AUDRE LORDE'S TRANSNATIONAL LEGACIES

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"I Cross Her Borders at Midnight"
Audre Lorde's Berlin Revisions

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> I went to Berlin with strong reservations and found of course much there . . . Most of all I found a certain amount of room to be.
>
> Audre Lorde, unpublished journal entry, 1984

Audre Lorde explored crisscrossings throughout her life. Scholars and enthusiasts recall her string of formative identities, her interdisciplinary writing, and the geographic spaces of Afro-diasporic longing and belonging she located on her travels around the world. Since her death in 1992, selections from her published oeuvre have gained crossover appeal, if not canonical status, throughout the fields of cultural studies. This is especially the case with her essays, which have gained prominence, in part, among a new generation of Lorde devotees, who have used her concise phrasings in public dialogues and Internet memes. In her lifetime Lorde both sought and skewed such seemingly transparent access to her writing.

In addition to her cultural theories on identification, Lorde produced a large body of work dwelling on her own estrangement and ambivalence. Her public modes of literary production display her self-revealing style, even as her poems teem with private references, intricate metaphors, imagined locations, subtle shifts in syntax, and the fodder of her dreams. One way in which she balanced her assured visions and significant fears was through the act of revision, a significant yet understudied aspect of her interdisciplinary poetic output. Revision, for Lorde, was a matter of refining her poems line by line but also stood for her greater conceptualization

of poetry itself. Her archives offer glimpses into a process she once referred to as "alignment," which points to her practice of making slight but significant changes to poetic imagery as well as spacing and word placement.[1] For a traveling cultural worker aware of her own mortality, especially during bouts of illness, such attention to revision also demonstrated her spiritual commitment to practices of reflection and revisitation.[2]

Among Lorde's most essential sites of revision, a place where she worked toward proper poetic alignment, was the divided city of Berlin. Her revisions in and of the city allow us to delve into her evolving creative process. Berlin functioned as a site and signifier for her broader political project of working across lines of difference and division as well as her connected personal project of healing and transformation. This essay seeks to contextualize Lorde as a significant figure in the tradition of transnational exchange among American artists and writers across the years of a divided Berlin. I have considered revised and published works, including close readings of multiple drafts of her 1984 unpublished poem "First Impressions"; revisions from journal entries that became the poems "Berlin Is Hard on Colored Girls" and "This Urn Contains Earth from German Concentration Camps" (included in her book *Our Dead Behind Us*); and the historical revisions alluded to in her poem "East Berlin" (from *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance*) that span the historical divide of 1989. In each case I animate her publicly circulating work with readings of revised poems and journal entries from her archives to highlight connections within her Berlin-based poetry. A divided Berlin offered Lorde a space of creativity to continue working across lines of division and an urban locale from which to explore her own modes of identification and estrangement.

"FIRST IMPRESSIONS": TOWARD CRITICAL DISTANCE

The unpublished free verse poem "First Impressions"—which Lorde began as a journal entry on May 2, 1984, a month into her first trip to Berlin, and then typed out and revised in three iterations on May 15—exemplifies how the city's historically traumatized urban spaces served as poetic points of reflection for Lorde. In the poem, she captures her observations of life in the city through a series of pairings in which she addresses the concepts of home, health, and longing. Her observations are not centered here on Berlin's sprawling layout or central divides but its confined spaces. She opens

with the lines "The toilet paper is stiff as a 20 Mark note / The stall doors are long and solid / but the latch always works / in reverse."[3] Lorde conjures Berlin as a space of intimacy as well as a strained refuge. She uses a simile to reform the idea of West Germany's economic currency (a marker of Germany's internal division) and a "latch" to counter an enclosure behind which she herself goes. As American photographer Nan Goldin did in her own contemporaneous Berlin-based work—for instance, her portraits of women in bathrooms in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*—Lorde locates herself in a bathroom in Berlin as a way to achieve a critical distance, albeit in momentary isolation.[4] She uses the practice of enjambment, pushing "works" and "in reverse" into separate lines to spatially convey a sense of her own tenuous safety. The poem continues:

> Houses are intimidatingly clean
> but laundries are few and expensive
> the mail comes early
> and meals quite late
> in Berlin
> a health-food store is called
> A Reform House.

Through imagery and form, Lorde conjures Berlin as a bewildering home space within which she experiences both estrangement and comfort. She uses the word "in" repeatedly to emphasize location and enclosure and to bridge and blur distinct thoughts between the lines. The phrases "in reverse" and "in Berlin" appear after line breaks, which also stand out formally in isolation, thus allowing her curiosity and suspicions about the city to coexist. The refrain functions as what Amitai F. Avi-Ram calls, in relation to Lorde's work, an "apo koinou"—that is, a word or phrase that, through enjambment, shares meaning between two lines.[5] As she bridges her lines, Lorde conjures Berlin as a whole city, not limited to just East or West. As "First Impressions" ends, she writes, "the women are small-boned and wiry also / but surprising / each one I approach / becomes some other place / to hide in Berlin." Even against the backdrop of Lorde's professorial or writerly project in Berlin, the speaker does not seek out the women in this scene for simple solidarity or generative dialogue. The poet repeats the phrase "in Berlin" but removes the line break to reaffirm that the city is a place where she experiences both self-imposed separation and refuge.

While writing this poem, Lorde experimented with the placement of "in

Berlin" in her drafts. For example, the phrase does not appear as the ending line of her untitled journal version, which provided the initial lines for this poem. She added the phrase two weeks later to the final line when she first typed up the work. This first typed draft includes "in Berlin" on its own line at the end of the poem, only to be crossed out in a handwritten edit. The next draft and the final unmarked version of "First Impressions" retain the phrase, though she removes the line break and joins the final two lines as "to hide in Berlin." It is not clear if the handwritten edits on the typed drafts are Lorde's or another reader's; nonetheless, the poet's concern with how to deal with being "in Berlin" stands out. She mined the physical and cultural makeup of the divided city as a surface of reflection and turned to poetry as an outlet to consider such observations. The fact that this poem remained unpublished while much of her other writing about Berlin was prominently revised and published reemphasizes the productive tension between her site-specific productivity and "hiding" in the divided city.

MIDNIGHT'S REVISIONS AND MAPPING DIVIDED MEMORY

From the poems and journal entries written during her 1984 trip, a portrait of Lorde emerges. Berlin offered her an archive of poetic imagery and ideas as well as geopolitical challenges. She drew from her relationship to the city's physical environment in her writing about her experiences in the city. But such engagement was not merely marked by transcendence; Lorde was taken in and taken aback by Berlin, a city that led her to new paths of recovery and immense productivity as well as confrontations with historical haunts that were organic to Germany and to her own circumstances. She was aware of how her multiple intersecting identities (black, lesbian, poet, American, among other distinctions) marked her as an outsider in Berlin but also compelled her to work across difference on both sides of the city's internal divide. The Berlin Wall functioned as a key site and symbol of her poetic practice. But even as she treated the wall as a formidable structure, she highlighted the border system as part of the multiple forms of division that she encountered in Berlin.

According to her archive, Lorde began drafting her poem "Berlin Is Hard on Colored Girls," in her journal on May 8 and 9, 1984, while teaching in Berlin. The typed drafts that survive are dated February 11, March 31, and April 1, 1985.[6] At each stage, Lorde tended to choices of language

and line spacing. The poem weaves recognizable symbols and sites from both sides of Berlin with private images and memories that transcend the divided city's limits.

Scholars have suggested that the poem represents the plight of Afro-German women. Melba Boyd, a poet who attended Lorde's Berlin reading at the Amerika House, contends that it "embodies [her] identification with the plight of Afro-Germans and women of color in Berlin, as 'woman' is coded as the city, with forbidden borders and American influences."[7] The "American influences" could also be read to include Lorde's own experiences in Berlin. To be sure, her poetic rendering of Berlin as a "strange woman" frames the poem around notions of identity and estrangement, not only as regards her observations of the city but, importantly, also about herself. The title of the poem is a way to signal the Afro-German community's strained relationship with the city but employs the word "colored" to convey a potential connection with U.S. racial discourse. In this and other ways throughout the poem, Lorde opens herself up as an additional, if not central, subject of the poem.[8]

Lorde locates her poem in the time space of a dream but also in the geopolitical reality of divided Berlin.[9] The poem opens:

> Perhaps a strange woman
> walks down from the corner
> into my bedroom
> wasps nest behind her ears
> she is eating a half-ripe banana
> with brown flecks in the shape of a lizard
> kittiwakes in her hair
> perhaps
> she is speaking my tongue
> in a different tempo
> the rhythm of gray whales praying
> dark as a granite bowl
> perhaps
> she is a stone.[10]

Berlin is introduced through a matrix of diasporic sites. The symbols in the first stanza—kittiwake birds, the lizard, gray whales—conjure the island tropics and connect readers to Lorde's non-U.S. home spaces in Grenada and Saint Croix. The poem works as an encoded diasporic map, and the possessive "my" stages an interaction that implies a feeling of intrusion before ceding to acts of movement and translation.

The internal border of the Berlin Wall marks the spatial divide between the poem's two stanzas, the introduction of the narrative "I," and the division between the end of one day and the beginning of the next.[11] By the second stanza, the speaker traverses the woman's/city's internal border at the Berlin Wall, and the narrative perspective changes to the first person:

> I cross her borders at midnight
> the guards confused by a dream
> Mother Christopher's warm bread
> an end to war perhaps
> she is selling a season's ticket to the Berlin Opera[12]

Without mentioning the Berlin Wall, Lorde conjures a scene of border crossing. In addition to resisting its monumental nomenclature, she finds several ways to locate and then transgress the poem's alluded boundary. She accounts for the wall not through direct naming or images of concrete architecture but through the language of "borders," "guards," and temporal trickery.

Midnight as a time of liminality is crucial to this poem. Night offers a charged temporal space, allowing for uncertainty and ambivalence and signaling intimacy between women. In geopolitical time, midnight is significant: it is a clear reference to actual East German policy during the time of Lorde's visit, which required all daily visitors from West to East Berlin to leave before midnight. By invoking travel after midnight, the poem suggests that border control ultimately fails to keep the city's division intact. In the dream and poem, crossing borders after midnight goes against protocol, and the image gestures to other ways in which the Berlin Wall is porous in the poem. For example, when Lorde writes, "she is selling a season's ticket to the Berlin Opera," in a city with two opera houses—East Berlin's *Deutsche Staatsoper* and West Berlin's *Deutsche Oper Berlin*—she envisions the East as a site of habitual ("season") yet elusive return or the West as a disavowed place, altogether with a confused geography.[13] Ultimately, in this dream elaborated on within the poem, she undermines the normalcy and logic of division.

Lorde's use of "perhaps" throughout the poem accentuates its liminal contexts and her own ambivalence about living in the city. Given its free verse style, the poem's structure comes not from meter or rhyme per se but from the rhythm created through line breaks, stanzas, and spacing. The poem begins with "perhaps," which then reappears six times, either by itself after a line break or with extra white space separating it from other words on

the line. Mimicking the actual zigzagged path of the wall, the word snakes through the poem, acting as an unsteady refrain and offering a sense of structure. In this way, Lorde undermines polemic division and singular political meaning at the Berlin Wall while making sure the actions she explores in the poetic dream are both purposeful and conditional.

The poet's attention to extremes of tactility and texture is also important in the first several stanzas. These extremes are expressed through a litany of images that suggests "a tender forgiveness of contrasts." They include an interplay between the "hard" of "a granite bowl," "a stone," and "metal" and the soft, "half-ripe banana," "Mother Christopher's warm bread," "silken thighs," and the "american flag."[14] These contrasts ground the dream and the poem in the city's material conditions—such as U.S. military occupation and fortified borders—even as they summon ethereality and a forgiveness akin to letting go. Among these "contrasts," Lorde's rendering of "america" without an uppercase *A* offers an implicit critique of her national belonging and fits with Alexis De Veaux's formulation that Lorde selectively dropped the upper case when critically engaging the United States or while traveling abroad.[15]

In the final lines, Lorde writes:

> perhaps
> A nightingale waits in the alley
> next to the yellow phone booth
> under my pillow
> a banana skin is wilting.[16]

Lorde's imagined nighttime border crossing undermines the systems of border control at the Berlin Wall, and her dreamed excursion that culminates in a moment of potential flight. After spatializing and grounding her poem with mentions of a street "corner" and "the hair-bouncing step / of a jaunty flower-bandit" (an opaque reference to Dagmar Schultz), she introduces a nightingale, which pauses for her in the alley and symbolizes escape and restraint.[17] The nightingale, an important poetic symbol since antiquity, has traditionally embodied and negotiated divisions such as expression and silence, masculinity and femininity, and life and death.[18] In "Ode to a Nightingale," John Keats offers the bird, like a poem, as a way to transgress the in-between of these dualities.[19] Lorde revisits Keats's symbol, borrowing from the codes of canonical poetry to place her nightingale in the context of her experiences in divided Berlin. In her Berlin poems, the city's hard

edges—of history, of the wall—make stone and concrete important material referents, as is the potential for soothing, softness, comfort, and flight from that urban topography.

Lorde's complex and haunted relationship with Berlin was also connected to the public memory of the Holocaust, and she extended her exploration of the divided city in another poem, "This Urn Contains Earth from German Concentration Camps: Plotzensee [*sic*] Memorial, West Berlin, 1984." Located on a lake in the northwestern outer reaches of West Berlin, Plötzensee was a former Nazi prison and execution house. In 1952 it was dedicated as a memorial to those persecuted by the Third Reich.[20] During Lorde's 1984 trip, it was West Berlin's most prominent Holocaust memorial. As her poem's title suggests, a large inscribed urn at the site holds earth from each of the German concentration camps. Lorde presumably visited the site, and she retained copies of the memorial's pamphlet in her records.[21] Toward the end of her first trip to Berlin, she began drafting her reflections as a journal entry while considering her own comforts and reservations about the city. On July 29, 1984, she wrote, "But you have to forget Plotzensee's bland lack of assuming responsibility, the obscure circumlocutions that protect Germany's children from their history and humanity. An urn of earth from concentration camps. Not ashes of Jews."[22] Lorde's identification with Jewish victims of Nazi tyranny was linked to her concerns about contemporary racism in Germany: "Nothing can come to the point of feeling what they are saying, so they can never move on. So a Germany committed to this kind of thinking only is a Germany of the past, committed to repeating the same mistakes who will it be this time? The turks? or the newly emergent Afri-German [*sic*] people?"[23] Inspired by her earlier journal entry, Lorde typed out poem drafts on February 2 and February 19, 1985, and continued to revisit and edit the poem.[24] In so doing, she connected her reflections on the history and memory of the Holocaust in Berlin to her Afro-diasporic consciousness.

In the poem, Lorde marks the memorial as a site of contradiction rather than resolution. Like Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985), she places her vision of the site of memory around the "overgrowth" of nature and amnesiac cultures over sites of Holocaust trauma.[25] She reads physical space as a way to contend with an off-kilter feeling of historical time. Lorde's earliest drafts are titled "Plotenzee Memorial to the Resistance: Berlin 1984" and "Plotensee Memorial Berlin 1984." By the final draft in her archive, she has made two key changes. The primary title is a translation of the actual

plaque inscription at the memorial ("Die Urne enthält Erde aus deutschen Konzentrationslagern"), which she had cited in the body of an early draft, and the geopolitical descriptive "West" is added to Berlin in the title. In the latter case, she recalls the specific location of the site as well as how Germany's post-1945 division created spaces of historic estrangement and sublimated traumas of the recent Nazi past. Through all iterations, her use of the year reminds readers of the influence of her first trip but also resembles the inscriptive timestamp often found on historical or memorial markers.

The poem opens with a tension staged between remembrance and erasure. Lorde uses the memorial's actual inscription to convey the gaps between what is claimed and what is rendered silent in this historical display.

> Dark gray
> the stone wall hangs
> self-conscious wreaths
> the heavy breath of gaudy Berlin roses
> "The Vice Chancellor Remembers
> The Heroic Generals of the Resistance"
> and before a well-trimmed hedge
> unpolished granite
> tall as my daughter and twice around
> Neatness
> wiping memories payment
> from the air.[26]

Lorde's reference to "stone wall" and "self-conscious wreaths" conjure the Berlin Wall and anticipate the May 1985 controversy over President Ronald Reagan's visit to Bitburg cemetery within the context of the problematics of place-based Holocaust memory.[27] "The heavy breath of gaudy Berlin roses" suggests the empty expressive gestures of beauty in a misremembered history. Lorde uses extra space within lines ("neatness / wiping memories [*space*] payment / from the air") to convey rhythmic structure and to suggest gaps and silences in the imposed rhythms of history and memorial reparation. Rather than creating "Neatness," spacing and content form a vision that is out of sync. Society rushes to move on rather than heal or talk about its losses.

The poem goes on to describe a picnic in the lakeside park around the memorial. The eerie scene features several juxtaposed images of birth and destruction. For instance, "beneath my rump / in a hollow root of the dead elm / a rabbit kindles" conveys both a litter of baby rabbits and the birth of

fire.[28] Though the picnic ends, the haunting does not cease. The interruption of a "writhing waterbug," a roach flicked but split open in her food, symbolizes degradation and a deterred potential for survival.

> The picnic is over
> reluctantly
> I stand pick up my blanket
> and flip into the bowl of still-warm corn
> a writhing waterbug
> cracked open her pale eggs oozing
> quiet
> from the smash.[29]

The line breaks and extra spaces build an unsteady rhythm, and the caesuras in "I stand [*space*] pick up my blanket" and "cracked open [space] her pale eggs oozing" double as physical descriptions of stepping away and breaking open. The pairing of "quiet" and "the smash" suggests the gap between silence and expression at this site.

In the poem's final stanza, Lorde marks and pushes the limits of memorial practice, both at the site and in her own poetry. Here, she distinguishes between "earth" and "ash" of human remains and reminds her readers of commemoration's inability to fully stand in for the loss of human life.[30] She highlights how the site's appeal to nature as a form of rebirth doubles as a funereal absence and hinders critical dialogue about violence and history.

> Earth
> not the unremarkable ash
> of fussy thin-boned infants
> and adolescent Jewish girls
> liming the Ravensbruck potatoes
> careful and monsterless
> this urn makes nothing
> easy to say.[31]

Themes of speech and silence coexist in these lines, as does Lorde's clear ambivalence about such sites of memory. Her gendering of the murdered Jews is carried out again in her reference to Ravensbrück, which was a predominately female concentration camp outside of Berlin. In relation to her work with German feminists, this critical addressing of their pasts serves as a call to identification. The final lines, "careful and monsterless / this urn makes nothing / easy to say," respond to the urn at Plötzensee and perhaps also to the limitations of her own poem in finding the appropriate utterances

for encountering such a violent history. Like her nightingale reference in "Berlin Is Hard on Colored Girls," these lines conjure another classical symbol of poetry, the urn, and Keats's canonical "Ode on a Grecian Urn." His poem also mediates the gaps between speech and silence but owes its culminating lines to a lesson "spoken" by an urn and conveyed in quotation marks: " 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' —that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."[32] Lorde's ending links to and challenges Keats's ode, using intertextual revision to mark the aesthetic limits of memorial gestures, be they poetic or material. The past can be localized into poems, aesthetic objects, and memorials, but true loss extends beyond speech. Lorde revisits the thematic extremes of soft and hard materiality in Berlin—the tensions between the inscription of the plaque and the physical traces to which it refers, the offering of tangible earth that was sealed in the urn. Between these two material extremes, Lorde conveys her own and a larger shared sense of Berlin as both a refuge and a site of potential danger.[33]

OUT OF TIME AND PLACE IN EAST BERLIN

Between 1987 and her death in 1992, Lorde composed more poems that addressed themes of travel and return in Berlin. Her "Berlin years," as Schultz has called them, overlapped an era of sweeping change in Germany, in particular the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and Germany's reunification in 1990. Lorde collected many of these poems into *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance*. Posthumously published, this collection offers a poetic bridge across Germany's epochal divide. But Lorde's post-1989 poems and writings pivot away from Cold War triumphalism and showcase her sense of wariness about how the *Wende,* the post-Wall "turn" in German history, would affect life in Berlin, especially for Afro-Germans and other people of color. Her works foreground the Berlin Wall as a site from which to recognize the symbolism and public feelings of historical estrangement in this period, and to draw broader attention to uncertainties and fears wrought in periods of seeming public revelry and progress. Lorde's skepticism during this period was centered on the waves of racially motivated violence against Afro-German and immigrant communities that were erupting on Berlin and other German streets. In a series of connected editorials, journal entries, and poems, she leveraged her critical insights against the bygone monumental backdrop of the border.

This intervention into the *Wende* period marks the poems in *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance*. While her Berlin poems in *Our Dead Behind Us* also obliquely deal with the division of the wall, these later poems reflect the historical challenges of reunification with a renewed focus on the former border. Beginning on November 10, 1989, Lorde reflected on her ambivalence in several journal entries, and she continued those reflections in early 1990 in a series of drafts for the poem "East Berlin."[34] She opens her published version with the declarative statement, "It feels dangerous now / to be Black in Berlin." The perspectival subject of this poem is disembodied and without a human subject, yet the poet's use of "it" makes her statement declarative and factual. Lorde's sense of the new geography of reunification is based on well-known urban landmarks, yet her narrator strays back and forth between the former West and East. Violence erupts in part from the rapid convergence of worldviews and legacies of previous lines of division:

> sad suicides that never got reported
> Neukölln Kreuzberg the neon Zoo
> a new siege along Unter den Linden
> with Paris accents New York hustle
> many tattered visions intersecting.
>
> Already my blood shrieks
> through the East Berlin streets
> misplaced hatreds
> volcanic tallies rung upon cement
> Afro-German woman stomped to death
> by skinheads in Alexanderplatz[35]

Lorde's poetic mapping of "East Berlin" is a geopolitical anachronism, as the notion of "East Berlin" has become formally defunct in the reunified Germany. Her spaces within the poem separate areas that all lie in the former West Berlin (Neukölln, Kreuzberg, the zoo) to suggest dislocation amid the post-wall borderlines, which Lorde contrasts with her subsequent references to East Berlin's Unter den Linden and Alexanderplatz. The "tender forgiveness" subverting the border in her earlier poem gives way to a harsh concrete materiality in the post-wall era. The sidewalk, against the shadow of the ruins of the wall, becomes a scene of violence and disenfranchisement.

Though the wall is now partially dismantled and politically obsolete, Lorde sees it as a symbol of the continuing dangers that people of color

face in Germany. In her poem, she gestures toward the pitfalls of historical change without full reconciliation between East and West Germany and its diverse peoples and violent history. She writes in the final stanza:

> Hand-held the candles wink
> in Berlin's scant November light
> hitting the Wall at 30 miles an hour
> vision first
> is still hitting a wall
> and on the other side
> the rank chasm
> where dreams of laurels lie.[36]

The stanza uses the word "wall" twice—capitalized to refer to the Berlin Wall itself, lowercased as a poetic symbol of a threshold separating temporalities and deeper truths. "The Berlin Wall" and "the wall" are joined as paired poetic sites. Again, Lorde views Germany through rituals of commemoration and the space of a dream, here physically represented as cast aside. She is wary of celebrations in light of the violence and the uncertainty of this time. The poem closes with "hollowness wed to triumph / differing from defeat / only in the approaching tasks."[37] These lines reaffirm the deep divisions that Lorde has traced in the city but do not offer finality. The possibility for transformation exists here, tethered to Berlin-based historical reconciliation and future action. For Lorde, "the approaching tasks" include an active poetics, with emphasis on persistent reflection rather than closure.

DREAMS AND DIFFERENCE

In October 1992, Lorde traveled to Berlin and gave a public reading in Schultz's apartment. A month later, she passed away in Saint Croix, after several prolonged bouts with cancer. The visit was documented in a bonus clip from Schultz's film *Audre Lorde—The Berlin Years* that shows Lorde seated by a table with a vase of sunflowers and an open notebook from which she reads her poem "1984." She provides some historical context about the poem, in which she imagines she becomes president of the United States, noting that George Orwell's vision of 1984 had inspired her to revise U.S. power relations. But she also said that the poem, like many of her others, was sparked by a dream—in this case, a dream on April 4, the anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. She also reminded her listeners

that this was a work in progress: "Now I really want some feedback about this poem. Because it's a dream and I feel different ways about it at different times."[38] Here, and across Berlin's historical divides, open spaces, and hiding places, revision not only nourished Lorde's work toward refinement and revelation but allowed her to remain situated within the creative process, spurred on by her dreams and the city.

Notes

1. Karla M. Hammond, "Audre Lorde: Interview," in *Conversations with Audre Lorde,* ed. Joan Wylie Hall, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 32.
2. For more on expressive return, see Tayana Hardin, "Rituals of Return in African American Women's Twentieth Century Literature and Performance" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2012).
3. Audre Lorde, "First Impressions," 1984, box 31, Audre Lorde Papers, Spelman College Archives (hereafter cited as Lorde Papers). My initial reading is based on the last unmarked edit of these drafts.
4. Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (New York: Aperture, 1986).
5. Amitai F. Avi-Ram, "Apo Koinou in Audre Lorde and the Moderns: Defining the Differences," *Callaloo* 26 (Winter 1986): 193–208.
6. All citations to drafts of this poem refer to Audre Lorde, "Berlin Is Hard on Colored Girls," box 31, Lorde Papers.
7. Melba Joyce Boyd, "Politics, Jazz, and the Politics of Aesthetics" in *From Black to Schwarz: Cultural Crossovers between African America and Germany,* ed. Maria Diedrich and Jürgen Heinrichs (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 262.
8. Lorde's use of "colored" may resonate with other such uses in the post–Civil Rights era. See Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (1975; reprint, New York: Scribner, 2010).
9. For more on the dream spaces of Lorde's poems, see Gloria Hull, "Living on the Line: Audre Lorde and Our Dead Behind Us," in *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women,* ed. Cheryl A. Wall (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 150–72.
10. All citations to the published poem refer to Audre Lorde, "Berlin Is Hard on Colored Girls," in *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (New York: Norton, 1997), 375. The poem was originally published in *Our Dead Behind Us* (1986).
11. Throughout her poetry, Lorde draws her poetic imagery from actual experiences and imaginative gestures. She uses the perspective of "I" for herself and to embody witnesses for others. This demands readers' close and open consideration to meaning and subjectivity.
12. Lorde, "Berlin Is Hard," 375.
13. For more on the Berlin Opera, see "Music View; East Berlin Opera Nervously Awaits the Next Act," *New York Times,* June 24, 1990, www.nytimes.com; and Emily Pugh, *The Berlin Wall and the Urban Space and Experience of East and West Berlin, 1961–1989* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: ProQuest, 2008), 62.
14. Lorde, "Berlin Is Hard," 375.

15. Alexis De Veaux, *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde* (New York: Norton, 2004), 337.
16. Lorde, "Berlin Is Hard," 375.
17. Ibid. I learned about the reference to Schultz in a personal interview with her, December 2010.
18. For more on nightingales in poetry, see Jeni Williams, *Interpreting Nightingales: Gender, Class, and Histories* (Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).
19. John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," in *Selected Poems and Letters of Keats,* sel. Robert Gittings, ed. Sandra Anstey (Oxford: Heinemann, 1995), 187–92. Lorde had read Keats critically while she was at Hunter College. See Hammond, "Audre Lorde," 32.
20. Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 151–52, 162.
21. Plötzensee Memorial pamphlet, undated, box 43, Lorde Papers.
22. Audre Lorde, journal entry, July 29, 1984, box 46, Lorde Papers.
23. Ibid.
24. All citations to drafts of this poem refer to Audre Lorde, "This Urn Contains Earth from German Concentration Camps," ca. 1985, box 31, Lorde Papers.
25. *Shoah,* dir. Claude Lanzmann (Paris: New Yorker Films, 1985). Writing about *Shoah,* Lanzmann said, "Making a history was not what I wanted to do. I wanted to construct something more powerful than that. And, in fact, I think that the film, using only images of the present, evokes the past with far more force than any historical document." See Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah: An Oral History of the Holocaust. The Complete Text of the Film* (New York: Pantheon, 1985).
26. All citations to this poem refer to Audre Lorde, "This Urn Contains Earth from German Concentration Camps: Plotzensee Memorial, West Berlin, 1984," in Lorde, *The Collected Poems,* 376–77. The poem was originally published in *Our Dead Behind Us* (1986).
27. For more on Reagan at Bitburg, see Geoffrey Hartman, *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
28. Lorde, "This Urn," 376.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 376–77.
32. Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in *Selected Poems,* 195. I thank fellow members of the critical poetry seminar at the Texas Institute for Literary and Textual Studies for pointing out this connection.
33. Other poems from *Our Dead Behind Us* that contain Berlin themes and imagery include "Diaspora" and "For Jose and Regina."
34. All citations to drafts of this poem refer to Audre Lorde, "East Berlin," 1989–90, box 25, Lorde Papers. All citations to published versions refer to Audre Lorde, "East Berlin," in *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance: Poems, 1987–1992* (New York: Norton, 1993), 50.
35. Lorde, "East Berlin," 50.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. *Audre Lorde—The Berlin Years, 1984 to 1992,* dir. Dagmar Schultz (New York: Third World Newsreel, 2012). The DVD version includes this bonus clip and other special features.