

Guardians of the Reservoir: Architectural Youth in June Jordan's *His Own Where*

The poet, activist and educator June Jordan was also an architectural thinker, and her spatial visions figured children as the core—or lifegiving reservoir—of a transformed New York City. This paper opens with the two young heroes of Jordan's 1971 young adult novel, *His Own Where*, who make a home at the edges of what I identify as Brooklyn's Ridgewood Reservoir. At the end of its life as a city water supply and bordered by a cemetery, the reservoir reflects the rapidly foreclosing possibilities for urban communities of color in the United States, particularly young people, at the close of the 1960s. I argue that against white America's increasing portrayal of black youth as "social dynamite" and criminal threats, Jordan positions youth of color as the guardians of the literal and figurative spaces of urban racial justice. She accomplishes this political intervention through a generic fluidity that claims the inseparability of poetry, spatial thought, childhood and black love. Combining close reading with archival research in Jordan's papers, I show that the novel draws not only on Jordan's architectural collaborations with the celebrated designer and systems theorist R. Buckminster Fuller but also on her work as co-director of a collective of adolescent poets, the Voice of the Children. The two protagonists of *His Own Where*, I propose, channel the lives and voices of two specific young writers from the Voice of the Children, as well as a broader span of youth spatial activism in 1960s-1970s New York. Through this fluidity of child and adult voices, of fiction and reality, Jordan poetically advances what Katherine McKittrick has theorized as the "demonic grounds" of black women's geographies, reclaiming "what space and place make possible, outside and beyond tangible stabilities, and from the perspective of struggle." I argue that Jordan turns to children as the co-architects of her own "demonic grounds," as her young heroes build a new New York beside the reservoir.