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Practicing Love

Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality

Abstract: This article studies love as a distinct, transformative, and radical Black feminist politic. By closely sitting with the work of Alice Walker, June Jordan, and Audre Lorde, this article treats love-politics as another political tradition that has emerged from within the parameters of Black feminist thought, one that challenges the political tradition most closely associated with Black feminist thought: intersectionality.

"I often talk about love as one of the few places where people actually admit they want to become different."[1]
— Lauren Berlant

By the summer of 1972, Roberta Flack and Donny Hathaway's eponymous album had already produced two Billboard hits. But it was the album's third single, "Where Is the Love?" that was its biggest success. Flack and Hathaway's harmonies earned them comparisons to Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell, and the song's catchy chorus—"where is the love you said was mine, all mine, to the end of the time, was it just a lie? Where is the love?"—helped make "Where is the Love?" one of the summer's most memorable hits.

Six years later, June Jordan delivered her "Where is the Love?" speech at Howard University's National Black Writers Conference. Jordan said, "It is here, in this extreme, inviolable coincidence of my status as a Black feminist, my status as someone twice stigmatized, my status as a Black woman

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who is twice kin to the despised majority of all the human life that there is, . . . it is here, in this extremity, that I ask, of myself, and of anyone who would call me *sister. Where is the love?*" (Jordan 2003, 270–71; italics in original). In the years to come, her plea for love would become widely anthologized, included in Gloria Anzaldúa's edited collection *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, and republished in *Essence Magazine*. Jordan's "where is the love?" refrain—like the chorus of a catchy song—was instantly popular in Black feminist circles. This paper uses Jordan's query—*where is the love?*—as a window into a much longer, and largely unanalyzed, Black feminist tradition of love-politics, a tradition marked by transforming love from the personal (epitomized by Flack and Hathaway's song about romantic love gone wrong) into a theory of justice.

Of course, Jordan was not the first to put love at the center of her Black feminist project; a few years earlier, the Combahee River Collective Statement noted that its proto-intersectional politics "evolve[s] from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters, and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work" (Combahee River Collective 1983, 267). Nor has Black feminist love-politics been confined to "second-wave" Black feminist organizing; in fact, it remains a political and rhetorical trope even in contemporary Black feminist scholarship.[2] Joan Morgan asserts that "black-on-black love" is the centerpiece of her hip-hop feminism (Morgan 1995, 152), Gwendolyn Pough argues that the labor of contemporary Black feminism should be articulating a "message of self-love" (Pough 2003, 241), and bell hooks reminds us that "all the great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethic" (hooks 2000, xvii).

Although Black feminist love-politics has been expressed in distinctive ways in different periods, this paper focuses on a "second-wave"[3] Black moment when pleas for love were consolidated into a sustained call for a Black feminist love-politics, a moment that set the stage for later women of color feminist scholarship—including work by hooks, Traci West, Chela Sandoval, and Patricia Hill Collins—grappling with love. This particular moment has long been celebrated for its advocacy of love as a resistant ethic of self-care. If "bein alive & bein a woman & bein colored is a metaphysical dilemma"—to borrow Ntozake Shange's oft-quoted lines—then Black feminism's insistence on love, particularly self-love, might be read as a practice of self-valuation (Shange 1977, 45). Collins captures this reading of Black self-love, arguing that, "Loving Black people . . . in a society that

is so dependent on hating Blackness constitutes a highly rebellious act" (Collins 2004, 250). According to this scholarly tradition, love is a politics of claiming, embracing, and restoring the wounded Black female self.

My interest in Black feminist love-politics departs from interpretations of love as simply a practice of self-valuation. Instead, I analyze "second-wave" Black feminism's pleas for love as a significant call for ordering the self *and* transcending the self, a strategy for remaking the self *and* for moving beyond the limitations of selfhood. Moreover, this paper reads Black feminist love-politics' insistence on transcending the self and producing new forms of political communities as a kind of affective politics. My use of the term *affective politics* draws on work by scholars including Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, José Muñoz, and Ann Cvetkovich, who invite us to ask: "how do emotions work to align some subjects with some others and against other others? How do emotions move between bodies?" (Ahmed 2004, 118). I use the term *affective politics* to describe how bodies are organized around intensities, longings, desires, temporalities, repulsions, curiosities, fatigues, optimism, and how these affects produce political movements (or sometimes inertias). I am particularly interested in reading Black feminism's affective love politics as a departure from the kind of political work that Black feminism is often associated with: *identity politics.*

Reading Black feminist love-politics as an affective project serves three important purposes. First, this paper intervenes in scholarly conversations advocating the emergence of a "politics of love" by highlighting Black feminism's long labor of love-politics. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for example, bemoan a culturally narrow view of love, and advocate the dawning of a political era marked by public love. They argue, "The modern concept of love is almost exclusively limited to the bourgeois couple and the claustrophobic confines of the nuclear family. Love has become a strictly private affair. We need a more generous and more unrestrained conception of love" (Hardt and Negri 2004, 351). Yet their plea for a "generous and more unrestrained conception of love" ignores the long history of Black feminism's love-politics, a politics marked by a broad activist conception of love. My work asks how a consideration of Black feminism's love-politics might enable us to rethink the very contours of a "generous" love-politics.

Second, this paper endeavors to center Black feminism in affect theory's intellectual genealogy. The "affective turn"[4] in critical theory (Staiger, Cvetkovich, and Reynolds 2010, 5) has produced a rich body of scholarship invested in "public feelings," in the ways that "global politics and history

manifest themselves at the level of lived affective experience" (Cvetkovich 2007, 461). This work problematizes the boundaries between private and public, and draws intimate connections between the subjective and the social, between the emotional and the political.

This scholarly tradition generally roots itself in queer theory. Ann Cvetkovich's description of the Public Feelings project—a group of scholars working at the intersections of academia, political action, and performance—is emblematic of this genealogical work. She notes:

> It's impossible to imagine the Public Feelings project without the inspiration of queer work. Our interest in everyday life, in how global politics and history manifest themselves at the level of lived affective experience, is bolstered by the role that queer theory has played in calling attention to the integral role of sexuality within public life. Moreover, our interest in negative affects draws inspiration from the depathologizing work of queer studies, which has made it possible to document and revalue nonnormative ways of living. (Cvetkovich 2007, 461)

Cvetkovich goes on to argue that affect theory helps to make queer studies "intersectional" (462), and notes the importance of work emerging from African American Studies, particularly on the violent trauma of the Atlantic slave trade, to affect studies (465). Her work, then, gestures to the intimate relationship between affect studies and African American studies. My article continues the labor she begins: locating affect theory *within* Black feminist studies.

Finally, and most important, my paper reveals that Black feminism has long engaged in political work that transcends—or, at the very least, circumvents—identity politics and its at-times problematic elisions and lapses into essentialism (Brown 1995). In a moment in which Black feminism is increasingly imagined as synonymous with intersectionality, and in which intersectionality is increasingly scrutinized, underscoring Black feminism's nonidentitarian political labor is particularly significant (Kwan 1997; Ehrenreich 2002; Puar 2005). Indeed, in this post-identitarian—or at least identity-skeptical—theoretical milieu, feminists regularly craft narratives about feminist history that relegate Black feminism to the past (Lee 2000; Hemmings 2010) precisely because of its imagined attachment to identity-work, an attachment that has been "vilified by feminists of many different persuasions" (Hekman 2000, 289). My investment in tracing Black feminism's *non*-identitarian work is animated by a commitment to

underscoring the myriad political traditions that have long been part of Black feminism, but that are often ignored because of the extent of intersectionality's institutionalization.

To be clear, I am not indicting intersectionality and celebrating love-politics; instead, I am interested in heeding Muñoz's call to "imagine a position or narrative of being and becoming that can resist the pull of identitarian models of relationality" (Muñoz 2006, 677), and in foregrounding Black feminist work that imagines "relationality" outside of the elisions of identity politics. Moreover, I am not suggesting that intersectional labor is inherently opposed to affective work, particularly in a moment in which intersectionality is practiced across the humanities and social sciences, and is inflected differently by each intersectionality practitioner. Instead, this paper is undergirded by the belief that the task of tracing Black feminism's multiple and heterogeneous political traditions is of the utmost importance in a moment in which Black feminist labor is increasingly reduced to the status of a relic because of its affiliation with intersectionality's identitarian work.

What do I mean when I describe intersectionality as an identitarian project? In this article, I argue that intersectionality is inextricably linked to the production and maintenance of identity categories. Its primary intervention, I argue, is to add complexity to existing identity categories, not to jettison identity categories altogether. As Robyn Wiegman notes, intersectionality "promises . . . a critical practice that gives difference to identity in order to discern identity's multiple and proliferating intensities, inequities, and political agencies" (Wiegman 2012, 240). That is, the "promise" of intersectionality, a theoretical innovation that is now regularly championed as "the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies . . . has made so far" (McCall 2005, 1775), is "particularity, specifically through the critical location attributed to both black women and black feminism, *and* in such a way that no configuration of identity as a constructed social relation of power and subordination is thought to be beyond its analytical reach" (Wiegman 2012, 240). Intersectionality's investment in "particularity" is evident in its investment in using Black women's experience to problematize the rigid distinction between race and gender while maintaining a fundamental faith in both categories as meaningful, legible, and coherent.

My reading of intersectionality as an identitarian project underscores that it emerged both as *juridical intervention* and as a *restoration of identity*

politics crafted in a moment—not unlike the one we inhabit now—when identity politics was increasingly critiqued for eliding intragroup difference. As a juridical intervention, intersectionality problematizes an antidiscrimination regime that always presumes the mutual exclusiveness of race and gender. By recognizing as cognizable (and legally actionable) only discrimination claims that are *either* race-based or gender-based, antidiscrimination law often, though not always, ignores Black women's injuries because:

> Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men. . . . [O]ften they experience double-discrimination—the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women—not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women. (Crenshaw 1989, 149)

Kimberlé Crenshaw's intervention reveals that the architecture of antidiscrimination doctrine, with its insistent *or* formation—race-*or*-gender—ignores the "and" that captures many Black women's experiences. Crenshaw's juridical intervention, then, was not to abandon antidiscrimination law's reliance on categories both for redressing injuries and for granting relief. Rather, she sought to reveal the injuries that antidiscrimination's logic necessarily elides or ignores, and to show the necessity of judicial attention to injuries that occur "in the intersection" of race and gender.

If intersectionality emerged as a legal intervention, it also sought to rehabilitate identity politics. Crenshaw's point of departure is that identity politics "frequently conflates or ignores intragroup difference" (Crenshaw 1991, 1242), and that intersectionality can restore complexity to identity politics by insisting on a recognition that race and gender are heterogeneous categories.[5] To say it another way, Crenshaw seeks to dismantle the logic that Barbara Smith, Gloria T. Hull, and Patricia Bell Scott called attention to with their aptly titled anthology *All the Women are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (Hull, Scott, and Smith 1982). Crenshaw notes, "the intersectional experiences of women of color marginalized in prevailing conceptions of identity politics does not require that we give up attempts to organize as communities of color. Rather, intersectionality provides a basis for reconceptualizing race as a coalition between

men and women of color. . . . Recognizing that identity politics takes place at the site where categories intersect thus seems more fruitful than challenging the possibility of talking about categories at all" (Crenshaw 1991, 1299). For Crenshaw, intersectionality allows for identity-politics practitioners to perform identity work with a new attention to the heterogeneity of the categories they labor with.

This is not to say that intersectionality neglects the contextuality and contingency of identity. At times, intersectionality has usefully analyzed how one's experience of subjectivity or domination depends on location and moment. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's now-canonical work on the "metalanguage of race," for example, recognizes that race "lends meaning" to gender, sexuality, and class in historically specific ways, effectively "impregnating the simplest meanings we take for granted. It makes hair 'good' or 'bad,' speech patterns 'correct' or 'incorrect'" (Higginbotham 1992, 255). Higginbotham's intervention reveals that race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect—to borrow Crenshaw's vocabulary—in context-specific ways. My interest, though, is in how categories remain fixed, legible, and knowable, even as scholars attend to how context shifts our experiences of our selves and the structures of domination that constrain us.

This paper begins by arguing that Black feminism's recurring interest in love can be interpreted as an advocacy of a particular kind of self-work, one that encourages the Black feminist subject to transcend the self. The paper then asks how this politics so focused on a labor of the self might also be the vanguard of a promising form of nonidentitarian Black feminist politics, one that we might fruitfully consider "postintersectional" (Kwan 1997; Hutchinson 2001; Chang and Culp 2002). Prefixes like *post* are always misleading temporally and politically; the labor of "postintersectionality," at least as I use the term, is not to suggest that intersectionality is no longer useful. Instead, I use "postintersectionality" as an invitation to problematize the interdisciplinary fetishization of intersectionality's "complexity" (Nash 2010; Wiegman 2012), as part of a larger endeavor to uncouple Black feminism and intersectionality (Nash 2011), and as a move toward recognizing Black feminism's other political traditions. In suggesting that love-politics might help us think about Black feminist politics outside of—or beyond—intersectionality, I hope to show that Black feminism's political tradition is rich and heterogeneous, that it has reflected and unleashed myriad "freedom dreams" (Kelley 2003).

Self-Love as a Practice of Freedom

In 1983, Alice Walker began *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* with a two-page definition of womanism (Walker 1983). In the years that followed its publication, Walker's definition would become the subject of vibrant interdisciplinary debate as scholars routinely asked: what is womanism? How is it different from feminism, and from black feminism? What is the value of a new name for Black feminism? Does womanism contain a viable and distinctive politics?[6] Walker's "feminist, Afrocentric, healing, embodied, and spiritual" (Razak 2006, 100) definition is at times quite specific—referring to "a black feminist or feminist of color"—and at times it defines womanism "associatively" by connecting the womanist subject to a set of practices and beliefs (Torfs 2007, 20). Though the definition moves from the specific to the general, from the material to the spiritual, it emphatically stakes out womanism as a political project separate from feminism.

For Walker, womanism is distinct from mainstream feminism because it emerges from an imagined Black woman's standpoint, from the collective and particular experience of Black women's gendered and racialized oppression. As such, womanism is imagined to "describe black women's historical responses" to conditions of patriarchy and White dominance (Collins 1996, 16). Although Walker documents the social and historical context from which womanism emerges, she also differentiates womanism from mainstream feminism: if womanism is serious, grounded, universal, and purposeful, feminism is its opposite, somehow trivial, diminished, selective, *silly*. Where womanism is a vibrant, deep "purple," feminism is a quiet, muted "lavender."

Yet Walker's definition does far more than distinguish a womanist practice from a mainstream feminist practice; it crafts an episteme from Black women's imagined experiences. Walker's womanism amplifies the centrality of love to Black feminist politics. Although love had long been foundational to Black feminist thought—from members of the Black women's club movement advocating the "power of love" (Fannie Barrier Williams, quoted in Hendricks 1998, 19) to Audre Lorde's claim that "what was native has been stolen from us, the love of Black women for each other" (Lorde 1984, 175)—Walker's womanism is both one of the clearest Black feminist attempts to stake out a particular Black feminist politics and one of the clearest articulations of love as Black feminist politics. Love is central to the very definition of the womanist subject who feels love for other women ("loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually"), for humanity

("committed to survival and wholeness of entire people"), for the spiritual world ("Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit") for celebration ("loves music. Loves dance. . . . Loves love and food and roundness"), and, most important, for her self.

Scholars have long noted the importance of love to womanism's "ethical or ideal vision," but have tended to celebrate certain loves that Walker champions, and to downplay others (Collins 1996, 16). Walker's universalistic appeal, her call for a love "that embraces everyone for the purposes of healing, change, and liberation," is often a celebrated portion of womanism (Sanders et al. 2006, 152). In its broad humanistic appeal, the grounded, "serious" Black womanist subject is "traditionally universalist." Walker writes, "As in: 'Mama, why are we brown, pink and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?' Ans: 'Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.'" Walker's womanist subject is invested in the preservation (and representation) of "every color flower," a gesture that shows that the political project of womanism is a radical investment in difference. For Walker, womanism's universality is rooted in Black women's particular experiences. She notes, "Part of our tradition as black women is that we are universalists. Black children, yellow children, red children, brown children, that is the black woman's normal, day-to-day relationship. In my family alone, we are about four different colors" (Bradley 1984, quoting Walker). The embrace of difference becomes a way of connecting womanism to Black women's imagined experiences and traditions.[7]

Yet I am particularly interested in what I read as the most novel, underanalyzed, and transgressive portion of Walker's definition: her call for the womanist subject's unwavering self-love. Walker's womanist subject "loves herself. *Regardless*." The italicized "*regardless*" reveals that self-love is absolutely essential, that it persists in spite of everything else. Although Walker's call to self-love is certainly an "artful advocacy of unconditional love that starts with our acceptance of ourselves as divinely and humanly lovable," it is also far more (Sanders et al. 2006, 152). With "regardless" modifying "loves herself," Walker suggests that self-love stands at the heart of the womanist project, and functions as a prerequisite for the other kinds of humanistic, sensual, erotic, and spiritual loves that the womanist embodies. Self-love, it seems, is the only love that must *always* exist; it is the love that enables the other loves Walker's womanist embodies, engenders, and relishes. It is also the love that allows for the pleasures the womanist

subject enjoys—the pleasure in the Folk, in the moon, in roundness, in music and dance.

At its broadest, Walker's plea for self-love articulates a relationship between self and politics, revealing that womanist politics requires a particular orientation of self, and that ethical management of the self might even *prefigure* the political and creative projects that the womanist subject engages in.[8] But what does this arrangement of the self look like? If, as Elizabeth Povinelli argues, love is a "political event," what kind of "political event" is the womanist call for self-love? (Povinelli 2006, 175).

For Walker, love is a strategy of orienting the self away from the frivolous, from the insignificant, and toward what she describes simply as the "serious." Walker asserts that the womanist subject wants "to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. . . . Responsible. In charge. *Serious*." The womanist subject is "grown," she orients her self toward "grown up doings," toward "knowing more," toward a kind of social engagement that transcends the self. Being grown describes a self prepared to move beyond itself, a self that recognizes the limitations of selfhood, a self prepared for a certain kind of radical curiosity about the social world. The politics of womanism is an active working on the self, preparing it for the labor of social engagement, and for the task of advocating for the "survival and wholeness of entire people." To put it another way: womanist politics requires subjects to work on their selves in order to transcend their selves; it is, then, a radical articulation of the political limitations of selfhood.

Walker's "serious" womanist subject orders her self to transcend her self; other Black feminists have suggested that a commitment to love means training the self in other ways, in ways that extend and challenge the self. For some Black feminists, love-politics has been amplified as a call to orient the self *toward* difference, even in the face of fear or anxiety. Lorde writes, "I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices" (Lorde 1984, 113). For Lorde, Black feminist love-politics requires turning the self away from "terror and loathing," from a fear of "any difference that lives there." Indeed, Lorde implies that all subjects have a "deep place of knowledge" where fear abides; this is the place that has to be "touch[ed]" to realize the

feminist goal of allowing "the personal as the political . . . to illuminate all our choices." Though the labor of training the self might be taxing, the result is productive: Black feminists can learn to "value recognition within each other's eyes as well as within our own, and seek a balance between these visions" (173). Lorde, then, is making an implicit claim about the untrained self (that it "fears" difference) and urging her Black feminist subjects to embrace a politics that names that fear, and actively labors to topple it.

Like Lorde, Jordan treats love as a configuration of the self that labors to transcend the fear of difference. She asks, "If I am a Black feminist serious in undertaking self-love, it seems to me that I should gain and gain and gain in strength so that I may without fear be able and willing to love and respect, for example, women who are not feminists, not professionals, not as old or as young as I am, women who have neither job nor income, women who are not Black" (Jordan 2003, 271). For Jordan, the political act of "undertaking self-love" is the process of embracing difference, of becoming more expansive in one's conception of political community. Both Lorde and Jordan suggest that the labor of crafting a collectivity constructed around difference requires a "serious . . . undertaking," the task of working on—or perhaps even against—the self. The self is then able to recognize the possibility of a politics organized not around the elisions (and illusions) of sameness, but around the vibrancy and complexity of difference.

What Walker, Lorde, and Jordan share is a fundamental conception that love is a labor of actively reorienting the self, pushing the self to be configured in new ways that might be challenging or difficult. The three also explicitly resist rooting love-politics in romantic love, something that some contemporary hip-hop feminists have not been able to avoid. Hip-hop feminist Joan Morgan, for example, imagines hip-hop feminism as a response to the peculiarly contemporary problem of Black lovelessness.[9] For Morgan, the tasks of hip-hop feminism are to treat hip-hop as a productive archive that records and amplifies Black male pain, and to answer Black male pain with an unwavering—though not self-destructive—love. Morgan argues, "As black women, we've got to do what any rational, survivalist-minded person would do after finding herself in a relationship with someone whose pain makes him abusive. We must continue to give up the love but *from a distance that's safe*" (Morgan 1995, 155; italics in original). For Morgan, love is not a strategy of self-labor or a transformative practice

of reorienting the self; instead, it is something that is "given up" for the preservation of an imagined Black community. More than that, Morgan suggests that Black women should "give up the love" to avoid loneliness. She ends her piece with a haunting warning: "At the end of the day, I'd prefer the love to the empty victory of being right and alone anyway. Wouldn't you?" (157). By evoking the specter of Black female loneliness, Morgan reveals that her concept of love is not about the transformation of self but instead about romance.

Although Morgan's call for love wears the guise of a radical politics, it is actually a departure from the long labor of Black feminist love-politics consolidated during the "second wave." In fact, Black feminist love-politics practitioners rejected the notion that the political call to love is simply a call to love *others*. Although scholar-activists like Walker carved out space within their conception of love-politics for loving others (Walker, for example, notes that the womanist might "love other women sexually and/or nonsexually. . . . Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually"), the political thrust of their notion of love is that it is a labor of the self, not a romantic attachment to an Other. Part of what makes the work of second-wave love-practitioners so radical is a fundamental investment in love as a practice of self-work.

Love and Politics/Loving Politics

If Black feminism's commitment to love has been amplified as an interest in a transformative labor of the self, it has also manifested itself through an advocacy of the formation of affective political communities. My analysis focuses on two aspects of love-politics that render it a distinctive, nonidentitarian *political* tradition: first, Black feminist love-politics stakes out a radical conception of the public sphere; second, Black feminist love-politics maintains a new relationship to temporality generally, and to futurity specifically. In both regards, Black feminist love-politics offers a sharp departure from the identitarian labor of intersectionality revealing the existence—indeed, vibrancy—of multiple Black feminist political traditions.

My investment in locating a distinctive, affective, Black feminist politics emerges, in part, in response to strong—and important—critiques of intersectionality amplified by a host of scholars, most notably Jasbir Puar. For Puar, intersectionality—at least as it is currently practiced—is too easily adapted into liberal regimes of inclusivity, too easily works as a strategy

of "difference management," and too often gets taken up as "a tool of diversity management, and a mantra of liberal multiculturalism . . . [which] colludes with the disciplinary apparatus of the state—census, demography, racial profiling, surveillance—in that 'difference' is encased within a structural container that simply wishes the messiness of identity into a formulaic grid" (Puar 2005, 128). In place of intersectionality, Puar advocates theorizing "assemblage," which "underscores feeling, tactility, ontology, affect, and information" (Puar 2007, 215). Puar treats assemblage as opposed to intersectionality (though later she would note they are not opposed but "rather frictional"); if intersectionality can be a technology of liberalism invested in inclusion and diversity, assemblage is invested in movement, futurity, and affect. Puar's intervention is significant because, I argue, Black feminist love-politics constitutes a Black feminist tradition *deeply* invested in "feeling, tactility . . . [and] affect," and in crafting political communities constituted by heterogeneity and variety, rather than homogeneity and fixity. So how might we read Black feminist love-politics as performing precisely the kind of work that Puar suggests is opposed (or "frictional") to intersectionality, a kind of affective politics that transcends the pitfalls of visibility, inclusion, and liberalism associated with intersectionality? What is the affective political work that Black feminism's call to love performs, and how is it different from the identitarian work of intersectionality?

First, Black feminism's love-politics offers a powerful reconception of the public sphere. My understanding of the public is indebted to Cvetkovich, who suggests that we keep the definition of "public culture" expansive to make space for "forms of affective life that have not solidified into institutions, organizations, or identities" (Cvetkovich 2003, 9), and to Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, who "support forms of affective, erotic, and personal living that are public in the sense of accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity" (Berlant and Warner 1998, 562). My understanding of "public culture" is also indebted to the interdisciplinary work on the "black public sphere," which treats an expansive archive—from "street talk and new musics, radio shows and church voices"—as part of a "wider sphere of critical practice and visionary politics" (Black Public Sphere Collective 1995, 3).[10] I draw on this interdisciplinary body of scholarship to ask how Black feminist love-politics engenders new publics, new forms of relationality, even if tenuous and fleeting, marked by forms of collective sentiment rather than by identity.

If "communal affect" constitutes the "ties that bind utopian communities," then Black feminism's love-politics creates a public culture based on a collective "public feeling" of love, or what Jordan calls "a steady-state deep caring and respect for every other human being, a love that can only derive from a secure and positive self-love" (Jordan 2003, 272). Love, then, is a practice of self, a labor of the self, that forms the basis of political communities rooted in a radical ethic of care. In her "Where is the Love?" speech, Jordan asserts, "I am entering my soul into a struggle that will most certainly transform the experience of all the peoples of the earth, as no other movement can, in fact, hope to claim: because the movement into self-love, self-respect, and self-determination is the movement now galvanizing the true, the unarguable majority of human beings everywhere" (270). Jordan's claim—that she is participating in a struggle of like-minded subjects, an "unarguable majority"—reveals that the public sphere she wants to create is one rooted in a shared commitment to "self-love, self-respect, and self determination." What her "unarguable majority" shares is a commitment to a utopian vision, a commitment to "transform[ing] the experience of all the peoples of the earth." Jordan's political community is not based on the elisions of identity or a shared (imagined) sameness, but on a conception of the public rooted in affiliation and a shared set of feelings. It is this affiliation—however tenuous, however momentary, however fragmentary—that allows Jordan to shift from a minoritarian politics to a conversation about an "unarguable majority."

This is not, of course, to argue that Jordan does not recognize profound social inequalities and how they are allocated in ways that coincide with race, gender, class, and sexuality. Indeed, Jordan is one of the great theorists of racial and gendered violence and their effects on the material, social, and psychic lives of those who are subjected to brutality. Instead, I am interested in how a radical ethic of care, rather than an assertion of shared injury (when, of course, the great insight of Black feminist theory has been to showcase that injury is never *really* shared; identity-work always requires elisions), can form the basis of a public. By jettisoning identity as the foundation of her public sphere, Jordan's plea for love transcends the "logic of pain" that Wendy Brown identifies as lying at the heart of many calls for identity politics (Brown 1995, 64). Brown argues that a conception of injury is central to identity politics because "politicized identities generated out of liberal, disciplinary societies, insofar as they are premised on exclusion from a universal ideal, require that ideal, as well as their

exclusion from it, for their own perpetuity as identities" (408). But for Jordan, the public is not a site for articulating—or displaying—wounded Black flesh; instead, it is the site where selves laboring to love—to orient their selves toward difference, toward transcending the self—join in a form of relationality. In so doing, Black feminist love-politics "shed[s] new light on the possibilities of the public sphere," imagining the public sphere as a site organized around a shared utopian vision rather than around a wounded, shared identity that demands recognition of the wound (Pough 2004, 166).

Black feminist love-politics also reshapes the public sphere by offering a distinctive conception of remedy. Rather than looking to the state for remedy—as intersectional projects often do in their sometimes ambivalent call for doctrinal remedy[11]—Black feminist love-politics asks how affective communities can themselves be a site of redress. This is not to say that naming injury *isn't* important or that minoritarian subjects do not need the state to redress harm; instead, I read this turning away from the state as a critique of the state's shortcomings, particularly its unwillingness to adequately name and redress Black women's injuries. By insistently looking *away* from the state, love-politics practitioners perform frustration, revealing their understandings of the limitations of a regime that is not committed to redressing their harms. For example, Jordan asks, "*Where is the love*? How is my own lifework serving to end these tyrannies, these corrosions of sacred possibility? How do the strong, the powerful, treat children? How do we treat the aged among us? How do the strong and the powerful treat so-called minority members of the body politic? How do the powerful regard women? How do they treat us?" (Jordan 2003, 270). Jordan's queries suggest that although the "unarguable majority" cannot undo "tyranny," the "majority" can critically analyze its role in the perpetuation of injustice, and labor to unlock itself from the hold of hegemony. More than that, affective communities can consider the "sacred possibilities" they can unlock *even under* conditions of patriarchy and white-dominance. By insisting on analyzing both how the powerful "treat so-called minority members of the body politic" and how political communities can organize around unlocking the connections between subjects, Jordan argues that the labor of unlocking the "sacred possibility" among us comes from examining our own engagement with power, and locating ways to remove ourselves from its seductive hold. By focusing on how the public sphere can be a site of redressing the "spirit-murder" of racism and

sexism—through conventional activism and through practices that reveal that "customary forms of political response, including direct action and critical analysis are no longer working either to change the world or to make us feel better" (Cvetkovich 2007, 460)—Black feminist love-politics implicitly offers a critique of the state and its capacity (or incapacity) to ever adequately remedy injuries.

Although love-politics reformulates public culture and organizes it around affect and new conceptions of redress, love-politics also orients public culture toward a different sense of temporality, one that Jordan gestures to in her call for a recognition of "sacred possibility." Recent years have been filled with interdisciplinary calls toward thinking about the possible, from Muñoz's conceptualization of queerness as an embrace of "futurity," (Muñoz 2009) to Robin D. G. Kelley's celebratory belief that "the map to a new world is in the imagination" (Kelley 2002, 2) to Wendy Brown's plea to move toward "claims which, rather than dispensing blame for an unlivable present, inhabited the necessarily agonistic theater of discursively forging an alternative future" (Brown 1995, 408) to Kathi Weeks's interest in "a horizon of utopian possibility" (Weeks 2011, 30). Indeed, critical theory's recent preoccupation with temporality—particularly queer theory's interest in conceptualizing queerness as a critique of normative time—has led some scholars to champion a "politics of the open end" (Puar 2007, 215).

Black feminist love-politics, though, has long been invested in the "open end," in radical possibility, orienting itself toward a yet-unknown future. Black feminist love-politics constantly evokes what "has yet to be known, seen, or heard" (Puar 2007, 216) or what Kelley calls the labor of "talk[ing] openly of revolution and dream[ing] of a new society, sometimes creating cultural works that enable communities to envision what's possible with collective action, personal self transformation, and will" (Kelley 2002, 7). To put it another way, Black feminist love-politics is staunchly utopian; rather than the presentism of a visibility politics like intersectionality, which calls for legibility and recognition in "the here and now," Black feminist love-politics, like Muñoz's reading of queerness, chooses "the future" as its "domain" (Muñoz 2009, 1).

The traces of the what-might-be are present in Lorde's rumination on "the future of our earth" that "may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference" (Lorde 1984, 123) and in her description of the virtues of

anger, where she notes "we *are* moving on. With or without uncolored women. We use whatever strengths we have fought for, including anger, to help define and fashion a world where all our sisters can grow, where our children can love, and where the power of touching and meeting another woman's difference and wonder will eventually transcend the need for destruction" (123). Lorde's project is, at its simplest, world-making, it is "moving on" toward a future that is not yet here but is unfolding; her interest is in what Muñoz would call the "could." It is a project strategically disinvested in remedying the present (or the possibility that the present could be remedied), and wholeheartedly invested in the future as a locus of possibility. This orientation toward the "could" echoes what Muñoz terms "feeling revolutionary," a sentiment he describes as a "feeling that our current situation is not enough, that something is indeed missing and we cannot live without it. Feeling revolutionary opens up the space to imagine a collective escape, an exodus, a 'going-off script' together. . . . Practicing educated hope is the enactment of a critique function. It is not about announcing the way things *ought* to be, but, instead, imagining what things *could* be" (Muñoz and Duggan 2009, 278). It is the interest in "collective escape," in the visionary dreaming about "going off script" that distinguishes Black feminist love-politics' utopian impulse from the presentism of identitarian politics like intersectionality.

In describing intersectionality as present-oriented, I do not mean to deny intersectionality's commitment to a just social world, which is, of course, a visionary project, or to discount its normative project: reconfiguring legal doctrine, insisting on the inherent value of Black women's experiences, reformulating feminist and antiracist theory. What I mean, though, is that intersectionality relies on an attachment—perhaps even a cruel attachment[12]—to the present in two ways: first, it insists that redress can be crafted *within the confines* of the social moment as it now exists. Legal doctrine can be reformed to make cognizable race-*and*-gender-based discrimination claims; feminism can be recrafted to "include" Black women's experiences; antiracist work can be transformed to take seriously Black women's injuries. Second, intersectionality's very conception of identity, which treats race and gender as fixed, coherent, and legible, "presupposes identity and thus disavows futurity, or, perhaps more accurately, prematurely anticipates and thus fixes a permanence to forever" (Puar 2005, 216). Although intersectionality fixes identity, presuming that race and gender are stable categories that interact in particular and knowable ways, it also

aspires to make visible those identities and their intersections in the "here-and-now."

Black feminist love-politics suspends this attachment to the present, recognizing that changing the grammar of our contemporary political moment will not remove us from the script that is always already in place. Instead, love-politics practitioners dream of a yet unwritten future; they imagine a world ordered by love, by a radical embrace of difference, by a set of subjects who work on/against themselves to work for each other. This dreaming, of course, does not suspend labor; Black feminist love-politics practitioners have always been attached to the idea that the radical future requires certain kinds of very hard work, pushing beyond our investments in selfhood and sameness, and reaching toward collectivities and possibilities. Nor does this vision neglect the host of ways that power and structures of domination work on and against bodies in quotidian and spectacular ways. It is a critical response to the violence of the ordinary and the persistence of inequality that insists on a politics of the visionary.

Ultimately, Black feminist love-politics proposes a departure from the identitarian political work that is so often associated with Black feminism. Where proto-intersectional groups like the Combahee River Collective insisted that "we believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity" (Combahee River Collective 1983, 16), a sentiment that Crenshaw would share a decade later when she coined the term "intersectionality," Black feminist love-politics responds with its own "radical politics." Black feminist love-politics crafts a political community that eschews the wounded subject that lies at the heart of identity politics. In its place, it crafts a collectivity marked by "communal affect," a utopian, visionary, future-oriented community held together by affiliation and "public feeling" rather than an imagined—or enforced—sameness.

Thinking Love, Doing Love

Kelley argues, "Freedom and love may be the most revolutionary ideas available to us, and yet as intellectuals, we have failed miserably to grapple with their political and analytical importance" (Kelley 2002, 11–12). My paper takes up Kelley's challenge and examines how Black feminists have treated love as a "revolutionary idea." Indeed, this paper has endeavored to show that Black feminism's long tradition of love-politics—particularly as it was consolidated during the "second wave"—has effectively amplified a "material and political" conception of love (Hardt and Negri 2004, 352). For

the scholar-activists at the center of my analysis—Alice Walker, June Jordan, Audre Lorde—love acted as a *doing*, a call for a labor of the self, an appeal for transcending the self, a strategy for remaking the public sphere, a plea to unleash the radical imagination, and a critique of the state's blindness to the violence it inflicts and enables.

Love, of course, is not wholly unproblematic political terrain: it can be deployed to shore up heteronormativity, to re-energize dominant narratives of romance, and to advance claims to power. Sara Ahmed's work, for example, invites scholars to examine how the claim to be acting *in* or *through* love can enable the exertion of particular kinds of power. She asks, "How has politics become a struggle over who has the right to name themselves as acting out of love? What does it mean to stand for love by standing alongside some others and against other others?" (Ahmed 2003). Her work reveals that the "language of love" operates, at least at times, by concealing animus and renaming it love.

Though it is important to consider how claims to acting in love are often claims to power as well, this paper celebrates Black feminist love-politics as producing a number of critical shifts: first, studying Black feminism's long labor of love-politics reveals an under-studied Black feminist political tradition, and underscores the importance of not reducing Black feminist work exclusively to intersectional work. In so doing, the paper aspires to counter a larger trend in feminist theory to relegate Black feminism to the category of feminisms-past, feminisms problematically (and anachronistically) attached to identity. Second, reading Black feminism's long-standing interest in affect exposes that the roots of the "affective turn" are far more varied than often theorized. Although affect theory and queer theory are inextricably intertwined, the labor of constructing political communities around "public feelings" and "communal affect" has been a Black feminist investment for decades. Finally, reading Black feminism's love-politics takes up the challenge that Hardt and Negri advocate when they champion a "politics of love." Indeed, Black feminism's visionary love-politics effectively and hopefully uses a refrain like "where is the love?" and transforms it from a personal question about romantic love into a political call for transcending the self and transforming the public sphere.

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Notes

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1 See Berlant and Hardt 2011.

2 I use the term "second-wave Black feminism" with analytical suspicion, mindful of the host of critiques of wave metaphors. See, for example, Springer 2002; Henry 2004; Snyder 2008.

3 This is not to say that all second-wave Black feminist politics was love-politics; indeed, second-wave Black politics was a moment that was also marked by a proliferation of identity politics. Rather, I am interested in how calls for love-politics were amplified and organized in this moment.

4 Jasbir Puar parses the "affective turn" more finely, suggesting that we might think of it in two particular strains; the first are a set of scholars "who deploy affect as a particular reflection of or attachment to 'structures of being' or feeling that otherwise remains unarticulateable. In many cases affect in these works is situated in a continuum or becomes interchangeable with emotion, feeling, expressive sentiment." The other is, she argues, part of a "Deleuzian frame whereby affect is a physiological and biological phenomenon, signaling why bodily matter matters, what escapes or remains outside of the discursively structured and thus commodity forms of emotion, of feeling" (Puar 2007, 207).

5 Crenshaw echoes this in her article "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law" when she asserts, "History has shown that the most valuable political asset of the Black community has been its ability to assert a collective identity and to name this collective political reality" (Crenshaw 1988, 1336).

6 For examples of some of this debate, see Collins 1996, 9–17; Coleman 2006, 85–89; and Phillips 2006.

7 Less celebrated, and less analyzed, is Walker's interest in Black women's love for each other—an imagined spiritual *and* sexual connection between Black women. Although other scholar-activists have theorized psychic and erotic connections between women, including Adrienne Rich's lesbian continuum and Audre Lorde's plea for resurrecting and celebrating the erotic, Walker's explicit investment in the *sexual* and nonsexual love between women is explicitly racialized. Although Walker "gives a primacy to the sexual love between women," she also "gives a primacy" to the sexual love between *Black* women (Coleman 2006, 86). And yet the sexual love portion of Walker's womanism continues to be under-theorized.

8 Walker's definition gestures to much earlier philosophical traditions, including Plato's *Republic*, which argues that the soul—consisting of rational, appetitive, and spirited portions—has to be correctly ordered for an individual to be

oriented toward justice (Plato 1992). The just subject, according to Plato, is the one governed by rationality; the rational self tempers both the appetitive and spirited facets of the self, ensuring that the self is governed fairly. It is only when the self is fully balanced—governed by rationality—that it can act virtuously.

9 Sociologist Orlando Patterson echoes these claims, arguing "the simple, sad truth is that Afro-Americans are today the loneliest of all Americans—lonely and isolated as a group; lonely and isolated in their neighborhoods, through which they are often too terrified to walk; lonely as households headed by women sick and tired of being 'the strong black woman'; lonely as single men fearful of commitment; lonely as single women wary of a 'love and trouble' tradition that has always been more trouble than love" (Patterson 1998, xii).

10 My interest in publics is informed by work like Houston Baker's, which is critical of Jürgen Habermas's work on the "bourgeois public sphere." According to Baker, "Habermas [is] eager to enter a time machine and return to the good old days of London coffee houses and literary societies: things long ago and far away" (Baker 1995, 11).

11 Intersectionality practitioners, although invested in seeking redress from the state in the present, also noted that state redress was not their ultimate goal. Crenshaw writes, "the civil rights constituency cannot afford to view antidiscrimination doctrine as a permanent pronouncement of society's commitment to ending racial subordination. Rather, antidiscrimination law represents an ongoing ideological struggle in which the occasional winners harbor the moral, coercive, consensual power of law. Nonetheless, the victories it offers can be ephemeral and the risks of engagement substantial" (Crenshaw 1988, 1335).

12 Here I am referencing Berlant 2011.

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