

LANGUAGE

LIBERATION

JOY

ABOLITION

EDITING

PEOPLE

Some-
times
when
I read or hear
something so true,
I feel an expansion of my cons-
ciousness that moves me to tears. Has
that ever happened to you? For example, when
I first read this quote, every cell in my body said YES:

“No one who has ever touched liberation could possibly
want anything other than liberation for everyone.”
—Rev. angel Kyodo williams

As a white, able-bodied, cis-het-presenting person,
there’s a lot of systemic bullshit I don’t have to deal
with or can get around with relative ease. I know this.
You know this. *And* I spent years living under very
difficult circumstances beyond my control. I know the
joy of liberation, of freedom, that undeniable lightness
of being. Mine was a small, personal liberation, and in
the words of the great Fannie Lou Hamer: “Nobody’s
free until everybody’s free.”

Abolition isn’t only about abolishing slavery
or prisons. I am specifically referring to the movement
that aims to tear down harmful institutions that
oppress the poor and disabled and queer and people
of color and instead build healthy systems of safety
and accountability in their place. The people impacted
are not “others”—they are me, my friends, my family,
my community. Abolition is a practice, a way of being
and living. It is a choice, a million choices in succession.
It is reaching for joy and wholeness in all that we do.

This letter seems heavy, but I don’t *feel*
heavy. It annoys me that seriousness and playfulness
are considered opposites. Why can’t something be
delightful *and* significant? I’d argue that the people
dancing and twerking at protests are making some of
the most profound statements, and they’re having
fun and spreading joy while doing it. As the copyeditor
of *Dear Friend*, I’ve really enjoyed engaging with every
letter. Some letters led me down internet rabbit holes,
some made me laugh or think about something new,
some led me to the authors’ websites or Instagram
accounts. Having language to share ideas and express
ourselves in this way is a spectacular miracle!

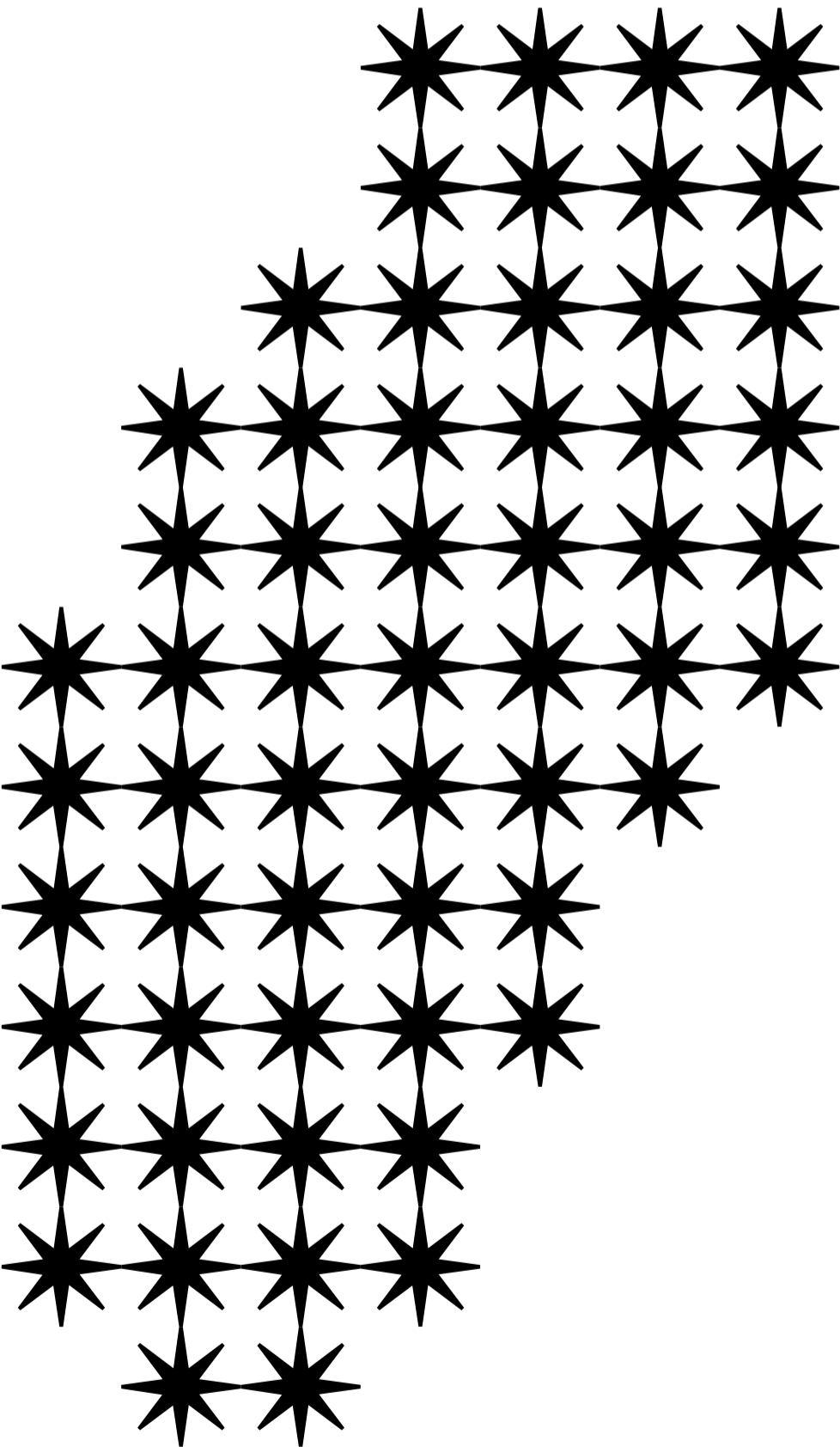
The slow elongation of the human throat,
tongue, and larynx 50,000 years ago made speech
possible, and 5,500 years ago humans began to make
the transition from orality to literacy. There are studies
that show how languages are shaped by their local
geography and environment. Another study shows
that our personalities shift when we switch languages.
Other research shows how language influences
how we think. The architecture of this co-evolution,
co-design of language, place, and body astounds me.
At the same time, I am aware that language—and the
English language in particular—has been used as
a genocidal weapon to eradicate culture and history—
of enslaved people, of Indigenous peoples, of immigrants.
What happens when a language leaves its homeland
and invades the mouths of others? I think the violence
of it changes all of us.

After editing Alicia Olushola Ajayi’s letter in
2020, I sent this note to Sandra and Ott:

*Maybe I shouldn’t admit this, but other than
for texts intended for scholarly journals, I have pretty*

*much abandoned using editing manuals like the
Chicago Manual of Style or the Oxford Style Manual.
I’ve been writing and editing for 20 or so years, and
I have slowly moved away from the concept of “correct”
or “prefect” English because it is so tied to elitism
and is used as a tool of white supremacy. As I see it,
my role as a copyeditor is to preserve the voice and
message of the author and ensure that their ideas are
communicated clearly. Many people think copyediting
is just technical work. Technical knowledge comes
into play, for sure, but there are many discretionary
decisions made while editing.*

My move away from gatekeeping “proper
English” and from rules that limit and inhibit meaning
is part of my abolitionist practice, as are examining
how I parent my child, how I hold myself and others
accountable, how I organize in my community, how
I earn, spend, and share money, how I dance, how I make
art, how I build relationships, *how I do anything*.
Abolition brings freedom, and I’ve tasted that joy, that
liberation, that abundance, that love. And how could
I not want that for you? For all of us?



XO,
RACHEL KINBAR