American Political Science Review (2024) 1–13
doi:10.1017/S0003055424000698 © The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of American Political Science Association. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original article is properly cited. The written permission of Cambridge University Press must be obtained prior to any commercial use.

June Jordan's Political Theory of Redesign

LISA BEARD *Western Washington University, United States*

This essay examines June Jordan's design writings to elaborate a political theory of redesign in her work. I show that Jordan's redesign offers political principles for reimagining space at multiple scales and speaks to the question of how more livable, beautiful worlds may be wrought from the material contexts in which we presently live. Against the grain of the dismantling of public goods in the late twentieth century, Jordan re-envisioned public city spaces and housing with dignity and room for human flourishing. Her primary barometer for design was the fullest expression of human aliveness—she insisted that the built environment should "[cherish] as it amplifies the experience of being alive." Jordan's visionary pragmatism anticipates what Deva Woodly calls the "radical Black feminist pragmatism" of the twenty-first century's Movement for Black Lives and speaks to contemporary abolitionist thought and struggles over the future of public goods.

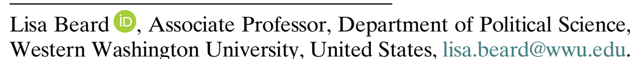
> I hope that we may implicitly instruct the reader in the comprehensive impact of every Where, of any *place.* This requires development of an idea or theory of place in terms of human being; of space designed as the volumetric expression of successful existence between earth and sky; of space cherishing as it amplifies the experience of being alive, the capability of endless beginnings, and the entrusted liberty of motion; of particular space inexorably connected to multiple spatialities, a particular space that is open-receptive and communicant yet sheltering particular life.
>
> — June Jordan, "Letter to R. Buckminster Fuller (1964)"[1]

At a February 1991 antiwar speech in Oakland, June Jordan protested that the Gulf War to date had cost 56 billion dollars, and proposed an alternative budget: "One billion dollars a day for seven days for Oakland!" (1992, 182). When a skeptical reporter suggested that, surely, she must have meant one *million* dollars a day, Jordan affirmed that she absolutely meant one billion a day. "That's the bill," she declared, "that's our bill for housing and drug rehabilitation and books in the public schools and hospital care and all of that good stuff. It's a modest proposal … It's a bargain! Seven billion dollars on the serious improvement of American life in Oakland versus fifty-six billion dollars for death and destruction in Iraq" (182). She later reflected on her heavy grief that the reporter "could not contemplate the transfer of his and my aggregate resources from death to life as a reasonable idea" (183).

Here and elsewhere, when Jordan insists that resources be taken from U.S. imperialist institutions and be channeled instead to social welfare, she lays claim on public resources against the tide of the *antistate state's* military and carceral spending in the late twentieth century (Gilmore 2007a, 245; 2007b, 43–44).[2] Her interventions elucidate not only an antiwar and abolitionist mathematics or economics but also a kind of physics in which activists envision the construction of beautiful and dignified affordable housing, for instance, rather than the death and destruction of Iraqi lives, or of opening a community college rather than a prison on a parcel of land. They summon the sound and warmth of human voices filling city sidewalks rather than locked away in cages (People's Paper Co-op and Trinidad 2021). They refuse the grip of massive public investment in military and carceral spending in the public imagination (People's Budget LA Coalition 2021). Sound, energy, and matter can manifest this way instead of that way, they remind us. They map the taking of materials (energy, matter, funds, space) from war, prisons, and policing—to make a *something else* that is centered on public welfare and human flourishing.

As Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2022, 137) explains, justice is spatial: the forms of relationships, political practices, and economic structures that must change to end oppression are all sited in space. "[F]reedom is a place," she insists, and at the heart of every social justice struggle is, as she puts it, "a geographical imperative" (474, 137). Gilmore summons a political *we* of "ordinary people" who craft places of freedom, again and again, "mak[ing] freedom provisionally," experimentally, and "imperatively" (Gilmore 2022, 6), working out how "to stretch or diminish social and spatial forms to create room for their lives" (Gilmore and Gilmore 2016, 11).

How can we make life-affirming places with what is here now, in relationship to larger structures, in


Lisa Beard, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Western Washington University, United States, lisa.beard@wwu.edu.

Received: September 11, 2023; revised: January 15, 2024; accepted: May 20, 2024.

[1] Jordan (1995, 28).

[2] The *antistate state* is a structure of organized state abandonment of welfare provision together with intense occupation by state power. See Gilmore (2007b, 43–4).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000698 Published online by Cambridge University Press

relationship to boundaries of creation? What is the practice of "stretch[ing] or diminish[ing] social and spatial forms" to create room for life? I turn to June Jordan for answers. Primarily remembered for her writings and activism on issues from gendered violence to U.S. foreign policy to contemporary racial politics, Jordan was also deeply attentive to political questions of design, architecture, and space. Her design writings home in on the placeness of creating a more livable, beautiful, and just society, and the *processes* of making such places. Jordan's writings turn our attention to the "scenes and not just the subjects of democratic life" (Honig 2017, 91). She compels us to consider how we can enact place-making with each other as a political practice so that we can live more beautifully.

While environmental design, place, and space appear throughout Jordan's oeuvre, it is between 1964 and the mid 1970s that she attends most closely to these themes.[3] She wrote against the backdrop of the twinned divestment in public goods/the welfare state and investment in prison expansion and ongoing sustenance of the military behemoth; and amidst the destruction of Black, Brown, and working-class urban neighborhoods to build the U.S. suburbs. In this period, Jordan collaborated with architect R. Buckminster Fuller on *Skyrise for Harlem* (1964)[4]; worked as a Research Associate and writer for a year and a half at Mobilization for Youth (MfY), Inc. in New York City's Lower East Side (1966–1967)[5]; was awarded a Prix de Rome Fellowship in Environmental Design in Italy (1970); published her novella *His Own Where* (1971) and her children's book *New Life: New Room* (1975); and drafted her unfinished novel *Okay Now*. Taken together, Jordan's writings on the built environment reimagine space at scales from large, collectively held rural lands (*Okay Now*) to entire city boroughs (*Skyrise*) to specific neighborhoods (MfY planning reports) to a New York brownstone and its city block (*His Own Where*) to the space of a single bedroom in a public housing apartment (*New Life: New Room*).

All of these projects are projects in *redesign.* They take what is and make something new. They reimagine, reformulate, rework, remix, recreate. Jordan indexes the consequences of established designs and the toll on human life, particularly on Black life, of these arrangements—from stifling, overstuffed, cramped, and depressing interiors; to fences that ensure that every yard on a Brooklyn block is kept too small; to lethal crosswalks; to the psychological impacts of city grids on people's spirits and political imaginations; to the dismal vacuum of shuttered side street storefronts and corridors that get no sunlight. And she expansively, widely, reimagines those spaces—outside and beyond inherited structures.[6] At the heart of Jordan's redesign—and one of the things that this essay excavates—is her political commitment to the *fullest/widest expression of human life*, particularly for Black people and poor people of all ages who are structurally denied spatial dignity and choice.

While political science has often left matters of design and the built environment to the fields of urban planning, geography, or architecture (Bell and Zacka 2020), Jordan points those of us who are concerned with power and justice to take seriously "the comprehensive impact of place" and the significance of place-making and design in building just futures. For Jordan, design is not merely aesthetic, as it is often conceptualized in political theory, but an important mode of shaping, living within, moving through, and responding to the world. Jordan instructs us on the spatial dimensions of injustice and justice.[7] This means attending not only to how place has been and is turned against people or how "inequality [is] blazoned into the geographic landscape" (Smith in McKittrick 2006, 6), but also what transformations in our physical environments would enable and nurture dignity, justice, and self-determination for all people.

In Jordan's redesign, we can find an elaboration of spatial dimensions of racial justice in Black feminist terms. Her redesign is a political project of cherishing Black aliveness and centering Black worldmaking, including Black children's worldmaking. It is an egalitarian and democratic project anchored in a care ethic and a commitment to liberation (Jordan 1995, xxii; Woodly 2022, 62, 84–5) that anticipates what Deva Woodly has called the *radical Black feminist pragmatism* of the twenty-first century's Movement for Black Lives. For Jordan, as I will show in this article, the work of redesign focuses attention on the *for*—as in *for what* and *for whom*—which is to say, it focuses attention on the kind of worlds we want to build (1995, Foreword).

[3] See also Jordan's essay "Park Slope: Mixing It Up For Good" in *Technical Difficulties* (1992).

[4] In this essay, I refer to the larger project in italics—*Skyrise for Harlem*—as well as the specific article from this project published in *Esquire* in 1965 and her prefatory essays and published letter to Fuller in *Civil Wars* ([1981] 1995). *Skyrise* was a visionary project whose story and scope Cheryl J. Fish (2007), Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2012), Charles Davis III ("Representing the 'Architextural' Musings of June Jordan," *Race and Architecture* blog, November 26, 2013), Claire Schwartz (2020), and others have worked to restore in the public imagination to intervene where Jordan's name and leadership in the project have been deleted. See also the proceedings of the Princeton School of Architecture's Women in Design and Architecture's February 2022 conference, "June Jordan: Pleasures of Perspectives."

[5] June Jordan, "Letter to Ms. T.H. Rucker—Black Environmental Studies Team, Yale Oct 31, 1972," Box 21 Folder 1, *June Jordan Papers 1936–2002* [hereafter *Jordan Papers*], Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study.

[6] See also Deshonay Dozier (2022) on Black spatial visions.

[7] As Katherine McKittrick (2006, 6) writes, "[p]revailing spatial organization gives a coherency and rationality to uneven geographic processes and arrangements: a city plan, for example, can (and often does) reiterate social class distinctions, race and gender segregation, and (in)accessibility to and from specific districts; the flows of money, spaces, infrastructure, and people are uneven, in that the built environment privileges, and therefore mirrors, white, heterosexual, capitalist, and patriarchal geopolitical needs." See also McKittrick on Du Bois' account of how the color line is manifested in part by and produced in relation to the physical environment (22).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000698 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Jordan began her first collaborative design project in 1964 as a response to the accumulating crisis of white violence against Black life (1995, xxv). This was in the immediate aftermath of the police killing of 15-year-old Jimmy Powell and the 1964 Harlem Uprising as well as in the ongoing context of the murderous slow violence of Harlem's disintegrating and rat-infested housing, destructive educational systems, overloaded roadways channeling freight through residential neighborhoods, and ongoing abuses by the New York City's Tactical Police Force (Jordan 1965, 110–1; 1995, Foreword). She sought to undo the geographies of anti-Black racism in Harlem through creating a dignified, urban landscape that cherished its residents. She insisted on a wide horizon: flourishing. In her redesign, Harlemites would have far more than bare survival: they would have thriving, they would have self-determination in the full expression of their aliveness. Across Jordan's redesign work, she aimed to mobilize people politically toward community control and care (1995, xxi), but it is particularly in her later texts—her fiction books—that she most explicitly summoned people as political actors who are designers, orienting them to what she called "activist habits of response to environment" (59).

This essay examines a selection of June Jordan's design writings—and particularly *New Life: New Room*—to elaborate a political theory of redesign in her work. *New Life: New Room* (*NLNR*) was Jordan's final published work on design in the decade of her most focused work on environmental design. Conceived while Jordan was on an environmental design fellowship in Rome and published in 1975 with illustrations by Ray Cruz—then reprinted in *Ms.* magazine and anthologized in *Stories for Free Children* (1982)—the book would also be her seventh of eight children's books.[8] Through a fictional narrative of three children who live in a public housing apartment, the room they share, and the "flexible environment" that they create through a collective process and "the joy of their inventiveness," *New Life: New Room* makes ontological and political claims about the design of built environments, the significance of self-determination and beauty in places of life and living, and possibilities of physical change in these environments.[9]

Elements of Jordan's theory of redesign include (1) "aliveness" as a guiding priority and primary rubric of analysis; (2) a disposition toward world-making that is committed to mixing vision/imagination with resources at hand and in view of conditions as they presently are; (3) a tolerance for and encouragement of the messiness of experimentation; and (4) attention to connectedness and sharing and a rejection of privacy and loneliness. I show that Jordan's redesign not only orients us toward normative political principles for reimagining our built environment at multiple scales, but also toward ways to create with what is here now in the present—with the weight and heft of concrete and sidewalks and existing structures; with everything as it actually is in this very moment. In the first part of the article, I examine how Jordan designed against the grain of the dismantling of public goods and public housing in the late twentieth century, re-envisioning public city spaces and public housing with dignity, beauty, greenspace, and room for human flourishing. In the second section, I show that Jordan's visionary pragmatism anticipates the contemporary Movement for Black Lives' political philosophy of radical Black feminist pragmatism, as traced by Deva Woodly. The next sections study Jordan's primary barometer for design: the fullest expression of human aliveness, examining her theory that the built environment should "[cherish] as it amplifies the experience of being alive" and her account of connection, quiet, and loneliness. The concluding section traces how Jordan's design work is moved by a love that is worldbuilding and identifies the contributions of Jordan's design writings to abolitionist thought and contemporary debates about the future of public goods.

PUBLIC HOUSING FUTURITY

> 4. We want decent housing fit for the shelter of human beings.
>
> — October 1966 Black Panther Party Platform and Program (Foner 2014, 2)

In her design writing in the 1960s and early 1970s, Jordan reimagined public housing and city streetscapes against a public policy backdrop of the vast destruction of low-income urban housing, massive forcible displacement of urban Black residents, and ongoing federal infrastructural investment in suburbs. She reimagined these spaces against the tide of demonological national discourses about public housing in that era. During the 1950s and 60s, federally assisted "urban renewal" programs devastated the neighborhoods of communities of color in cities across the U.S. (Lipsitz 2018, 6).[10] The impacts of urban renewal on Black communities cannot be overstated. Tens of thousands of Black families were forcibly removed from their homes and neighborhoods and faced an only worsening crisis in housing shortages in the central cities across the 1950s and 60s into the 1970s (Taylor 2019, 41–3). Ninety percent of low-income housing units that were removed across the years of the urban renewal program were never replaced, the vast majority—over 80%—of the cleared land going to highway construction

[8] Finding Aid, *Jordan Papers.*

[9] June Jordan, "February 25, 1971 Book Proposal," Box 21, Folder 2, *Jordan Papers.*

[10] Federal funding for these programs tripled in 1959 and then doubled in 1961 with John F. Kennedy's election (Taylor 2019, 41–3; see also U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 1995).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000698 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(connecting the suburbs to the city) and commercial municipal and industrial projects (Lipsitz 2018, 7).

Meanwhile, as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2019, 12) explains, public housing had, by the 1960s, become "untenable" as a government program and political issue. Maligned as socialist and profligate by the private real estate industry, blamed and demonized by conservative and liberal politicians as enabling the "welfare poor," and physically deteriorating from accumulating years of government neglect, public housing was a public good under threat. Racist tropes and old schemas of the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor blamed African American tenants for the deterioration of public housing and shrouded structural issues of residential segregation, poverty, unemployment, and public policy decisions meant to protect private enterprise (Taylor 2019, 229). In the summer of 1972, two massive buildings in the St. Louis Pruitt-Igoe projects—heralded as a paragon of modern architectural genius when they were constructed in the early 1950s—were demolished before a national television audience, the broadcast confirming narratives that public housing—and its residents—were "beyond repair and hope" (228). As Taylor explains, the future of public housing was in crisis by the early 1970s, with the spectacle of the Pruitt-Igoe demolition "cast[ing] a large shadow" over contemporary debates about race, housing, and federal intervention (176). It was at this time that federal housing programming shifted away from public housing construction to what Taylor has called "predatory inclusion" in FHA-assisted homeownership (5). At the start of 1973, President Nixon had declared a moratorium on housing and community development assistance, halting funding for numerous housing projects until the ban was lifted in the summer of 1974 when the Section 8 housing program was developed (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 1995, viii).

Instead of housing, the state built prisons at home and tanks to send abroad. Here, "instead" is not a simple turn of phrase. In fact, it was the same governmental and financial institutions that shifted construction and financing away from public education, health care, affordable housing, and environmental protection, *toward* financing prisons and policing as "catchall solutions" to social and economic crises (including the steep unemployment of the 1970s) and toward the military industrial complex (Gilmore 2022, 207). As Ruth Wilson Gilmore has shown, the firms that built schools, hospitals, highways, and other municipal infrastructure in the 1950s–70s and the banks that had organized that financing pivoted toward the construction of prisons, and the military industrial complex/permanent warfare state was built from the very institutional foundations and funds of the welfare state (Gilmore 2022, 207, 248).

Against condemning national discourses—narratives that were mobilized to divest in rather than reimagine/repair/redesign/renovate public housing—Jordan in her larger oeuvre claimed some of the possibilities of public housing—particularly in her childhood memoir, *Soldier*; in *Skyrise for Harlem*; and in *New Life: New Room.*[11] In *Soldier*, she testified to her earliest years living in newly built, well-designed, thoughtfully situated, and graceful Harlem River Public Houses, which were, she remembers, "uniformly neat and modern," with new appliances, radiator heat, curving pedestrian pathways, grass, and planted trees. Jordan praised the houses' natural light, the coherence of the development, and the proximity of the calm, slow-moving Harlem River. Her family moved in, she recounts,

> only days after city officials cut the inaugural ribbon.
>
> I was still a baby.
>
> It was going to seem like paradise to me. All of the low-rise red brick buildings matched rather nicely, and sapling maple trees asserted themselves in the freshly planted dirt that bordered pedestrian paths. To the west, space enough for four lanes of traffic created a very generous conduit for natural light. To the east, a gigantic sloping lawn drew you down to the river where tugboats and occasional cargo freighters floated by.
>
> That man-made valley of light to one side and the slow flowing of the river on the other never failed to salvage a morning or an afternoon from any sense of confinement or doom.
>
> Whenever I was taken outside I felt like singing and, very often, I did just that. (Jordan 2000, 16)

These features—natural light, vista, spaciousness, coherence, green space, a relationship to the river, and beauty—came together in a "benign design" that Jordan returned to repeatedly in her work (Jordan 2000, 44). She made clear, too, the stakes of this housing as being a "necessity and safe harbor" for her own and other West Indian and Black American families who lived in the Harlem River Public Houses. She contrasts the years her family lived there—when she does not remember any household tensions about money or quality of life—to her family's later move to a deteriorating brownstone townhouse in Brooklyn which her father had purchased (Jordan 2000, 44). She writes that the move marked the start of her father's brutal physical abuse and her years of regularly being sick.

Where *Soldier* remembers and claims a story in New York City's public housing history that had beauty and safety in design, *Skyrise* imagined a future of expanded public housing. When asked by *Esquire* to write a piece on the 1964 Harlem uprising, Jordan did not write the essay they expected—instead, she collaborated with architect R. Buckminster Fuller to imagine a transformation of Harlem's built environment (Jordan 1965, 109). The 2,500-word essay that

[11] On reclaiming and redirecting state institutions, see also the Public Reconstruction project (publicreconstruction.org) and Bonnie Honig (2017, 92). James Baldwin pens a condemning critique of public housing in his essay "Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A Letter from Harlem" ([1960] 1985, 210), arguing that as long as the *place* of Harlem is politically–geographically structured by anti-Black racism (with white people thinking Black people are not "good enough to live anywhere else"), no number of "improvements" can resolve the crisis.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000698 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Jordan ultimately published is a condensed synthesis of a massive design project. At the heart of it was the construction of fifteen 100-story structures replete with apartments with hanging gardens, balconies, natural light, and views of the rivers, as well as workshop spaces for residents' creative endeavors, and shops and local businesses. A core principle Jordan centered from early on in the design project—and an intervention into prevailing public policy—was that Harlem residents would not be pushed out in the redevelopment process. "Too often," Jordan wrote to Fuller, "urban renewal meant Negro removal, as the street saying phrased it. Serious improvement of a physical community where Black people lived almost always meant the literal eviction of Black families while redevelopment took place and then exclusion of these families by means of subsequently high rents they could not afford" (1995, 24). Jordan and Fuller conceived of a plan by which the fifteen structures would be built *above* current housing, and then residents would move up into their new dwellings (1965, 111). Only then would the old, dilapidated housing be destroyed. Between the tall domes a fully interconnected set of curvilinear greenways would all lead to water—"an arterial system psychologically operative from any position in Harlem" (Jordan 1995, 27).

New Life: New Room also thinks with public housing, but at a very different scale than *Skyrise*, and the story unfolds within more severe constraints in its parameters of possible change. Where in *Skyrise*, Jordan and Fuller completely replace the existing 720 square foot housing units in Harlem with 1,200 square foot units, and where in her 1967 collaborative redevelopment proposal prepared for Mobilization for Youth Jordan envisioned large apartments to meet the needs of a neighborhoods' large families, *NLNR* works *within* the unmodified walls of the too-small apartment. It imagines how children can redesign within the small public housing apartment that the government has not rebuilt. In the story, young Tyrone (age 10), Rudy (age 9), and Linda (age 6) Robinson are the three young protagonists—siblings who will begin to share a room in their apartment once their new baby sibling arrives. In the opening pages of the story, Jordan's characters convey the felt pressure of the space, and their lack of access to anything larger. The children all feel "angry about the house getting so much smaller all the time" while they grow and their family grows (Jordan 1975, 2). And while Mr. Robinson has talked time and again with the housing agency staff to request a larger apartment, he explains that they "don't let you have a reason to hope. They just tell you they're sorry, they're sorry" (6–7).

In preparation for their new baby's arrival, Mrs. and Mr. Robinson decide that Linda will need to move out of her spot in the living room where she sleeps on the fold-out couch; the three children will move into the parents' larger room, and the parents will use what had been Tyrone and Rudy's room. The arrangement is Mrs. Robinson's idea, and Mr. Robinson suggests that they let the children figure out how to set up their new room themselves, with the parents there to help if asked. As I will elaborate in a later section, the book bears witness to the children as they design a shared environment together with what they have, in a way that can most fully support their needs and their full expression and experience of their aliveness. While Jordan does not in any of her projects work with a blank slate—her designs are envisioned always in relationship to present economic, material, and political conditions—*NLNR* sheds light at a particularly granular level on the practice of worldmaking in relationship to the world *as it is right now*.

WORLDMAKING AND PRAGMATIC IMAGINATION

In Jordan's political theory of redesign, worldmaking is enacted within the existing world and in relationship to it. Jordan's projects are visionary, and, in developing each of them, she deliberates on and shapes her design in relationship to present material, political, and economic constraints. Her worldmaking engages with these boundaries/contexts in the act of creation.

In Jordan and Fuller's *Skyrise* project, for example, they did not only create a design but also mapped out a timeline for the preparation for mass production of structural parts, prioritizing economies of scale in that production (they propose converting wartime manufacturing plants to build components for low-income housing), delineating financing considerations, and articulating the intersections of their plan with New York City's political and policy context (linking the plan, for example, to contemporary policy endeavors announced by city officials) (Jordan 1965, 111; 1995, 24, 27). Her collaborative redevelopment proposal for the Lower East Side employed a modular design that would be financially feasible even given the likelihood that large sums of funding for low-income housing would not be available all at once; work with the unpredictability of when certain parcels would be available for purchase; adapt to and incorporate architectural innovations that would arise along the years of the project's implementation; and survive interruptions over the years of the project.[12] In *New Life: New Room*, the kids have "next-to-zero funds for their room-organizing use" (as she writes in her book proposal) and no new equipment besides the cot their father purchases for Linda and the poster paint and brushes he buys for them (1975, 52).

Jordan's design orientation was at once visionary and pragmatic. Her political visions for remaking the worlds of neighborhoods, public spaces, and apartment interiors rethink and reimagine social-spatial norms and inheritances from the past *and* they are anchored in conditions as they presently are. She works with what she has or with what her readers might have.

Woodly identifies pragmatic imagination as one of seven constitutive elements of radical Black feminist

[12] "Introduction," 1–15, Box 75, Folder 2, *Jordan Papers.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000698 Published online by Cambridge University Press

pragmatism, which she identifies as the political philosophy of the contemporary Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) (2022, 50). She identifies this as a new political philosophy of the twenty-first century—one that contains elements of political thought that came before, but is a new formation (49). We can see how Jordan's visionary pragmatism in design in the 1960s and 1970s anticipates M4BL's pragmatic imagination in the early twenty-first century. Woodly explains that pragmatic imagination, or "[i]magination toward action," is "speculative, not make-believe; the world it conjures may be fantastic, but it is practicable" (50). She explains that

> We often think of imagination as flights of fancy. Not so. Imagination is the faculty or action of forming new ideas, or images or concepts of external objects not present to the senses. Imagination is the creative divergence from the well-trod habitual and lexical paths that are set in the common sense of a given time and place. Political imaginaries are very important and have all kinds of uses. We imagine communities. We imagine the good life. We imagine our futures. Pragmatic imagination also understands that the circumstances that currently condition our lives were also once imagined. In this way, imagination is a normal political faculty, its opening is useful for political change and its closure is useful for the maintenance of status quo relations of power and privilege…. the imagination of social movements is political … because when movements like the Movement for Black Lives insist that another world is possible, they do so with a philosophically pragmatist, not utopian, conviction. (52)

The visionary and pragmatic principles of Jordan's design work have been misread and her firm intention to see her redesigns *enacted* has been obscured, Jordan recounts in a retrospective essay (1995, 25). Without her permission, *Esquire* editors retitled her "Skyrise for Harlem" essay as "Instant Slum Clearance," credited the design entirely to Fuller, and captioned the project as a "utopian plan." Jordan bristled at the branding "utopian" as dismissing the design as fanciful, unrealistic, and purely speculative, whereas the design was intended to be at once visionary, transformative, and *implemented.* Refusing the classification as utopian, Jordan explained retrospectively that she and Fuller conceived of the project "as a form of federal reparations to the ravaged peoples of Harlem," and "fully expected its enactment" (1995, 24–5).[13] She explained that it was in this spirit that they "worried over every problem and detail related to maximal speed, practicality, and economy" (25). As Woodly (2022, 53) explains, pragmatic imagination "demands that those who desire the change make the way. This includes not only imagining what could be, but also, crucially, plotting a course and designing the process and means that those involved will use to make strides toward their goals."

That Jordan and Fuller's design was crafted with full expectation of enactment lays explicit claim on federal reparations to Harlem residents, insists on the participation of Harlem residents in "the birth of their new reality," demands the re-purposing of U.S. manufacturing capacity to meet the needs of the people, centers urban redesign *for* Harlem residents rather than as a project of their gentrified displacement, and prioritizes parks, views, and greenspace (Jordan 1995, 26). Jordan refuses to forfeit or discard as foregone or inevitable the entrenched divestment and the scattered and negligent urban planning in Harlem, and she plots the path from the present to a future design that will work to repair past harm.[14]

Esquire's erasure of Jordan's lead role in the project and their dismissal of the design as utopian rather than seeing it as a *plan* should be understood as part of larger histories of white supremacist ideology in which, as Katherine McKittrick explains (2006, 9), Black placemaking is rendered unintelligible and invisible and a "black sense of place" is concealed. In theorizing the way *Esquire* edited her piece, Jordan identifies the term "utopian" as functioning as a part of a larger misframing that located her design work in a distant realm of the purely speculative. Even more widely across her work, she does not use the word *utopia* to name just futures she and others imagine. She does use the word *vision*—particularly in bearing witness to the political vision of Sandinista revolutionaries,[15] and in bearing witness to Black South Africans who "have cultivated a concept of dignity and a vision of a non-racist egalitarian society" (1985, 147)—to describe ways of living (relationships of power, spatial designs, economies) that are not yet fully here (but our longing for them propels our forward action), and which can be in different stages of having been imagined (some more fully imagined, some still in an earlier stage).

Among Jordan's design writings, *New Life: New Room* and her novella *His Own Where* center Black children in particular as worldmakers—as designers who critically assess conditions, reimagine, invent, collaborate, build, and create. She wrote *New Life: New Room* "to cheer and to assist" children and their parents, showing three children "changing things in a room so that the three people can have what they need" and

[13] See Marcus Anthony Hunter's definition of *spatial reparations* as "a restorative and reparative geography of socioeconomic and political opportunity, particularly for those displaced and dispossessed by American slavery and their descendants" (2021).

[14] Angela Davis has invoked the term "utopia" in a different sense, to mean a future that *is* possible and that can orient present action (Davis 1971). See also Davis et al. (2022, 15) on radical imaginaries as well as on how the label "utopian" is often leveled against abolitionists.

[15] In a 1985 essay, Jordan observes that "[t]he Sandinista victory was more than a revolt against the unbearable: it was an altogether conscious movement toward a fully conceived vision of another, a better way to live," (70) and elsewhere reflects on how under oppressive conditions "the people of Nicaragua have always made room in their lives for the preservation of a vision of what they positively, passionately hope to create: the ways that they hope to share the farming of the land, the responsibility for production, the administration of schools, the political representation of their numerous political parties" (1985, 147).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000698 Published online by Cambridge University Press

encouraging parents to support their children as designers.[16] Jordan explained that she wrote *His Own Where*—whose 15-year-old protagonist critically evaluates and works to reimagine hospitals, streetscapes, sidewalks, and home environments and mobilizes others to join him—as "a means of familiarizing kids with activist principles of urban redesign, or, in other words, activist habits of response to environment" (Jordan 1995, 59). We can understand the two books as companion texts to Jordan's *Skyrise for Harlem*—together mapping not only multiple scales of but also intergenerational roles in urban planning and environmental design. The two books appeal to children and teenagers as political actors with a critical role in collaboratively shaping and changing their environment for collective well-being, connection, creativity, and community.

As Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2016, 24) has explained, June Jordan saw children's literature as "one part of a holistic intergenerational imperative"—she endeavored to be an author accountable to young people. KaaVonia Hinton-Johnson (2004) has situated Jordan's interventions into children's literature in a line that includes the 1920–1921 periodical *Brownie's Book*, edited by W. E. B. Du Bois, and that includes Black women writers who primarily have written to adult audiences but also to children, including Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ntozake Shange, and others. Jordan encouraged authors of children's literature to "write stories to correct the genocidal misinformation about reality" being taught to children and adults through the corporate media (Jordan in Gumbs 2016, 24). In her 1977 speech, "The Creative Spirit: Children's Literature," delivered at UC Berkeley to an audience of educators and authors, Jordan (2016, 17) explained that "children are the ways that the world begins again and again" and that this guides her in thinking about her writing and its purpose. Across multiple essays and in her memoir, Jordan contends with children not as prepolitical beings but as real, full people, who she aims to meet in their specificity, as "this child and that child—rather than as Black children wholly predictable and comprehensible in the light of statistical commonplace" (1995, 38). Across many of her political essays, Jordan attends carefully to the conditions—familial, local, national—in which children live that they have no choice over and no power to change, and she thinks with them and reveres their own poetic and theoretical accounts about their conditions and what might be possible.[17]

In envisioning the book that would become *NLNR*, Jordan articulates her dedication and accountability to children like Tyrone, Linda, and Rudy and to their parents. A primary goal of the book, she explains, is to "[provide] children and their parents with believable episodes of physical change in the service of human pleasure and health, changes that do not cost money."[18] In the project, she invites the reader into a powerful political and spatial imaginary, but she distinctly commits to crafting an imaginary that is visionary *and* credible; expansive *and* realistic; life-changing *and* accessible. That her endeavor and practice are to furnish specifically *believable* episodes of change locates the book's political imagination in a self-conscious relationship to present material conditions and contexts. These are possibilities that, to the young reader, are convincing and may well be actualizable at this moment. They do not cost money. They do require Tyrone, Rudy, and Linda's creativity, eye for beauty, and collaboration. Jordan thus brings our attention to the stakes of the relationship between *stories* of change in our world—stories about new possibilities for collective processes, decision-making, and creating shared environments that nourish life—and *what it means for such stories to be wrought from the material contexts in which we presently live.* How better to mobilize creators of new and just futures than to story and illustrate action in present conditions? What could be more likely to create just futures than to start to enact them here and now—in every nook of our world, at every scale? Jordan's story envisions a way of creating space for expansive aliveness within certain bounds of present conditions. Even as the changes are within certain bounds, they also *change* present conditions and make them more life-giving, and they are seeds of and precursors for a set of redesign practices that can be scaled up.

"SPACE CHERISHING AS IT AMPLIFIES THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING ALIVE"

When Jordan conducted political ethnographic research on a series of walking tours of nine blocks of the Lower East Side for a redevelopment proposal in 1966, her central metric—her central optic in her study and analysis of space—was *life.* Where space is set up well, life can and does thrive—a space can "[cherish] as it amplifies the experience of being alive" (Jordan 1995, 28). Jordan studied *where* life was happening in communal spaces. Her barometer was not only visual but sonic—she listened for laughter, hearing it vividly on a walking tour in just two of the many otherwise dull teen social clubs, and on another walking tour, in two pool rooms. She noted where people were chatting ("[in] front of Spanish grocery stores, men sat on wooden boxes and chatted about the passersby, quietly"; and young men discussed "cars, cars, cars" while they worked on their cars on the street sides) and where people were silent.[19] She observed where children played (using discarded mattresses as trampolines) and where they did not (on the "forbidding,

[16] June Jordan, "February 25, 1971 Book Proposal," *Jordan Papers.*

[17] See, for example, Jordan's essays "Old Stories: New Lives [1978]" and "The Voice of the Children [1967]" in *Civil Wars* (1995); and *The Voice of the Children* (Jordan and Bush 1970).

[18] June Jordan "February 25, 1971 Book Proposal."

[19] June Meyer, "Nov 13, 1966 Report #2," 1; Box 75, Folder 2, *Jordan Papers.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000698 Published online by Cambridge University Press

gray" playgrounds).[20] She indexed where life was cramped and constrained, noting the lack of places to sit except on benches facing busy traffic, the marked absence of girls and women on sidewalks and in eateries, the dark and deserted side streets, the uncollected garbage, the empty storefronts, the lack of stores selling fresh produce or living plants.[21]

Jordan saw redesign of the neighborhood as critical and urgent for the lives of its residents because in its existing design, the neighborhood felt like it was in a "suspended momentum as though life has been caught on the furthermost fire escape railing of the highest roof and meanwhile the people wait below but only stand or sit or wash clothes waiting for life of any kind to fall on them."[22] She studied how the inherited design was stifling full human expansion and expression, and she took it all to the table for redesign. In her report, she recommends adding dancing space to the floorplans of record stores; adding semi-sheltered spaces for people to tinker with their cars; expanding the small restaurants to have room not just for stools (where only men are sitting) but also tables (where women might come in to eat); designing space for lively bazaars and street vendors; adding outdoor sitting areas throughout the neighborhood so women would come outside and sit in front of their apartments; and redesigning playgrounds to be inviting and bright.[23] She emphatically observes that laundromats "seem to be a natural magnet" for residents of all ages and genders, and proposes they should each be built with a "gigantic community room bordered by washing machines" with space for "checkers, magazine reading, ping pong, washing machines, coffee and coke vending machines, and small café tables and chairs."[24] Across her proposal, Jordan prioritizes abundant natural light for daytime, and streetlights for the night. In the day, people should have the sunlight on their faces. In the evening, the streets should be a "glowing invitation" to stroll.[25]

In *His Own Where*, young Buddy has a keen eye for those public and interior designs that threaten life and those that cherish and amplify life. His beloved father has recently been hit by a car as he crossed an intersection and is in critical condition in the hospital. His father had nurtured Buddy's eye and imagination for redesign. Buddy lives in a brownstone townhouse with an interior completely reimagined and rebuilt with his father, a work in progress with soaring ceilings, tall windows, skylights, stained glass, minimal and essential furnishings, and brightly painted stairs. The space enlivens the spirit and allows it to expand with grace. While his father is in the hospital, Buddy continues to work on the house, and spends the food money sent by relatives on paint, tools, and flower seeds, and plants roses, chrysanthemums, marigolds, and a pear tree. He convinces his neighbors on his block to take down the fences dividing their backyards, so that they have one large park-like space to share (52).

Life and the full expression of human aliveness is, too, at the heart of the Robinson children's design of their room in *New Life: New Room.* As Jordan explains in her plans for the book, "a room/an environment is beautiful and magical when it follows from (adapts to) the needs and uses of the human beings who occupy the space, and not the other way round."[26] Indeed, *NLNR* engages her young (and adult) readers as *designers* in this orientation; engaging them with the question of what are the needs and activities of the particular humans who occupy a space—and how can the space be set up to nurture their fullness? In this story, these are the needs of the three Robinson children. This could include, as Jordan imagines in her proposal, "a coziness on rainy days, a cleared plane area for multiple games when friends come by, an area for secrets, an area for experiments and discoveries, [and] an arrangement that permits one to read while two play cards, etc."[27] They need, as she describes in *NLNR*, to be able to whisper with each other at night without their parents hearing them; to snuggle and be comforted in times of fear or discomfort; "something alive like goldfish or some baby plants that they could take care of, and help to grow"; and they need a sense of spaciousness—they need brightness and light (Jordan 1975, 46). "Maximal aliveness" here includes nurturing, beauty in our surroundings, safety, creative exploration and expression, collective decision-making, self-determination, connection, play, and fun.

Some of what is required in the children's redesign process is to disassemble/remove/repurpose those inherited structures and objects that get in the way of living together, living with spaciousness, and their ability to shape and create in the space. The children remove the imposing structure of the large wooden bureau in the room to, as Jordan plans in her book proposal, reclaim wall and floor space, "to lighten the feeling of the room, and to increase the pleasing sense that this is 'our room'—where we control/invent/delimit/color/find what we want."[28] In the proposal, Jordan envisions the children inventing under-the-bed drawers out of apple boxes, an elegantly functional design that costs no money. In the book, after negotiations with their father, the children file the dresser drawers under the bed, now painted in bright colors, and discard the larger frame. They also discard many of their toys.

These are collective processes. In the book, the children learn (as Jordan puts it in the book proposal) "the health and safety of learning to live really close together—as we all will have to learn, pretty quick."[29] This learning includes negotiation, experimentation,

[20] June Meyer, "Nov 27, 1966," *Jordan Papers.*
[21] June Meyer, "Nov 13, 1966 Report #2," 2, *Jordan Papers.*
[22] June Meyer, "Nov 13, 1966 Report #2," 3, *Jordan Papers.*
[23] June Meyer, "Notes Towards a Cultural Study of the Demonstration Area November 27, 1966," 1, Box 75 Folder 2, *Jordan Papers.*
[24] June Meyer, "Nov 13, 1966 Report #2," 3; and "Nov 27, 1966," Box 75, Folder 2, *Jordan Papers.*
[25] June Meyer, "Nov 13, 1966 Report #2," 3, *Jordan Papers.*

[26] June Jordan "February 25, 1971 Book Proposal," 1.
[27] June Jordan "February 25, 1971 Book Proposal," 1.
[28] June Jordan, "February 25, 1971 Book Proposal," 1.
[29] June Jordan, "February 25, 1971 Book Proposal," 2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000698 Published online by Cambridge University Press

FIGURE 1. Illustration by Ray Cruz in June Jordan's *New Life: New Room*, 31–32

and group decision-making about their possessions. Property becomes collectivized. As they explain to their aunt who is concerned about the pile of mixed-up toys, it does not matter if the toys are all mixed together, because they "don't need to know" whose toy is whose anymore. It had been Tyrone's idea that they only keep those items that all three children want to keep and which they all can use "for real" (Jordan 1975, 16). Here, we can hear Jordan's question issued in her 1977 speech, "The Creative Spirit: Children's Literature,"—"What do we have in mind when we give a little girl the three-dimensional replica of a kitchen stove that does nothing at all?" (Jordan 2016, 16). The children quickly agree on items as they sort (keeping a flashlight, dice, comic books, and magnets; and tossing the boys' war toys and Linda's plastic stove and a doll) until they get to Tyrone's blocks, which Linda wants to toss on the grounds that they seemed babyish. The conversation uncovers that Linda has never had a chance to learn how to use the blocks, and Rudy offers to show her, and she offers to show her brothers how to take care of a doll. On these two items, the siblings strike an imperfect compromise (the final plan skewed toward Tyrone's preferences), that in a way gets improved upon when they later plan to get goldfish or some baby plants—something alive (unlike a doll) to take care of.

Their processes are messy, experimental, and emergent. When they cannot agree on a design for painting their windows, they try Rudy's suggestion of a race, as in, "On your mark! Get ready! *Paint!!*" (Figure 1). "And they were off," Jordan writes,

> painting, bumping, spilling, dabbing, dripping, poking, streaming, splashing, red and yellow and blue over the glass.
>
> It got to be very interesting.
>
> After a few minutes they stopped and looked. In fact, the window was beginning to look good, all right. But there was a lot of purple and a lot of green where the colors ran together.
>
> So the children slowed down, a bit, and began to move out of each other's way, so that red or yellow or blue could take its place on the window pane and make the shapes that were smiling, round, happy, large shapes of color that the sunlight would turn to warm and burning color rays like a rainbow bright over the whole room. (Jordan 1975, 33–4)

The children try out one way, then pause and assess the outcomes of their racing approach (mostly purples and greens) and what their approach foreclosed (red, yellow, and blue colors, and shapes). They shift pace (slowed down) and shift process (from speedy competition to more coordination and deliberate collaboration) so that they can have the range of colors and shapes they want.

The affective arc in the story as a whole moves from the children feeling scared, angry, and funny about the upcoming changes in their family and apartment to feeling "excited and scared and strange and crowded and lonely and pleased" at the point when their father moves furniture between the two bedrooms, to feeling "shy and small" as they first face their new room together, to feeling "lucky to live together this way," connected, and ready for their new baby sibling to arrive (Jordan 1975, 22, 25, 52). The changes are disorienting and frightening at first—none of the children want to leave their former places in the house—but through the place-making process, they find a satisfaction, comfort, beauty, and expanded connection.

How should we politically understand Buddy's or the Robinson children's redesign and the expressions and experiences of aliveness that they make room for? How should we understand Buddy's marigold seeds, or the Robinson children's window painting? To answer these questions requires troubling liberal approaches to the problems of violence, harm, and precarity, which focus so often on what Bonnie Honig (2009) calls *mere life*, a politics that reduces us by offering a distorted image of survival and forfeiting what makes life full, affectively meaningful, pleasurable, and politically fecund, as Lida Maxwell has theorized (2017). As Lisa Guenther (2016) and Anna Terwiel (2018, 71) show in their studies of prisoner hunger strike demands and debates about prison temperatures, a politics of mere life or mere biological survival authorizes just a narrow swath of pursuits or demands as politically worthy (e.g., better legal

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000698 Published online by Cambridge University Press

representation) and dismisses as irrelevant, trivial, reformist, or apolitical the pursuit of embodied comfort and pleasure (e.g., demands for art supplies, air-conditioning, expanded visiting privileges, the right to wear sweatsuits) when in fact these latter demands push back against the very ways the modern carceral system functions. Such dismissals, Guenther warns, misunderstand freedom, justice, and the very basis of a life worth living; and she insists on the utmost importance of seeing demands for what she calls “creaturely comforts” as *continuous* with those demands we may already recognize as political (236). To “liberate survival,” as Jasmine Syedullah and Rae Leiner (2021) have put it, we are invited here to understand the continuity of Jordan’s commentary, in her larger oeuvre, on the Sandinista Revolution or defunding the U.S. military, and teenagers planting streetside flower gardens or young children redesigning their room—across all of it she is after a much, much bigger frame than mere life or merely surviving racial capitalism.

Relatedly, where liberal approaches to biopolitical analyses of racism as premature death risk thinking that we have stopped racism with policies that would preserve mere life, Jordan asks “Isn’t there more, though?”[30] Jordan’s horizon in redesign is not non-death but, as Kevin Quashie has put it, “the breadth of being alive” (2021, 11). This is a design that cherishes people’s lives and fosters and enables maximal aliveness—with all of its joy, delight, expression, creation, beauty, and connection. She insists on a racial (and gender, and class) justice that attends to bodily and aesthetic desires, pleasures, self-determination, and creative expression. This is the difference between the cold blue emergency call boxes dotting university campuses which aim to dissuade or respond to attacks, versus Jordan’s vision that sidewalks at night should be “a glowing invitation” to stroll. This is the difference between grim public outdoor space that is set up to be barely functional versus the way Jordan as a baby was so inspired by the open space outside her new home that she would frequently begin to sing. The political vision is, as Angela Davis, Gina Dent, Erica Meiners, and Beth Richie (2022, 91) have put it, “new futures grounded not in violence but in the flourishing of life.”

“JOYFUL WAYS TO LIVE TOGETHER”

The children’s worldmaking in *New Life: New Room* extends Jordan’s meditation—woven across her larger design oeuvre—on collectivity and mutuality against liberal notions of privacy. Some of this she elaborates in *His Own Where*—as when Buddy, who is living alone in his house while his father is in the hospital, reimagines his city block after studying the ways the “fencing separate the people keep every yard too small” (52). Buddy makes a plan and goes around to make it happen. He talks to all his neighbors about tearing the fences down, listening to their concerns about security, and ultimately convincing them to try it:

> Pretty soon the neighbors break the backyard open. Pull the fencing down. Stretch the yard into a park they all will share. Have a great big smoky BarBcue to celebrate. Working the ground with neighbors. Planning the backyard park so there be different things that you can use it for. Buddy be less alone and busy. They have a huge dump of sand somebody bring in and even the older kids spread into it. Have a ball. The men plan how to share the hose they have for waterplay when summer start.
>
> Things looking up. People on the block say hello and talk awhile. (Jordan 2010, 52)

Here, sharing space becomes an antidote to crampedness, loneliness, and despair. The redesign is world-expanding and enlivening. The new design makes room for a multiplicity of activities, for intergenerational fun, and it fosters neighbors being more connected to each other. Buddy, in this time of crisis, is less alone—he becomes connected to his neighbors and he has a role in creating their shared space.

Jordan explains in her plan for *NLNR* “that it is learning joyful ways to live together, literally, that should and can be our ‘private’ concerns.”[31] Jordan rejects white liberal conceptions of privacy, refusing them as deeply at odds with “human pleasure and health.” This is the construction of privacy that is reserved only for some: it is privacy built through the construction of suburbs on unceded lands; it is the pursuit of privacy as the primary concern of a home, as a place to accumulate, retain, and defend the material spoils of “the possessive investment in whiteness” built through land theft and divestment in and surveillance of communities of color and Indigenous communities (Lipsitz 2018). This is privacy in the sense of arranging one’s concerns into preoccupations with a very tiny sphere of political imagination, being chronically distracted and contained, constructing a sense of self imperiled by an “other” who might endanger this privacy, and relying on the police to patrol space (Cacho 2014; Roach and Pinto 2021; Smith 2021). It is the building of life worlds in such spaces, and the thought that life can be controlled by controlling one’s space. This is privacy “as a right and promise that is deeply based in white U.S. values of government, rational self-possession, and property,” as Shoniqua Roach and Samantha Pinto have described (2021, 1). As Lisa Lowe (2015) traces, ideas of privacy in bourgeois domesticity have historically been constituted as an individual possession to be politically protected, as

[30] For the theorization of racism as vulnerability to premature death, see Gilmore (2007a, 28).

[31] June Jordan, “February 25, 1971 Book Proposal.”

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000698 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in "the right to privacy." The so-called private sphere, Lowe explains, was constructed through the transatlantic political economies of slavery and colonialism and was constructed as an object of desire and aspiration for the modern liberal subject (28). These meanings and structures of privacy were constituted through the white settler violation of Black and Indigenous space at multiple scales.[32] To reject the dominant logics of privacy, as *NLNR* and others of Jordan's writings make clear, must not be confused as a dismissal of Black interiority (Quashie 2012) or Black privacy, or an acceptance of the political conditions of state and extralegal surveillance of and intrusion into Black lives. Jordan has us turn toward what Sarah Haley—in reflecting on the legacy of Angela Davis' groundbreaking essay "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" (1972)—has called "the revolutionary interior" (Haley in Haley et al. 2021, 3; see also Roach in Haley et al. 2021, 10).

NLNR offers a reflection on which arrangements in human life produce loneliness and which arrangements foster connection, belonging, and comfort. It is in following Linda, and Linda's reflections about her place in the living room, that Jordan lays this out. As Linda anticipates moving out of the living room, she reflects on how she loved this spot. What she knows about this space is that it is a place everyone comes into and out of, every day. This is where her family would sit, talk, and dance—there was, Linda reflects, "no loneliness in the living room" (Jordan 1975, 12–4). Loneliness is different than quiet or interiority. At the scale of this particular story, the need for quiet is known and accounted for among the needs of the children in their space, along with needs for "an area for secrets" and a place for "one to read while two play cards."[33] Jordan extends her inquiry into loneliness—and where loneliness is and is not located—in the last part of the book, when it is the first night that the three children sleep in their newly set up room. They decide to cable their cot beds together to be better able to whisper in the dark and giggle and not be lonely. They laugh and talk and scare each other and then calm each other down for an hour before they all fall asleep at last (Jordan 1975, 50). The next day, Jordan writes, "[m]orning came with sunlight, and red and yellow and blue colors striped and circled the new room where the children lay, waking up, slowly. It was a beautiful day. It was a beautiful room, very big, and open, and Rudy and Tyrone and Linda felt they were a bunch of lucky people—lucky to live together this way. Rudy was not alone. Tyrone was not alone. And Linda was not alone. They were together in their own room" (Jordan 1975, 52–3).

[32] As Christen Smith (2021, 21) argues, white privacy is constructed through rendering Black women's privacy "impossible" and through the intrusion into Black domestic space by the state and extralegal white violence. As Shoniqua Roach (Haley et al. 2021, 8) explains, "the U.S. 'black household' … remains under discursive and material siege via sociological writings, social policy, state-sanctioned surveillance and invasion."

[33] June Jordan, "February 25, 1971 Book Proposal."

CONCLUSION

Jordan emphasizes the importance of design emerging from the needs of the people who live in a place—and not just their basic survival needs, but their needs for creative expression, recreation, community, contemplation, friendship, nature, beauty, and pleasure. These could be needs for a place for kids to ride bicycles, or elders to sit in the sun outside and talk together, or someone's need to have a quiet place to draw. A way that racism and economic injustice manifest is in placing people's power to meet their needs, even basic needs, at a distant remove (Gilmore 2022, 114). To stay warm, for instance, becomes a matter of "locating the absentee landlord," as Jordan explains (1995, 26). She demonstrates how an aspect of injustice and oppression is that people are denied choice, power, dignity, and safety in their built environment; that the spaces where they live are not set up to nourish and cherish their lives or enable the fullness of their expression and creativity. She insists on the importance of people being able to shape and create their environment where they live, and for that environment to reflect and adapt to their changing needs. Jordan presents the built environment not as something to be left to "expert" city planners, formally trained architects, police commissioners, or real estate investors—but instead summons intergenerational political actors to envision and lay claim together to redesigns that would cherish and amplify their lives. She stories and models the political practices of "activist habits of response to [the] environment" and placemaking for freedom and justice and she insists that these environments should reflect their residents' intrinsic value.

Jordan understood her design work to be an expression of her love—love for Black people, for poor people, and for children. Within a lineage of what Jennifer Nash (2013, 440, 457) has traced as a Black feminist love-politics that transforms love from the personal into a theory of justice, Jordan's is a love that is worldbuilding—not a dyadic or insular love (Maxwell 2017, 687), but a practice of care for larger collectives, for people who Jordan, in most cases, had never met.[34] In the early 1960s, Jordan utilized her one evening out per week on trips to Manhattan's Donnell Library to read architectural journals and textbooks and writings by designers (Jordan 1995, xvi). Some of these texts in particular, Jordan writes, "weighed upon my own [thinking] as a hunch yet to be gambled on the American landscape where, daily, deathly polarization of peoples according to skin gained in horror as white violence escalated against Black life" (xxv).

After these years of self-directed study, what catalyzed her first design project (*Skyrise*) was, she described, a great crisis in her love after surviving the police violence of the 1964 Harlem uprising. In the week after the uprising, her body went into a full trauma response at every sound of a police or fire

[34] I mean *worldbuilding* here not in a Arendtian sense but in line with abolitionist and decolonial political thought and political history (Adalet 2022; Getachew 2019).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000698 Published online by Cambridge University Press

engine siren, and she realized that she was "filled with hatred for everything and everyone white" (Jordan 1995, Foreword). The crisis was not that everything white did not merit this response, but that white violence was robbing Jordan of her own compass of love, her moorings in what she loved—moorings that could guide her political action each day. She resolved at that moment to "use what I loved, words, for the sake of the people I loved. However, beyond my people, I did not know the content of my love: what was I *for?*" She explains that it was the "agony of that moment" that propelled her to reach out to R. Buckminster Fuller and propose the collaborative design project. After their initial meeting and agreement on the collaboration, Jordan writes that she "felt safe in [her] love again" (1995, Foreword). She reflects that the redesign project provided "a way [and] a scale of looking at things that escaped the sundering paralysis of conflict by concentrating on the point, the purpose of the fight"—allowing her to focus on the questions at the very heart of political struggles at that moment: "What kind of schools and what kind of streets and what kind of parks and what kind of privacy and what kind of beauty and what kind of music and what kind of options would make love a reasonable, easy response?" In design, and at this scale, Jordan describes developing a "faithful confidence carried by dreams: detailed explorations of the alternatives to whatever stultifies and debases our lives" (1995, Foreword).

Jordan's detailed explorations of designs that would cherish and amplify rather than stultify and debase people's lives speak in important ways to our contemporary political juncture. Across the fifty years since Jordan's first published design writings, her contemplations have only become more pressing, given the accumulating impacts of privatization in the U.S. Today, struggles over the future of public goods—and within this, forms of public design—are being waged across scales and sites, from water to housing to education to infrastructure. To be sure, none of these public goods had a clean record before the neoliberal turn, in that state institutions and public goods have been entangled with histories of economic and racial and settler violence, but all are constituted by resources that can and should be repurposed and redesigned, Jordan would tell us.

As organizers make clear, these contemporary struggles over the future of public goods require envisioning and laying claim upon alternative visions for public institutions, political practices, and spatial designs. Such abolitionist and alternative imaginaries are so often misread, as Mariame Kaba (2021, 2) explains, as a negative project of dismantling, rather than apprehended as a positive project of building life-affirming institutions and practices, "a fleshly and material presence of social life lived differently" (Gilmore 2022, 351). Far beyond just the institution of the prison, abolition seeks change in all aspects of social and political life (Gilmore 2018; 2024). Some of the arenas of re-visioning and recreating social and political life have been more fleshed out and theorized than others, with the most attention in recent decades centered on envisioning conditions and practices of safety that do not involve prisons and armed police. Latent in and adjacent to some of this work, and ripe for further elaboration, is a deeply spatial dimension of abolitionist worldmaking that has to do with how people make place, home, and freedom, in the midst of and against the partitions and repartitions of racial capitalism (Gilmore 2022, 491).

If we want to ask, to return to Gilmore's question early in this article, how ordinary people make abolition geographies; how they make freedom provisionally, experimentally, and imperatively; and how they figure out how to stretch or diminish social and spatial forms to create room for their lives; we can find in abolitionist critique a concern with "the greatest and least detail of these arrangements of people and resources and land over time" (Gilmore 2022, 475). The practices of making and understanding such abolition geographies, Gilmore explains, "elaborate the spatial—which is to say the human-environment processes—of Du Bois and Davis' abolition democracy" (491). June Jordan has much to offer here in her visionary pragmatism that centers on a design principle of *maximal aliveness*. She thinks hard about the making of built environments—the physical plane of our institutions and social arrangements—and how we could live life differently; she plots paths and identifies practices at multiple scales for how we might get there; and she maps how more livable and beautiful worlds may be wrought from what is here now.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to the co-editors and three anonymous reviewers, as well as to LaShonda Carter, Desireé Melonas, Jeanne Scheper, Khanum Shaikh, Kirstine Taylor, Anna Terwiel, Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, and Salvador Zárate for their generative comments, and to the research librarians at the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The author affirms this research did not involve human participants.

REFERENCES

Adalet, Begüm. 2022. "Infrastructures of Decolonization: Scales of Worldmaking in the Writings of Frantz Fanon." *Political Theory* 50 (1): 5–31.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000698 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Baldwin, James. [1960] 1985. *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948–1985*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Bell, Duncan, and Bernardo Zacka, eds. 2020. *Political Theory and Architecture*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Cacho, Lisa Marie. 2014. "The Presumption of White Innocence." *American Quarterly* 66 (4): 1085–90.

Davis, Angela Y. 1971. Interview by Bo Holmström. *Sveriges Television*, Världen I Fokus, December 17.

Davis, Angela. 1972. "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves." *The Massachusetts Review* 13 (1/2): 81–100.

Davis, Angela Y., Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth E. Richie. 2022. *Abolition. Feminism. Now*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

Dozier, Deshonay. 2022. "Rethinking the Homeless Crisis: Black Spatial Visions for Los Angeles." *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 54 (3): 752–71.

Fish, Cheryl J. 2007. "Place, Emotion, and Environmental Justice in Harlem: June Jordan and Buckminster Fuller's 1965 'Architextual' Collaboration." *Discourse* 29 (2/3): 330–45.

Foner, Philip S., ed. 2014. *The Black Panthers Speak*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

Getachew, Adom. 2019. *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2007a. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2007b. "In the Shadow of the Shadow State." In *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. INCITE!, 41–52. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2018. "Making Abolition Geography in California's Central Valley." *The Funambulist*, December 20.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2022. *Abolition Geography: Essays Towards Liberation*, eds. Brenna Bhandar and Alberto Toscano. New York: Verso.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2024. *Change Everything: Racial Capitalism and the Case for Abolition*, ed. Naomi Murakawa. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson, and Craig Gilmore. 2016. "Beyond Bratton." In *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*, eds. Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, 173–99. New York: Verso.

Guenther, Lisa. 2016. "Beyond Guilt and Innocence: The Creaturely Politics of Prisoner Resistance Movements." In *Active Intolerance: Michel Foucault, the Prisons Information Group, and the Future of Abolition*, eds. Perry Zurn and Andrew Dilts, 225–40. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gumbs, Alexis Pauline. 2012. "June Jordan and a Black Feminist Poetics of Architecture." *Neo-Griot*, March 21.

Gumbs, Alexis Pauline. 2016. "m/other ourselves: a Black queer feminist genealogy for radical mothering." In *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*, eds. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams, 19–31. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

Haley, Sarah, Shoniqua Roach, Emily Owens, and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. 2021. "Confinement, Interiority, Black Feminist Study: A Forum on Davis' 'Reflections' at 50." *The Black Scholar* 51 (1): 3–19.

Hinton-Johnson, KaaVonia. 2004. "Taking Children Seriously: June Jordan's Contribution to African American Children's Literature." In *Still Seeking an Attitude: Critical Reflections on the Work of June Jordan*, eds. Valerie Kinloch and Margret Grebowicz, 145–56. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Honig, Bonnie. 2009. *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Honig, Bonnie. 2017. *Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Hunter, Marcus Anthony. 2021. "Radical Reparations." *National African American Reparations Commission.* Retrieved October 20, 2024 (reparationscomm.org/reparations-news/radical-reparations).

Jordan, June. 1975. *New Life: New Room*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company.

Jordan, June. 1982. "New Life: New Room." In *Stories for Free Children*, ed. Letty Cottin Pogrebin, 139–42. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Jordan, June. 1985. *On Call: Political Essays*. Boston, MA: South End Press.

Jordan, June. 1992. *Technical Difficulties: African-American Notes on the State of the Union*, 1st edition. New York: Pantheon Books.

Jordan, June. [1981] 1995. *Civil Wars*. New York: Touchstone.

Jordan, June. 2000. *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood*. New York: Basic Civitas Books.

Jordan, June. 2010. *His Own Where*. New York: The Feminist Press.

Jordan, June. 2016. "The Creative Spirit: Children's Literature." In *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*, eds. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens and Mai'a Williams, 11–8. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

Jordan, June, and Terri Bush. 1970. *The Voice of the Children; Collected by June Jordan and Terri Bush*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Jordan[née Meyer], June. 1965. "Instant Urban Renewal." *Esquire* (April): 108–11.

Kaba, Mariame. 2021. *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, ed. Tamara K. Nopper. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

Lipsitz, George. 2018. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Lowe, Lisa. 2015. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Maxwell, Lida. 2017. "Queer/Love/Bird Extinction: Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* as a Work of Love." *Political Theory* 45 (5): 682–704.

McKittrick, Katherine. 2006. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Nash, Jennifer C. 2013. "Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality." *Meridians* 11 (2): 1–24.

People's Budget LA Coalition. 2021. "The People's Budget: City of Los Angeles 2021–22." peoplesbudgetLA.com.

People's Paper Co-op, and Monica Trinidad. 2021. "Sounds of Abolition." justseeds.org/product/sounds-of-abolition/.

Pinto, Samantha, and Shoniqua Roach. 2021. "Black Privacy: Against Possession." *The Black Scholar* 51 (1): 1–2.

Quashie, Kevin. 2012. *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Quashie, Kevin. 2021. *Black Aliveness, or A Poetics of Being*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Schwartz, Claire. 2020. "When June Jordan and Buckminster Fuller Tried to Redesign Harlem." *The New Yorker*, August 22.

Smith, Christen. 2021. "Impossible Privacy: Black Women and Police Terror." *The Black Scholar* 51 (1): 20–9.

Syedullah, Jasmine, and Rae Leiner. 2021. "'Take a Moment to Ask Yourself, If This Is How We Fall Apart?' Practices for Mutually Reinforced Resilience in the Time of Reckoning More Lessons from the Manual for Liberating Survival." *Journal of Women, Politics, & Policy* 42 (1): 23–7.

Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. 2019. *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Terwiel, Anna. 2018. "What is the Problem with High Prison Temperatures? From the Threat to Health to the Right to Comfort." *New Political Science* 40 (1): 70–83.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research. 1995. "63 Years of Federal Action in Housing and Urban Development." *Cityscape* 1 (3): vi–ix.

Woodly, Deva R. 2022. *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements*. New York: Oxford University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055424000698 Published online by Cambridge University Press