

**Afterword;**

**Testimonio es Atole es Medicina**

**By Robert Farid Karimi**

I finally understand my work is to create the conditions for new birth all  
the time in everything.

- Luis J. Rodríguez, 2023

Let us, you and I, bos y yo, imagine.

Bos: you. It's not pronounced 'boss'. It's like the word 'Beau' with the hissing 'S' to end.

Your lips round. Let the 'B' bounce; the 'S' hiss. Bos.

We Guatemalans use Bos as the familiar you. We always confuse the letters 'B' and 'V'; instead of vosotros (like the Spaniards), we use bosotros. In honour of this, I will use bos to refer to you, the familiar reader, so we stay in relation to each other.

As I said, let us, bos y yo, together, imagine:

We're inside the Tía Chucha Cultural Center in Sylmar, California. This is a bookstore, a space with posters, originally started by Trini Tlazohtotl and Luis Rodríguez...

Wait, wait! Let me pause. This ain't a Lonely Chicanx Planet!

We arrive in the AfterWord: a dreamspace where the interstitial, intergalactic, intersectional lives. For those that don't fit in the usual spaces. Those seeking spaces where the imaginary and the irrational collide with our everyday reality — whatever that is. No software or internet needed.

We dream of this remixed version of Tía Chucha Cultural Center. A place of our own imaginations to feed our imaginations. Your Tía Chucha is not my Tía Chucha. We could be in some interstellar space station, a raucous poetry reading, a serious meeting dreaming about a project in the community.

If bos can't imagine a Centre, clear your mind and entertain this thought:

You and I, bos y yo, go through an imaginary back-side door.

My hand open. Bos y yo enter.

I post up something on the Cultural Center's corkboard:

I Dedicate This To My Mother Who Always Reads The Last Page Or Last Chapter First

To Figure Out If She Will Read A Book.

Maybe you already read the whole book. No matter. We all get to the AfterWord through our own path.

Your way is your way. We're here. Bos y yo.

At that moment, we realize we are a part of a drum circle. A story circle. Any circle of community you imagine. Prisoners, youth, elders, and punk rock poets painted like David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust discussing the latest anime. All relations. All culturas. All genders; all grooves. Queer? Of course. Y que?

Someone stands. Maybe it's Trini who leads us in a meditation. Another elder of many years steps up, she looks at us to sing or offer a prayer, and then asks us to each offer something to the circle. I offer these words I hold dear, spoken by Reverend J.B.B. Tosamah from N. Scott Momaday's novel:

Consider for a moment that old Kiowa woman, my grandmother, whose use of language was confined to speech. And be assured that her regard for words was always keen in proportion as she depended upon them. You see, for her words were medicine; they were magic and invisible. They came from nothing into sound and meaning. They were beyond price; they could neither be bought nor sold. And she never threw words away.<sup>1</sup>

It's a text I circle back to often, and for this moment, I think imperative. Every essay in this collection brings up a different elder, a different memory, an echo. Everyone has a different name for Luis. Each writer creates their universe in relation to their general connection to Luis. They give a name to their relation by sharing their personal name for him: Louie, Luis, etc. In the AfterWord, I will use Laura Garcia as my muse and call him elpoeta.<sup>2</sup> Two words stuck together – a non-binary hybrid. The lowercase to honor Luis' humility, and his solidarity with the masses.

The capital 'P' for how much poetry matters to him.

All the anthology's essays live inside this AfterWord. Not a summary. A mosh pit. A puzzle for bos, the reader. To find the pieces, the hypertext. To dialogue. Language comes alive in collision. Humor. Tragedy. Metaphor. Poetry. Created when images, realities, and languages collide. In their dissonance, we discover our laughter, sadness, rage, or other emotions. Discover an algorithm. A rhythm. A song...

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A Pattern. I sought a pattern. A relation. I was reading Tyson Yunkaporta's *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*, and I thought where does the Walker of the Red Road fit within this context? Yunkaporta woke me up to think of how elpoeta's collection of testimonios,

and those that he inspires, serve as a knowledge system, a lens for us to see the world that is ever-changing, not an archaeological fossil to be ground into a commodity:

In my travels, I saw that it was our way, not our things, that grounded us and sustained us. So I began to find words and images to express those Indigenous patterns of thinking, being, and doing that are usually invisible and obscured by a focus on exotic items and performances.<sup>3</sup>

Then elder Xicanindio poet Raúl Salinas's voice taps my head from the ether. When he was sick, close to leaving us to the other side, Raúl hosted me at Resistencia Bookstore. He apologized and told me he was too ill to stay to hear me read. Could only introduce me. So that's what he did. Then, left.

I burst out one of my poems, sang songs, and did my usual 40-minute set of humorous political poetry. At the corner of the bookstore, leaning, beaming? Raúl. He stayed! I asked why. His reply: 'I needed your energy, nephew. It was medicine'. This gave me the seed for the pattern I sought. Testimonio as medicine! Not only the text itself. The invisible yarns that make a ball of tethered relations. For healing or fuel, or to build future worlds which bridge our raíces with our presents.

el poeta as a medicine man. Not just to heal us, but to offer us to make our own medicina, remix with his, and even share what we create with our communities in a gesture of poetic generosity that some may call the activation of his Marxist and Indigenous consciousness;

I call it [*beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-ro-sa-to-do-new-birth*].

Smashed together in relation to fit inside the imaginary invisible space it frames, the set symbols in the term serve to claim their community. A callback. A song line. Spoken in the rhythm of Funkadelic's Aqua Boogie.

Sing it with me:

'Psy-cho-al-pha-di-sco-be-ta-bi-o-aq-ua-doo-loop'  
'Psy-cho-al-pha-di-sco-be-ta-bi-o-hu-man-you-loop'  
[*Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-ro-sa-to-do-new-birth*]

[\*\*\*]

Bos! You and I, we part of the space-time kin-tin-u-um. el poeta serves as a conduit con su medicina. For this AfterWord, let's time travel. Bend, make malleable this space of textual time. Put on the sparkly technicolour lenses of [*beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-ro-sa-to-do-new-birth*] and...

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Wham!

A documentary plays on a screen of Wham!, the 80s British group that stormed the world featuring the talents of Andrew Ridgeley and George Michael. I was stopped in my tracks when I rediscovered that George Michael was Greek and Andrew, Egyptian. Sons of immigrants, who, to survive, to just make it in the world, created these reckless rebel personas, hiding various aspects of their lives, to scream into the international pop scene. They used these personas to access what the world would never give them if they followed the path of social mobility afforded/offered by George's father: 'Do the A-levels, get a good job...' <sup>4</sup>

With our new lenses, their story, their testimonio becomes a document for the global and multigenerational immigrant experience (because the traveling over lands and cultures never really ends). Their telling makes us count. Cuento. I tell. Contar. I count. <sup>5</sup> Tethering the cuentos of an 80s band may seem frivolous, yet the medicine, like in elpoeta's stories/poems is not the text itself. His work's hyper-localisation speaks to and with so many global communities. They create this invisible yarn, a tether which is how the cuento moves within the body, a somatic songline from teller to listener to teller...

Uno, dos, tres, cuatro...

[\*\*\*]

Wham!

I move to a future 25 years after Wham's birth. Past Pilsen, where elpoeta used to live, and I land in New York City. At Puerto Rican artist Pepón Osorio's exhibit at the New Museum: *My Beating Heart/Mi corazón latiente*. <sup>6</sup> With the new lens, I stroll through two of Osorio's immersive installations that remind me of elpoeta. The first: 'No Crying Allowed in the Barbershop (En la barbería no se llora)'. It's a large installation, a rendition of an operating barbershop Osorio first created in Hartford, Connecticut in 1994.

The walls are painted pink; actual hubcaps orderly dominate the paint. In Old English-looking script, written large: 'Perdoname Madre' with bullets and a rose, feeling like a tattoo mural. A pool table in the middle. A larger-than-life, bleeding from arrows in his body statue of Saint Sebastian: patron saint of manly men and/or manly men in the closet. Videos of men flexing. Crying. The black and white tile. The blinged-out Puerto Rican flag barber chairs with all the barber tools ready for the next barber to cut hair. A sign that says 'Se Habla Español/Spanish Spoken Here'. 8-ball fuzzy dice for a car's rearview.

All of it, in all its maximalist rascuache bling, symbol of the contradictions and complications of Latino masculinity to provide people, especially men, to have their usual place para platicar (converse about the comings and goings) and confront these contradictions. All the elements, and watching Osorio cry in one of the videos, remind me of elpoeta's story of the man crying in *From Our Land to Our Land*. Men crying their tears in his prison workshop:

Tears began to fall from his eyes, even as his voice remained strong. We were all riveted - crying tears inside if not on the outside. The men's silence was the best mark of respect he could have received. When he was done, the quiet lingered for

a beat, then the applause rushed in. The men were visibly moved as this man stood poised, unwavering, in the whirl of dark and convoluted sentiments.<sup>7</sup>

Like Osorio, elpoeta allows those in the spaces he creates, to live inside their contradictions, and find their vulnerability without losing their self-respect. I could imagine elpoeta reading a passage of his work *Men's Tears* while sitting on one of the blinged-out barber chairs in Osorio's installation, getting a haircut. elpoeta's words amplify Osorio's vision; these tears, this barbershop, a place for acknowledgment of this pain; a place where these emotions can be faced for all their complexities and harms so that these men can learn how not to echo the pain endured by them.

My eyes shift. I am struck by Osorio's installation next door, *Badge of Honor*. A side-by-side video installation where, on one side: a maximalist version of a young Puerto Rican teenager's bedroom - what feels like thousands of baseball cards on his wall, his bed a candle-lit altar, and various trinkets -- talisman of teenagehood.

On my right side of the installation, a black and white video of the young man asking questions to his father whose visage is on the left side: the other half of the installation. The father's side is a stark contrast — a minimalist replica of his jail cell. The father responds to his son and asks questions as well. The videos, even though the interviews were done at separate times in different places — edited to appear to be in conversation. My eyes blur for a moment from my lenses. The father and son in Osorio's installation become elpoeta and Ramiro, and then Ramiro talking to his son. Then, the prisoners in the UK, Lancaster, or wherever elpoeta has gone, speaking to their children, and their families. Looking at Osorio, through elpoeta's lens, puts everything into focus, reveals the global pattern, the cycle of manhood Osorio and elpoeta question, and how the dialogue between the two could be the key to breaking it.

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Wham.

We fly through the vibrant orchestration of colours of a mural of Italian graffiti artist Flycat.

Whack!

Detour. I am in Naples. In the Sri Lankan part of town. The Sri Lankans sandwiched tight into apartments throughout the streets I walk. Is this another Giroux Zone of Abandonment, as Jonathan D. Gomez wrote about in his essay on encountering Luis in the projects of East Los Angeles?

I imagine South Central Los Angeles, Chicago, the roads elpoeta walked in his past. A group of young children, their identities mixed, swirl around playing in the Neapolitan streets. How can the stories of elpoeta serve all of Europe, the globe, to think about how we foster humanity and empathy? Get us all to reimagine how we think about how all the struggles — from Palestinian refugees to Sri Lankan Italians to Neapolitan Africans to any number of permutations of people — could find solidarity and kinship within these zones?

[\*\*\*]

'Psy-cho-al-pha-di-sco-be-ta-bi-o-aq-ua-doo-loop'  
 [Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]  
 'Psy-cho-al-pha-di-sco-be-ta-bi-o-hu-man-you-loop'.

[\*\*\*]

Another pattern seen in this textual time travel: every writer in this anthology establishes their tether to elpoeta. It's a tribute to how elpoeta enters a prison. He declares himself. Not just opening up his pockets for the security, for the guards to frisk and to check if he's bringing something in common that they call contraband.

Instead, he opens himself and breaks down who he is right away, gives his street cred by telling his story, so that he can get to the thing that the guards can't take away, the true contraband, the lessons and thinking that he teaches to tell folks that they matter and that they have the freedom to change how they see the world.

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2004. Chicago. The first time I meet elpoeta in person. My new job: as Artistic Director of the Guild Complex, the literary institution he helped build, which originally housed Tía Chucha Press. Our paths crossed. I am nervous. Don't know what to say.

Here I am:

A poet, a writer, a storyteller, and an artist. Mother born in Mazatenango, Guatemala; my father born somewhere north of Tehran, Iran. Their births a mystery to me because my mother was the first to not be born in a train car, and my father's family so poor in Iran, their birth certificates were mostly incorrect because they couldn't afford to fix the spelling. They were divorced before Jimmy Carter became President, and I, being the only one born in the U.S. at the time, was named after a Kennedy on the 1-year anniversary of the death of Chicano journalist Ruben Salazar. I was being pulled by my two grandmothers, who whispered in their children's ears: they should go back to their respective countries, and not raise their child in the heathen United States. We lived in an area of the San Francisco suburbs where Pilipina/o/x and Latinx/a/o communities intersected because of farmwork, job placement, and military retirement. In a house where my mother never cooked pig, I, the half-Muslim, engaged in haram tempted by the cracklingcrispy pork skin of a Filipino auntie's Lechon. Mmmmmmm is for Ammmmmmerica.

Rewind:

1995. I'm a journalist in San Antonio for a bilingual newspaper. One day, one of my editors told me I could not write the details of a young graffiti artist murdered by a Westside club owner, who was angry that the young men chalked up his outdoor black-painted club walls. I was told we had to protect a possible advertiser.

I wrote a poem called *Pena de Muerte* about two graffiti artists shot, one in LA by a Marine walking his dog, the other about a young man in San Antonio.<sup>8</sup> I fall in love with new journalism; poetry becomes a way to spread the news. Poetry slam came to Texas, so I joined. I saw performance poetry as a way to get the chisme, the noticias, the things the official account didn't want in the newspapers. A week later, I defy the editor and write the obituary for Selena Quintanilla Perez as a poem.<sup>9</sup>

Fast forward:

Co-founder of the Guild Complex, poet, Michael Warr and I read at the Seattle Poetry Festival in 1999. He, I, and activist-poet JoJo Gaon break bread after the reading. JoJo and I discuss the creation of an Asian-American spoken word summit that his group: Isangmahal and Chicago group I Was Born With Two Tongues were looking to build. I was the bridge between the two groups. JoJo was looking for someone to vouch for the Chicagoans, and dream the Summit into creation. Michael offered wisdom that night — it was about trust, togetherness, bonds, building. Things Michael was all about. After that moment, Michael asked if I would be interested in serving as the Executive Director of The Guild Complex.

Fast forward:

2003 to 2005: In my new role as Artistic Director at the Guild, I meet Guild Board Chair Vicki Capalbo, who first saw me in 1999 the night my slam team won the National Poetry Slam in the Chicago Theater. Activist Lew Rosenbaum takes me to various labour halls, so we organize a Labour reading. I program readings with Quraysh Ali Lansana, Nelson Peery,<sup>10</sup> Funkadesi, Sandra Cisneros, Douglas Ewart, Anida Yoeu Ali, Raúl Salinas, Krista Franklin, Dennis Kim, Avery R. Young, Theaster Gates, Lorna Dee Cervantes and more. I meet my poetic heroes Adrienne Rich, Haki Mahdabuthi, Carlos Cortez, and Sonia Sanchez for the first time.

Back to:

2004. Here, I meet elpoeta, who came to do a fundraiser for the Guild.

By the time I met him, I had taught *Always Running* in one of my English classes at my alma mater, Newark Memorial High School, as an independent study with some of my readers who had difficulty. I used his poem 'Hungry' to teach students about the concept of symbol in the high school English class I taught at my alma mater. The students fell head over heels over the images of tragedy in the character's quest to keep his Red Chevy. I was nervous around him. He opened his hand in kindness and generosity and hasn't let go through the years.

Fast forward otra vez:

2015. I read a poem dedicated to José Montoya at a Central American reading at AWP (Association of Writers and Writing Programs) about how the Farsi word for God is a homonym for Joder<sup>11</sup>.

I catch elpoeta laughing. Yes!

Blink your eyes:

Following year. Trini and elpoeta and I are at Tía Chucha discussing how to bring my Low Rider Kitchen Cart to Tía Chucha for their Quinceñera party. How can we create a works project to create a Low Rider Kitchen Cart parade?

Hop, Skip, Jump:

Same year, different month. Different Associated Writers Program. In Los Angeles. We are at Plaza Olvera in Los Angeles at a Mexican restaurant elpoeta likes. Long-time Tía Chucha collaborator Quraysh Ali Lansana and myself.<sup>12</sup> elpoeta tells me he wants to do a Central American Anthology. Wants to bring these folks together. Knows one well. Asks me what I think. Wants me to vouch for it because he is so passionate about the project. I rave about the project to acknowledge and affirm his passion. Now, the *Wandering Song* is in its 3rd edition.

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This is what I learned from the anthology writers — Testimonio sparks Testimonio.

Game recognize Game.

elpoeta's testimonio goes in opposition to the legacy of American Autobiography started by Benjamin Franklin: political morality plays in the form of non-fiction to create an American identity of bootstraps, ingenuity, and the absurd Manifest Destiny metaphor of the American Dream. Franklin's legacy can be seen in the tomes of politicians who use the form to humanize themselves to the electorate. elpoeta's testimonios are more in line with Toni Cade Bambara's call for artists 'to make the revolution irresistible'.<sup>13</sup>

Testimonio as affirmation. Testimonio as an act of unmasking, entering a space.

Testimonio to re-connect to the bodies of my memories, my own body's capacity to hold history and mythology. Trust. Love. Waking up. To not be lulled into sleep into believing the American Dream — that individualistic capitalistic mito. Instead, our testimonio breaks the Capitalistic I, and brings us, *bos y yo*, closer to changing the narrative through a mutualistic exchange to build a nuevo community.

Testimonio, the telling, the receiving, and telling again is the continuation of this love.

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elpoeta is part of a set of artists — whose ability to access love: love of self, community, heritage has been important to their artistic and community growth. It creates a dialogue between artists and community and provides visceral visuals and other sensorial images to bring the issues to life. These artists serve as a bridge that makes these issues palpable and engaging for people to participate. Their art questions traditions within traditional ethnic structures, can amplify



traditions, and spark new ideas and symbols for the evolution of self, community, and other institutions.

I call this GenerousSymbiosis. Artists who employ GenerousSymbiosis centre collectivity in their practice, and understand the past, present, and future as material, inspiration, and dialogic compatriots, which their art exists and manifests. Their work critiques the past while they envision and hope to support the future.

GenerousSymbiotic artists do not create in isolation — their collectivity is a part of their practice. Their act of reframing and reimagining is an act of mutual beneficence — where they hope that their art creates a benefit to the future of the community while critiquing the past and the parts of the present that need critique, analysis, and corrective interventions.

GenerousSymbiosis derives from cultural theorist Jose Muñoz's frame of queerness as a 'relational and collective modality of endurance and support'.<sup>14</sup> The GenerousSymbiotic artist does not fit in the mainstream patriarchal 'straight' construction of art making. Thus, engaging in the act of GenerousSymbiosis, the artists become the outsiders.

In- deed, to live inside straight time and ask for, desire, and imagine another time and place is to represent and perform a desire that is both utopian and queer. To participate in such an endeavor is not to imagine an isolated future for the individual but instead to participate in a hermeneutic that wishes to describe a collective futurity, a notion of futurity that functions as a historical materialist critique.<sup>15</sup>

Artists who engage in GenerousSymbiosis many times live outside the boundaries of traditional artists, yet do not forget their connection to their cultures and communities. Their act of art-making is a part of their resilience and resistance to dehumanization. They embody a fluid non-binary existence where the past, present, and future live in their art at the same time.

I framed this idea, inspired by the work of elder artista Yolanda López. Part of the materiality of her artist toolkit was the way she sparked others into action. Literally, through works like *Who You calling Pilgrim?!* (1970) — one of the most photocopied images on college campuses and activist circles, seminal in the struggle for Chicana/o Studies, and still in use widely by activists working with core issues in immigration and indigenous rights. And part of the poetry of her art practice is the invisible way she mentored, dialogued, and exchanged with others to find the artistry, political action, inside themselves. sparking the next generation. A mural created by Jessica Sabogal in 2021, in honour of Lopez, serves as Sabogal's testimonio of Lopez's mutual beneficence. Before she passed, in an interview, Lopez tips her hat to Sabogal—the mural, like Lopez, sparks fearlessness in the quest for self-determination: 'What she is doing is actually not just about me', but is a gesture to all women, López said. 'Indigenous, women of colour, smart women ... women who are not afraid'.<sup>16</sup>

GenerousSymbiosis! Full circle. On and on and on and on...!

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Go back. To the front of the book: Olguín and Metcalf's introduction. See the mural 'Watts Bleeds'. Eso. This.

Like Yolanda Lopez, I see elpoeta, as GenerousSymbiotic artist. He makes the craft of poetry and his political poetics part of how he built careers and communities. He's not artista/poeta José Montoya's El Louie: 'En Sanjo you'd see him sporting a dark topcoat//playing in his fantasy the role of Bogart, Cagney, or Raft'.<sup>17</sup> Este Louie is from Los Angeles. EastLos. Watts. South Central. What set he claim? Pues, todo CalifasAztlan. All parts; all directions: North, South, East, West. La tierra: sus raíces. Unlike the Louie in Montoya's poem, este Louie is still alive! He did not die from 'aging fast from too much booze'. Este Louie se limpio. He had a 'vida dura' como poeta, padre, persona.

'Tan, Tan, Taran'.

Like the subject of Montoya's poem: este Louie Rodríguez is 'un vato de atolle'. Hombre de maíz. That rough and ready, deep in the mud, got your back, even when you don't or can't find him, you know that he still, through his thoughts, got you when you are stuck in the mud and don't know where to go. Si! elpoeta: Alive! Vato de atolle.

*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*

*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*

*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*

[\*\*\*]

Don't get it twisted; generosity ain't the whole onda (that's Mexican Spanish for 'vibe'). I cannot keep singing *[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]* in relation to elpoeta's work without thinking about how the first two words of the system, the vision, the framework I present: Beat-back.

Jose Prado, in his contribution to the anthology, writes about elpoeta:

... he beat back. Beat police. Beat the school system. Beat addiction. Beat incarceration. And, beat ignorance. This very important set of responses is the stuff of Rodríguez's poetics and the source of his poetry.<sup>18</sup>

It reminded me of elpoeta's elder and inspiration Piri Thomas, and something I read in *Down These Mean Streets*: 'I stiffened and said to myself, Stomping time, Piri boy, go with heart'.<sup>19</sup> This act of beating back is the way to connect to the heart. To fight for one's life. Con corazon. The weapon is not the body, the fist. The tool: the testimonio.

El Cuento is the 'beat back'. It's to call the body to action. The cuento creates the somatic response to bring us to life. We are alive. Our pasts, our dead count. Our presents count. Cuentalo. Go With Heart. Corazon. Fight! Like Rocky Balboa, or Chapulin Colorado, or Piri Thomas. Or Yolanda Lopez. Respond. Live. Tell.

Testimonio as an open hand. Healing. Power.

Power up. With a cause that is your Self.

Testimonio as activism. A shield. A superpower. Not as a first-person shooter video game.

Testimonio as a Super Mario Brothers tool gifted from a secret mushroom to help us get to the next level.<sup>20</sup>

And just like a participant said in Steffen Brand, Nicholas McGuinn, and Amanda Naylor's research, this tool is 'another melody'. Each cuento makes a melody, no matter what language spoken.

Testimonio creates a Cuento Choir.

Sing:

*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*  
*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*  
*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*  
 Palabra Power Pa' La People!

[\*\*\*]

Wham!

Yes, it's back to the band Wham! As a son of immigrants, if I had known, that Wham! was coming from the same cultural collisions/obstacles that I was facing in the 80s and 90s, it would've changed my life! I know—going deeper into a pop band name seems silly, but these lives, the stories are the metaphors that inspire. Hearing the story of the duo reminded me of the immigrant experience, and also reminded me why we need documentaries, collections, and archives. And this book you hold in your hand; it's all a part of that need.

Testimonio as an act of unforgetting.

All throughout, I saw this anthology as an act of activating an archive. Everything from the analysis of the book elpoeta is known for, all the way to critiquing the masculinity in his work. It's vulnerable. Letters, drafts. Personal. As well as awards, achievements, and manuscripts. This book is just the beginning of activating an archive. It's important because it's an extension of *[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]* — it's the generous way elpoeta is. Go ahead, take it, remix it. Make it your own.

How do you activate an archive? Here are some ideas:

- have a poet/artist write the afterword
- how people dance with the words

- have various authors write about their feelings about what they see in the archive
- let folks critique and discuss how they can enter and exit and reimagine the archive; a mash-up imagining possibilities, through their own lenses.

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Or write a poem inspired by Christina Gómez's essay:

**Cuentos count by RFK**

cuenta los cuentos  
 cual que Cuatlicue  
 camina tal  
 cual quetzal  
 que qualify de la 'cuela  
 como un cuento  
 que los cuadros  
 de los classmates  
 quietly cuenta  
 los numeros, los  
 claves que cuentan,  
 cada vez que ellas  
 vean Cuatlicue,  
 quetzales, or their comunidad.

[\*\*\*]

Or take Leticia Hernandez-Linares's discussion of elpoeta, mix it with a chapter about Indigenous knowledge, I write:

**Sense - eh! Soy Cero-Mito by RFK**

Tu cuento makes lore, mito.  
 Count the first 100 digits of pi, mijo.<sup>21</sup>

Mija: 'I can make pi rhyme:  
 3.14159265358979323846264 //  
 3383279502884 //  
 197169399375105820974 //  
 9445923078164062862089 //  
 9 86280348253421170679  
 See: Mathematical chisme'.

Cuento.	Gente de Cero.	Cero. Zee-ro.
		Sense, eh?
		Tu eres. Two: Bos-yo.

Platica. Yarn.  
 Platica. Yarn.  
 Threads ain't digital, don't yawwwwn.  
 Unless you need oxygen.  
 Yarn. Oye. Yarn. Oye. =. Yo. Bos. Us. Two.  
 Coda. ::

[\*\*\*]

Testimonio becomes possibility. It's not just a record of the past. It's the once and future cuento.  
 Testimonio as future casting!

Make medicine out of medicine.

Futurocast: re-Imagine *Always Running* after the dolls incident in chapter 1 of the book, where elpoeta is ridiculed for playing with dolls, — wham! he continues to play with dolls. His dolls come alive to protect him, like a sci-fi fantasy, but his friend, the one who always defended him in school, loses his life. With only his imagination and magic dolls, elpoeta runs away, and 14 years later, ends up at Oxford, where he meets the Chicano pundit, Richard Rodríguez. They battle. One the closeted queer intellectual, the other a sensitive, grounded Marxist who still is politicized by the Brown Berets but doesn't let the machismo patriarchy rule his mind. Their battles become fodder for the Left and Right in the US like James Baldwin and Norman Mailer, and Marxists finally win the presidency to end all presidencies and hierarchies!

Remix! Maybe we make a video game. Turn *Always Running* into an episode of *Oregon Trail*, where you have to get tools of poetry to face 20th-century Los Angeles and get rewarded with a factory job in Chicago. Survive the factory, save your son. And get the mighty pen from poetry legend Gwendolyn Brooks to win the game.

[\*\*\*]

An archive dedicated to the power of *[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]* testimonio.

Testimonio to help us find our vocation.

Testimonio as prism to help us find clarity in our visions of the world.

Testimonio to spark change in the world, push against dissonance, and so irresistible, we join the circle for those who cry for change towards a Generous/Just/Nourishing society.

*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*  
*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*  
*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*

All of this to ask, what will elpoeta, y la crew in this anthology, and his archive, inspire? What story will we tell, build, from these yarns?

[\*\*\*]

My mind's record backspins a full revolution. I am back listening to elpoeta in Chicago, the first time we met. In this new interpretation of a past, to circle the circle of this AfterWord and to honour elpoeta, and his causa, inspired by his words, I stand up and speak my own testimonio:

I was in the pen.

I wanted a pen.

I was in Los Angeles County jail in 1993, and I wanted a pen. The executive vice Chancellor had just called the Los Angeles police department on 89 students for taking over the UCLA Faculty Center. We were booked, zip-tied, and cuffed in various ways, and shipped to Los Angeles County for the first time in UCLA's history.

This was all the politics of my training coming home to roost. No longer in a book, all the political theory from Chicana/o Studies classes was right in front of me.

Our faces pressed to the concrete. Ridiculed and isolated. Made to wait. Because the guards had never had to deal with a multicultural group of students from a major university in County.

Inside this pen, all I wanted — a pen.

I wanted to be a writer, speak the truth about the moment. Crack a joke to alleviate the stress, the fear, on all our faces.

When I made my phone call to my cousin Fernando — I begged him not to tell my mother because I knew she would kill me. Both of my parents came from places where they tried to avoid going to jail. Mom from Guatemala, dad from Iran. The idea that I was in jail right now was the worst thing I could do as a first-time college student. My cousin laughed at me — 'She already knows', he said. 'She wants you to call her. You're on the front cover of *La Opinion* and you're on the TV in San Francisco on Channel 2. Our tios and tia are panicking. Tio Rene wants to call the State Department because they all think that you're going to be dead by the end of the day'.

In the end, I was lucky, mom bailed me out.

She told me that any gifts for my graduation were going towards bail to teach me a lesson. To scare her — my uncles kept telling her that the LAPD was going to kill me by the end of the day; she should look in the newspapers to see if my name was amongst the dead.

I did receive two gifts. One, her tough love, and bail.

Two: My father told me a story he had never told me before in the days after I went to jail. No judgment that I had gone to jail, just a story.

He had dropped out of school. 21. Living the life of working two jobs and going to night school at the same time, he had no time for the revolution that was foaming up around him in Iran. One day, on his way to night school from his job in Iran airport at Iran Air, he looked at one of the protests. Just as a bystander. And the police came in and started beating everyone, including him. Arresting him. It politicized him. He realized that he needed to join the revolution in Iran to change the government.

*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*

*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*

*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*

[\*\*\*]

It's been a trip. Going back and looking at all these essays, and looking at Luis's life, it's amazing how many connections we have. José Montoya, Raúl Salinas, journalism, Piri Thomas, the Guild Complex, Vicki Capalbo, Traci Kato-Kiriyama. — and realising how all these different people intersected in our part of this grand flow.

And Bos, dear reader, are now part of this flow because you get to see all the different ways and permutations this writer has affected global communities. Bos may think it's just one text, but at times it's not even the text.

It's the invisible — what we can't see. It's el poeta's generosity and capaciousness in opening himself and us to our vulnerability. Let's repeat that! Generosity and capaciousness in opening himself and us to our vulnerability.

It's the *[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*. It's connecting to Yolanda Lopez, and the other elders in my life, bos's life, his life, to open their hands while they themselves struggle to make it in this world of writing, art, activism, being Brown, being human, being part of the cosmos.

[\*\*\*]

Now it's your turn. What will you offer to the circle? How will you see the world with this new lens? And how will it spark you to share your story, yarn to connect to a connect to larger pelota de melodies, a choir where our songs heal ourselves? Make más medicina. Make more medicine. Warm atole pa' el corazon.

Imagine: Before we leave.

Futurocast: A band shows up. Let's say mujeres from the women mariachi nights at La Fonda in Los Angeles. Maybe some from Mariachi Las Catrines. They roll 6 deep, dressed like Los Tigres Del Norte. They roll in with bass guitar, violin, vihuela, trumpet, guitar, and an accordion. They

tell us they are here to sing a corrido with us. I love the double entendre of a corrido – of a running, but this time, this corrido is for Bos, everyone in the circle, and el poeta.

The band starts; it's a familiar tune: The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez, except the lyrics change. Bos y yo, through some magical musical moment, get the moxy, step up into the circle, and sing:

Disculpe mi interrupción,  
Pueblo querido, quiero cantar  
Del Poeta que corre y corre  
Pa' que Uds pueden saltar.

Nacido en Los Ángeles  
corriendo de la vida loca  
Se llama Luis Rodríguez,  
el poeta, esposo y papa.  
Lleva su gran pesadilla  
Quiere cambiar sus fortunas  
En la ciudad de hambrotes  
Que siempre la confunda.

Cuídate Raza, el Norte  
Es traicionero y rico,  
Pero no da nos la carne  
Solo el hueso y hocico

En Chicago, el invierno  
Fue duro y el perdió su esposa.  
el Poeta no se rindió  
su alma más vigorosa.

El poeta no quedo mudo  
Encontró su voz poderoso  
Contando la historia personal,  
de su vida peligroso.

El escribió las noticias  
Dicho historias de nuestra Raza  
De la gente del pueblo  
Que Gran Negocio amenaza.

Aquí entra, La Trini  
espíritu de amor divina  
quien lo dijo al Poeta  
que quiere ser amiga.

Pero cambio la relación



Y ahora Trini y El Poeta  
Están juntos compartiendo  
Como podemos amar completa.

Y luchan y luchan y lu-  
Chan La Trini y el Poeta  
Para nostoros, el pueblo,  
Con sus almas indígenas.

El Trini ayudó al Poeta  
Amplificósu voz poderoso  
Con su amor, y mágica  
Los dos, artistas generosas.

El pueblo querido, Gracias!  
Cantamos por uno de nosotros  
Que inspira nuestras almas  
Somos revolucionarias, yo y vosotros!

The crowd readies to applaud, but we hear the sound of engines revving in the parking lot. We all run out. Hundreds of pinstriped Impalas, Chevys. Chilling. A symphony of slow and low. Profesora Denise Sandoval pops out of one of the cars to cue the crew -- all the cars bump some crazy funk music and sound off:

*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*  
*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*  
*[Beat-back-sym-bi-o-tic-ge-ne-rosa-to-do-new-birth]*

We all dance to the rhythm. The spirits of Yolanda Lopez, Raúl Salinas, y all our relations dance with us. We chant:

Palabra Power Pa' La People!  
Palabra Power Pa' La People!

Happy we are together as a people. Pues, this is, was, the AfterWord, we gotta dream big. Our testimonio tiene power. Medicina makes medicina makes poder. Boom!

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> N Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 54

<sup>2</sup> In her chapter in this anthology, 'Luis and I The Emerging Revolutionaries of the 1970s', Laura Garcia reminds us how a young girl named him El Poeta.

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<sup>3</sup> Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* (New York: Harperone, 2020), p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, Chris, dirs. Wham! Library Productions, Nemperor Productions, 2023.  
<https://www.netflix.com/title/81137188>

<sup>5</sup> Yes, this is a shoutout hypertext reference to poeta Leticia's Hernandez-Linares' essay in the anthology. Go back and re-read to connect to the full force.

<sup>6</sup> Guide to Pepón Osorio exhibition, <https://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/pepon-osorio-my-beating-heart-em-mi-corazon-latiente-em> [accessed 1 December 2023].

<sup>7</sup> Luis J. Rodríguez, *From Our Land to Our Land: Essays, Journeys and Imaginings from a Native Xicanx Writer* (New York, London and Oakland: Seven Stories Press, 2020), p. 102

<sup>8</sup> Robert Karimi, 'Pena de Muerte', 1995 – *Raza Spoken Here* Vol. 2CD, Calaca Press, 2000

<sup>9</sup> Robert Karimi, 'San Antonio Remembers Selena,' 1995, Apr 07. La Prensa de San Antonio: 40.

<sup>10</sup> As I write it is 2023. Such a trip that what the writers Guild of America and the screen actors Guild are fighting for are in line with what Nelson Peery and the LRC were fighting for.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.qalansana.com/copy-of-about> [accessed 1 December 2023].

<sup>13</sup> Thabiti Lewis, 'Philadelphia Interview/Conversation with Massiah,' June. ———, ed. 2012. *Conversations with Toni Cade Bambara*. Jackson: (University Press of Mississippi, 2012): 3

<sup>14</sup> Jose Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), p. 91.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> Clara-Sophia Daly, 'New murals honor Chicana artist Yolanda López and pay homage to Bay Area solidarity movements', *Mission Local*, <https://missionlocal.org/2021/06/new-mural-honor-chicana-artist-yolanda-lopez-and-pay-homage-to-bay-area-solidarity-movements/#:~:text=It%20made%20sense%20to%20her,women%20who%20are%20not%20aftaid>, [accessed 1 December 2023]

<sup>17</sup> Villa, Raul, 'El Louie' by Jose Montoya: An Appreciation,' *A Companion to Latina/o studies*, ed. Flores, Juan and Rosaldo, Renato (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 182-184

<sup>18</sup> Circle back to Jose Prado's chapter in this anthology.

<sup>19</sup> Piri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets* (New York: Knopf, 1968), p. 52

<sup>20</sup> I am not going to go there and imagine elPoeta as Luigi or Mario, but bos can. elPoeta knows where I live, and maybe his youngest sons Ruben and Luis (Chito) discuss him as a video game character in their game and cultural channel – *To Games It May Concern*:  
<https://www.youtube.com/@ToGamesItMayConcern> [accessed 1 December 2024].

<sup>21</sup> All respect to Yunkaporta here, who offers a story of his son, 'an Aboriginal boy', Max, whose 'appearance does not match some people's idea of his cultural identity' that inspired this line. 'When Max recites a hundred digits of pi, he is not stepping outside his identity; he is singing a pattern of creation from north to south. He does not need to have an Elder's level of knowledge to do this. He need only to perceive the pattern in what he does know'. Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* (New York: Harperone, 2020), p. 31.