space that define these spaces by their ability to transgress the boundaries of oppressive worlds of sense. Put differently, they both see resistant space as liminal, fragile, and therefore, radically transformative. While Lugones focuses on the agential and sociopolitical transformations made possible within hangouts as spaces for resistant epistemological praxis, I believe that the fragility of the hangout connects these transformations with an affective one found elsewhere in her corpus. We saw above that Ahmed links fragility with world-destructive affects like anger in her descriptions of feminist spaces of resistance. Similarly, I argue, Lugones’s concept of second-order anger can operate as a bridge connecting the collective space of hanging out with the self-as-cocoon, an image from her essay on Anzaldúa, “From within Germinative Stasis,” which she uses to describe a solitary space of tense internal transformation. In this final section, I argue that the fragility

induced by second-order angers can motivate the transformative force of resistant spaces. By helping to draw a connection between the brooding, inner space of germination, and the collective, sense-making space of hanging out, second-order anger names a world-destructive and future-oriented force that is intent on resistant transformation.

In “Hard-to-Handle Anger,” Lugones separates first- and second-order angers to help clarify the roles they have played in her life as a feminist, scholar, and activist. First-order anger, she explains, “has a communicative intent and does or does not succeed in getting ‘uptake’ within a particular world of sense,” whereas second-order anger is incommunicative and “presuppose[s] worlds of sense against which the anger constitutes an indictment or a rebellion.”²³ In other words, second-order anger’s unintelligibility signals the need for alternate senses of meaning. Lugones plainly disagrees with feminists who work to have this kind of anger read as an unjustly ignored cry for recognition or respect. For her, second-order anger remains unintelligible even when reimagined as a forceful and necessary reaction to oppression. It is noncommunicative, but not devoid of meaning; it pushes back against dominant worlds of sense that strip it of its cognitive content.²⁴ When Lugones describes this kind of anger as “cognitively rich,”²⁵ one is reminded of Audre Lorde’s claim that “anger is loaded with information and energy,” and is both oriented to the past in its reaction to the world as it is, as well as to the future, as it calls forth something else that might come to be.²⁶ Indeed, Lugones locates accounts of second-order anger in Lorde and Anzaldúa because, in her reading, both theorists describe “future-looking” anger rooted firmly in oppressive experiences in the present.²⁷ Its dual-oriented temporality can also be understood spatially. Second-order anger is a permeable and liminal affect. Jen McWeeny explains that for Lugones it “lies between the first world of the dominators and the third world of the oppressed: it is a borderland territory that resists assimilation to either side.”²⁸ Reading Lugones and Anzaldúa, McWeeny emphasizes the epistemological power of second-order anger to shift our perspectives on power and break us out of taken-for-granted ways of seeing and thinking.²⁹ She argues that second-order anger is a resistant and embodied way of knowing the world that gains its power to illuminate from its antistructural position toward dominant frameworks.³⁰ In other words, the epistemological and political transformations that second-order anger can arouse, and which Lugones, Anzaldúa, and McWeeny emphasize as crucial for resistance, result from its ability to affect habitual orientations

within worlds of sense. Second-order anger, like an Ahmedian moment of feminist snap, is an expression of the refusal to carry on as we always have.

Thus, Lugones argues, that for those capable of listening to it second-order anger “expresses the state of transformation [it] is a cocoon, an inward motion intent on sense making [it] is neither really different nor separate from the passion of metamorphosis.”³¹ It is transformative because it splits the oppressed person from within by destabilizing her oppressed self, who fears this anger as a failure to live up to social conventions, and awakening her resisting self, for whom it fuels the imagination of liberatory possibilities. Much like Ahmed’s positive reappropriation of the world-destructive affects of the Killjoy figure, Lugones rethinks this affective fragility as a generative transformation away from an oppressed self and toward a resisting self who can begin to recognize the depth of meaning contained in her anger at the world.³² The cocooning space of second-order anger is therefore oriented toward alternative sense-making practices and new forms of active subjectivity and agency. It is an anger that calls out, not for recognition, but for the creation of new worlds of sense where it can be heard.

I therefore see that second-order anger motivates the creation of resistant space in two concerted senses. One, it blocks the intimate forces of oppression by opening an inwardly antagonistic space for the self to take on a resistant position. As Lugones says, “the inhabitation of this [resistant] place/vantage enables me to withdraw my energies from cementing and contributing to the relations of power that define me as servile or as nonsensical.”³³ Second-order anger helps to insulate the oppressed self because it expresses an immediate refusal to quietly abide by the terms of one’s own oppression. It also creates an impure separation from dominant and oppressing worlds of sense because it intensifies our awareness of the possibilities of living beyond them. This first sense of space-making is insulating; it is akin to putting up an internal wall that stops the terrorizing intimate experiences of oppression. Second-order anger can move us to radically disinvest from pleasures and attachments in the present, which serves as a reminder of the need to delink, however temporarily, from a world even as we continue living within it.

Two, second-order anger calls out for the future remaking of oneself as an active subject with resistant agency. It fuels the recreation of the self into a place that can facilitate the becoming of something new. Lugones’s metaphor of cocooning helps to illustrate the coincidence of these two concerted senses of resistant space-making. She explains that a cocoon is a space

for “insulating strategies; since she cannot respond in the terms of her oppressors to their harm, she must make space apart for creation, for new sense.”³⁴ Further, by allowing herself to become a space for the expression of second-order anger, the cocooning subject “is fomenting her potential self, the creation of a counter-universe of sense in which she can engage her potential fully.”³⁵ In both senses, second-order anger transforms the self into a space for resistance to domination.

In “From within Germinative Stasis” Lugones makes it clear that this kind of transformative and affective germination is a necessary step toward radical and collective political resistance to intermeshed oppressions. “We always may feel the temptation to engage in political activity without this preparation, as if oppression did not touch our selves,” she writes, but “Anzaldúa shows the transformation of reality to require a tense inhabitation of our selves.”³⁶ In this statement, we can see the senses of inner space conjured up by second-order anger merging with the collective spaces of hanging out. Second-order anger draws the oppressed self inward into a space of germinative transformation while also urgently pushing forward and outward to create the conditions for future liberation. This dual orientation breaks down the oppressed self as an individual subject, and leaving her fragile in her opposition to existing worlds of sense, compels her to join with others in a collectivity of resisters in the midst of radical self-transformation. It is imperative, as we learned from Ahmed, that collective spaces of resistance are formed to shelter this fragility, not to mend or erase it. Lugones’s accounts of the epistemological, social, political, and affective transformations constitutive of resistant space provide direction on how to shelter fragility in a way that preserves the radical force of resistance by making space for the resisting self to form and expand.

Uniting these texts and ideas in Lugones and Ahmed serves more than a philosophical interest in the formation of resistant spatiality. It also points to the continuing relevance of their thinking about resistance for those of us who engage in feminist coalitional work. They remind us that resistance spaces are, and ought to be, fragile because they must shelter incommunicative anger that aims at the radical transformation of the world. Both Lugones and Ahmed emphasize the creative and community-building valences of this world-destructive affect. By highlighting its role in the formation of insular and communal resistance spaces, I hoped to suggest that tense and transformative experiences of angry germination should be what vitalizes collective feminist resistance.

NOTES

1. In María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003).
2. María Lugones, "From Within Germinative Stasis: Creating Active Subjectivity, Resistant Agency," in *Entre Mundos / Among Worlds: New Perspectives on Gloria E. Anzaldúa*, ed. Ana Louise Keating (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
3. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 103.
4. See the chapter, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception," in Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, for more on travelling in and out, and between, worlds of sense.
5. Paula M. L. Moya, review of *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*, by María Lugones, *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006): 199–200. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810960>.
6. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 59.
7. *Ibid.*, 209.
8. *Ibid.*, 216.
9. *Ibid.*, 218.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Mariana Ortega, "Carnal Disruptions: Mariana Ortega Interviews María Lugones," in *Speaking Face to Face: The Visionary Philosophy of María Lugones*, ed. Pedro DiPietro, Jennifer McWeeny, and Shireen Roshanravan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019), 281.
12. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 209.
13. Lugones, "From Within Germinative Stasis," 86.
14. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 176.
15. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 175.
16. *Ibid.*, 41.
17. *Ibid.*, 187–88.
18. *Ibid.*, 171.
19. *Ibid.*, 62.
20. See Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) for a lengthy discussion of the Feminist Killjoy.
21. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 49.
22. *Ibid.*, 62.
23. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 108, 104.
24. *Ibid.*, 111.
25. *Ibid.*, 104.
26. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (New York: Crossing Press, 2007), 127.
27. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 113.
28. Jen McWeeny, "Liberating Anger, Embodying Knowledge: A Comparative Study of María Lugones and Zen Master Hakuin," *Hypatia* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 299.

29. McWeeny, "Liberating Anger, Embodying Knowledge," 300.
30. *Ibid.*, 306–7.
31. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 103.
32. *Ibid.*, 107.
33. Lugones, "From within Germinative Stasis," 85.
34. *Ibid.*, 89.
35. *Ibid.*, 95.
36. *Ibid.*, 92.

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