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Be Longing: Toward a Feminist Politics of Relation

AIMEE CARRILLO ROWE

This paper seeks to think of location from the perspective of belonging to rethink a “politics of location” as a “politics of relation.” I draw upon literature from third world and antiracist feminisms and cultural studies in order to ask: what gets left out when the conditions and effects of belonging to a “location” are assumed as a starting point for our theorizing? To map out and interrogate such conditions create new possibilities for theorizing collective subjectivity. And by extension, a politics of relation asks us to interrogate how we may hold ourselves accountable for who we are (becoming, as a function of belonging), and the collective conditions out of which our agency, experience, and consciousness emerge. I propose “differential belonging”—a tactical maneuvering across resistive communities—as a vehicle for feminist subjects to rewrite/reverse processes of interpellation.

Keywords: community / (coalitional) subjectivity / location / whiteness / heterosexuality / “(differential) belonging”

Ubuntu translates as ‘born to belonging.’ It’s a simple notion: we are all born to belonging, and we know ourselves as humans in just and mutual relationship to one another.

—Mab Segrest, *Born to Belonging: Writings on Spirit and Justice* (2002, 2)

I am writing to you from my girlfriend’s puffy red chair perched by the window, looking out over the lake as fall blows into Iowa, now my “home.”¹ Except when I refer to “home” from here, I mean California. But when I refer to “home” from there, I mean right here. I belong in these places. I belong to and with people here and there. And I long for each in its absence, and neither is complete without the other. And it’s more than these two. There’s also Seattle, the rainy state where I worked on a Ph.D. and delivered my sister’s son beside my brother-in-law. Then there’s Connecticut where I lived by the sea and worked hard and sometimes joyfully for a year. I am not “the same” here and there. In each I long for the other.

“Home, once interrogated, is a place we’ve never been before.” Kamala Visweswaran (1994) wrote this in her meditation on feminist ethnography as failure. She urges us to sit patiently with moments of failure to know more about who we are. Because who we are is always inseparable from the theory we create. And the theory we create allows us to live in new and more just ways. Our “homework” is to examine these connections—between self and community, between community and theory, between

theory and justice. Doing our homework is about making the familiar strange, of revisiting home to unearth what is at stake in its making.

My argument is that who we love² is political. The sites of our belonging constitute how we see the world, what we value, who we are (becoming). The meaning of self is never individual, but a shifting set of relations that we move in and out of, often without reflection. My work aims to render transparent the political conditions and effects of our belonging. It gestures toward deep reflection about the selves we are creating as a function of where we place our bodies, and with whom we build our affective ties. I call this placing a “politics of relation.” It moves theories of locating the subject to a relational notion of the subject. It moves a politics of location from the individual to a coalitional notion of the subject.

My title plays on the notion of interpellation. Louis Althusser’s (1971) well-known parable of a cop hailing a subject, “hey you there!” reveals this function of power. The subject must respond to the hailing because she recognizes that it is she who is called. Whether she chooses to run from the cop, or turn and face her, whether she complies or rebels, who she is is constituted in her recognition that she has been hailed—her recognition of her positioning within webs of power. My title seeks to provide a potentially resistive hailing, or what Chela Sandoval (2000) calls “reverse interpellation.” *Be Longing*, two words, placed beside each other, not run together, phrases a command. The command is to “be” “longing,” not to be still, or be quiet, but to be longing. This being is, of course, a command to which we are already responding. We are always already being hailed by our various (be)longings from the moment of our birth, from those moments well before our births: moments of conquest and settlement, moments of miscegenation and antimiscegenation, of mixing and blending and resistance. We tend to overlook the ways that power is transmitted through our affective ties. Who we love, the communities that we live in, who we expend our emotional energies building ties with—these connections are all functions of power. So the command of this “reverse interpellation” is to call attention to the politics at stake in our belonging, and to envision an alternative.

Mab Segrest has recently written, “what if we began not with the assumption that we were born to ‘segregation, separation, isolation, competition,’ but rather with the assumption that ‘we are all born to belonging’” (2002, 2)? The former assumption of the individual is consolidated in the works of high modernism, from Descartes to Smith to Bacon. This assumption has been part and parcel of colonial conquest, and it finds its zenith in the Bush administration’s convoluted notion of freedom. Freedom of the Western individual to stand on the necks of her neighbors without recognizing the pain in her own neck—her own face reflected there. If the assumption of the individual is foundational to colonial modernity, my hope is that the assumption of belonging is constitutive of the decolonial imaginary.

What is at stake in the shift that I, and I am not the first,³ propose? The command to longing is one that you, reader, “be” something that you are (not), but may not think of “yourself” as because you (especially the Western reader) have been hailed as a subject through countless articulations of “Individuality.” It is signaling toward a process that places oneself at the edge of one’s self and leaning and tipping toward the “others” to whom you belong, or with whom you long to be—or those who are “you.” Jean-Luc Nancy calls it the “clinamen” in his efforts to think the limits of community, and the failure of “communism,” imposed by the “individual.” He writes: “Still, one cannot make a world with simple atoms. There has to be a “clinamen.” There has to be an inclination or an inclining from one toward the other, of one by the other, or from one to the other. Community is at least the “clinamen” of the ‘individual.’” I understand Nancy’s vocabulary to draw upon the moment in which poetry “swerves” from its structured path (Swiss 2003). The structured path from which to swerve is that of the lone traveler, the Individual. In its most radical form, this swerve would entail the annihilation of the subject as individual, her rearticulation as always already “becoming other” (Probyn 1996). There is no subject prior to infinitely shifting and contingent relations of belonging.

This movement beyond the illusion of “self” may be understood as a body in motion: this body “does not coincide with itself. It coincides with its own transition: its own variation. . . . In motion, a body is in an immediate, unfolding relation to its own nonpresent potential to vary” (Massumi 2002, 4). This possibility for ephemeral unfolding appears in that which recedes from the senses, such as the missing Mayan word for “I.” Here the “subject,” or what in the West we would call “I,” is gestured toward through utterances such as “we there in that place,” accompanied by a nod in the direction of the person being named (Rivas 2002). The individual is not consolidated as such, but an embodied and spatially located form of “we” among “us” can be gestured toward. The gesture itself calls upon a set of bodies in motion, coinciding with their own variation and the infinite unfoldings possible among them. This space between eludes us because it does not coincide with itself, especially in those relations that have become so naturalized that their unfoldings are continuous and immediate. We encounter collision, however, when our belongings are stripped from us. And also when our belongings challenge us to rewrite the consciousness of our notions of “self.” But even such collisions occur in motion, washing over us like waves. We, sucked under, gasp for air. We, turn and ride.

A politics of relation is not striving toward absolute alterity to the self, but rather to tip the concept of “subjectivity” away from “individuality” and in the direction of the inclination toward the other so that “being” is constituted not first through the “Self,” but through its own longings to be with. Belonging precedes being. Thus, not “intersubjectivity,” as in a

subject exists and then let's think about the spaces in between subjects, but rather that something called "subjectivity" may be thought as an *effect* of belonging—of the affective, passionate, and political ties that bind us to others. Thus there is no separation between longing—to be with—and being. This is the space I seek to name in section two, to be revisited in section three. I think of it as "differential belonging," una movida/a move to shift the terms of interpellation from that of the subject to the spaces between us.

I am advocating a shift from a notion of identity that begins with "I"—as does the inscription "I-dentity," which announces "I am . . ."—to a sense of "self" that is radically inclined toward others, toward the communities to which we belong, with whom we long to be, and to whom we feel accountable. Perhaps "positionality," with its multiply placed "i's" is a more appropriate signifier (see Lal 1996). These belongings may be multiple, shifting, and even contradictory (in terms of the norms they produce, the politics that drive them, the conditions for loving they request, or demand): family, neighborhood, friends, allies, colleagues, social groups, lovers, nations. In this sense, these sites of belonging are political as they operate in relation to power: with and through, as well as against, in resistance to, and even in directions that redefine and redistribute it. The inclination in the final pages is to think more fully the latter. There I consider stories and theories from those who live that.

Toward a Feminist Politics of Relation: Location, Speaking, Belonging

Tell me/ Whom you love, and I'll tell/ You who you are

—Creole saying, in Jane Lazarre, *Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness: Memoir of a White Mother of Black Sons* (1996, 132)

In this section I argue that the "politics of location" discourses constitute "location" through articulations of identity in which belonging is assumed. But its role and conditions, as well as the potentially critical agency involved in its constitution, get overlooked. In this sense, location is seen as representing a particular set of modes of belonging—to whiteness, to other women as "lesbian," and to U.S. citizenship, for instance—without interrogating the *conditions* that enable, or would potentially disrupt, those sites of affective investment. The analysis in this section seeks to render these conditions visible in order to enable the formation of critical agency, in the form of new modes of accountability for one's "location." To do so I untangle the ways in which location, speaking, and belonging mutually function.

Adrienne Rich's work on the "politics of location" is a productive point of entry to theorize a politics of relation. Her work has influenced much

feminist and critical theory by providing a pivotal intervention into the political conditions of theory production (see Mohanty 2003). I turn my gaze to a set of conversations that have emerged in the wake of Rich's "politics of location" manifesto in an effort to reveal the ways in which belonging emerges within the text and/or subtexts of this discourse as a condition of possibility for thinking "location" and as conditioned by the politics of speaking. While the debates surrounding the politics of location extend well beyond those accounted for here, my interest in the transformative possibilities of transracial feminist alliances⁴ entails a focus on the threads through which white women and women of color are potentially (dis)connected from/to each other. The move I seek to make, from location to relation, entails centering belonging as a starting point for naming and imagining location, as opposed to an effect of location. This is a *politics* of relation for it raises questions of accountability and imagination in the direction of social change.

In "Notes toward a Politics of Location," Adrienne Rich interrogates her positionality as a white, Jewish, lesbian feminist from the United States. The piece provides what Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) would call an "accounting" for Rich's privilege, serving as the overlooked and invisible experiential grounding of her theorizing. This move is one which seeks a wider feminist solidarity by critiquing exclusionary conditions of subject formation in an effort to denaturalize their universalizing effects on theory production. In this sense Rich's work assumes a "view from below,"⁵ which standpoint theory tells us provides a more complete picture of power relations because the oppressed are not deluded by their own investments of power. Given her privileged positioning, then, how did Rich come to this "view from below?" What were relational conditions that produced such a knowing? What relational conditions enable her to acquire this vantage point? Here I suggest that these questions, unasked and unanswered by her text, signal its disjunctures. That is, in spite of her efforts to position herself as a coalitional subject Rich fails to locate "location" within community. In this way, she does not hold herself accountable to the allies who enabled her to see from that vantage. So ultimately, "Notes toward a Politics of Location" constructs her identity as "Enlightened White Feminist" as an *individualized location*. In her failure to interrogate the relational conditions out of which her seeing arises, Rich undercuts the coalitional affectivity of her self-reflexive gesture.

The reflexive turn within feminist and cultural studies is a necessary move to locate the interplay among theory, praxis, and experience. It marks a move beyond modernist notions of objectivity and disinterested knowledge production, not only through its explicit claims about the politics of "power/knowledge," but also through its performativity. It performs how knowledge is "situated" by calling attention to the particularity of the author's identity, and sometimes going so far as to investigate the desires and interests that drive the textual production. Many feminist

cultural workers recognize Adrienne Rich's seminal text, *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* as a point of departure, or foundational text, which ushered in this turn. The book is largely devoted to marking the "politics of location" from which Rich writes of her own location as a White, Jewish, lesbian feminist from the United States. Particularly her essay, "Notes toward a Politics of Location" signifies a critical marker of the reflexive turn.⁶ Rich first delivered "Notes" at the First Summer School of Critical Semiotics Conference on Women, Feminist Identity and Society in the 1980s in Utrecht, Holland, June 1, 1984, and later at various U.S. sites.

In this essay Rich interrogates some of her previous thinking to show the complicity of her own white, Western U.S.-based femininity as serving the overlooked and invisible experiential grounding of her theorizing. Such modes of invisibility mark the conditions of her privileged belongings. That which is most often "invisible" to groups of privilege is often most visible to those who occupy marginalized standpoints. And yet, (in)visibility, as with other conditions of belonging, may be reworked as lines of communication and therefore understanding opens up across lines of power. In Rich's case, she responds to feminist of color critiques of the universalizing tendencies in white feminist theorizing, resisting her previous tendency to universalize "woman" as "always" doing, being, desiring, understanding, experiencing across lines of difference. She admits, for instance, that she "wrote a sentence just now and x'd it out. In it I said that women have always understood the struggle against free-floating abstraction even when they were intimidated by abstract ideas" (214). This move opens up the critical question for Rich, a question that many feminist cultural workers have since reiterated: "When, where, and under what conditions has the statement been true?" This move from the universal to the particular, historicized, and contingent question of knowledge production is a moment in which she begins to "see" herself as embedded in power and privilege. She "corrects" herself from a place outside of herself, from a marginal vantage point.

As she continues, Rich vividly maps her own body, its geographical and historical location, and notes that it is a "body that has more than one identity" (215) as she strives to map out the specificity and confluences of a "politics of location." She writes: "To locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant to me to have a vulva and a clitoris and a uterus and breasts. It means recognizing this white skin, the places it has taken me, the places it has not let me go" (215–6). These bodily markings and the multiple axes through which she names her location work against the universalizing tendencies of whiteness. Later I return to this question of where the white skin takes the person who bears it and the spaces from which it displaces her. But for now I wish to call attention to speech communities to which Rich holds herself accountable and those whom she seeks to challenge. Rich's efforts to mark the

specificity of her white feminist positionality respond to the many critiques of “white feminism” that had already emerged by this time from a host of feminists of color.

One notable text, considered foundational in this regard, is *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, in which editors Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga challenge white feminists to “grapple” with their own oppressions and privileges in order to address the issues dividing women over race, class, and sexuality “head on.” It is the specificity of her own white female body that Rich marks, in a gesture that unsettles the universality of the presumption of white femininity that constituted the site of struggle of “feminism’s” meaning, values, and agenda. She writes of its particularity:

I see scars, disfigurements, discolorations, damages, losses, as well as what pleases me. Bones well nourished from the placenta; the teeth of a middle-class person seen by the dentist twice a year from childhood. White skin, marked and scarred by three pregnancies, an elected sterilization, progressive arthritis, four joint operations, calcium deposits, no rapes, no abortions, long hours at a typewriter—my own, not in a typing pool—and so forth. (1981, 215)

This gesture of marking her white body marks a radical departure from the norms of whiteness in the sense that the white female body is assumed to be unmarked, its racial location, its class privilege necessarily *invisible* because it is precisely this invisibility to hegemonic communities of belonging that enable its privilege to continue. As Richard Dyer writes, “There is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity” (1997, 2). In this sense, Adrienne Rich challenges the conditions of belonging that hegemonic whiteness commands. The specificity through which she marks her body articulates its particularity in terms that the bodies of women of color are exposed, and yet reveals the privilege that its white particularity acquires: from her well nourished bones and strong teeth to the control she exercises over her body—from her choice to type to her freedom from rape and forced sterilization. Her speech thus ironically performs a double gesture of both asserting and displacing its own privilege. On one hand, she delivers this speech across the United States and abroad and her discourse becomes widely celebrated, which may be understood as a function of her privilege. On the other hand, she breaks the unspoken code of white belonging by specifying the relationship between her whiteness and that privilege. Her positionality as “white woman” serves as a platform, then, for her to undercut that very authority.

The popularity of Rich’s text goes a long way to respond to the exigencies facing white feminists at that time and which continue today, particularly feminist of color criticisms of exclusion. As she states from the outset, the notes she inscribes signify the “marks of a struggle to

keep moving, a struggle for accountability" (211). When asked from the perspective of belonging, this opening raises the question: to whom does she seek to be accountable? For her accountability to a community or set of communities, or groups, is a vehicle that gestures toward belonging. Her text does not answer this question either explicitly or implicitly. In spite of Rich's efforts to mark the privilege that constitutes her location, a move that may be responsive to demands of various third-world feminist communities, somehow the essay only cites the texts of women of color in footnotes and their words fail to become central to her discourse. Indeed, if it is these women who have taught her to see her own privilege in the ways that enable her to potentially undercut it, she does not say so here. This oversight works at cross-purposes to an accounting to feminists of color whom she potentially seeks to reach. In order to flesh out this point, I turn to the work of Michelle Wallace, whose work falls in what I describe as the "wake" produced by Rich's "politics of location" essay.

In 1988 Wallace was a participant—along with bell hooks, Stuart Hall, Coco Fusco, and others—in a symposium titled *Third Scenario: Theory and Politics of Location Symposium*, held at the Midlands Art Centre in Birmingham. The symposium was dedicated to the interrogation of Rich's notion of "location" within black and third-world film (Akomfrah 1989, 5). Wallace begins her talk claiming her anger at having "been asked to speak within a framework defined by a white feminist who has probably exercised more power than any other in the United States in determining the essential reading list for Afro American and Third World feminist literature, a list which neither includes nor mentions my own work" (1989, 43). In this way Wallace marks the politics of her own location as one that is constituted through silence and subalternity in relation to the (de)legitimizing speaking practices of feminist knowledge production. Returning to the question of Rich's engagement with feminists of color in "Notes," Wallace argues that Rich's *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* serves a "gatekeeping" function through its exclusion of her own works, as well as other women of color such as bell hooks (48). Her reaction to this exclusion is ambivalent, given that she has "always read Rich with great pleasure and self-recognition. So it breaks my heart, although no more than it breaks my heart to read any text produced by the West" (49).

By drawing attention to the gatekeeping function of academic publishing, Wallace provides a view to see the connections among location and the politics of speaking: that speaking place for black women is limited to writing novels or "personality profiles for women's magazines," but there is no space for those who wish to speak as black feminist intellectuals. Indeed her argument culminates in the paradox produced by convergence between the moment of her highest public visibility with that of her "prefoundest [sic] silence and powerlessness" (51). Further, her response to Rich's exclusions is a complex mix of anger and sadness, illuminating

how affective investments in some sense of recognition, or being seen as worthy of belonging, becomes intricately involved in questions of location and representation. Wallace's criticism, as well as the contents of Rich's text, then, suggest that Rich is not really conversing *with* women of color in this "Notes," even though the piece does implicitly address some of the challenges issued by this community. Yet Rich is not speaking to or with women of color in any intimate way. She does not reference how their texts have spoken *to* her, not to mention how her relations with these women have moved her. Her text does not reveal questions of her own belonging in relation to women of color: does she belong to/with women of color? Does she long to sit at the table with women of color, hold and be held by women of color? While the bee buzzing around her as she writes in solitude intimately interpellates her reader, this intimacy does not extend to the conditions that shape her belonging.

The intimacies of politicized belonging provide a vehicle for the grappling Rich undertakes and thus provides the grounding for a feminist politics of relation. Transracial belongings are political because they provide a forum in which to rework power through critical and intimate modes of relation across lines of difference. But the failure to excavate such conditions produces the paradox of the text felt so keenly by Wallace: that she both undermines and reinscribes her authority. The text produces her location as an individual, not as a community member. This nonmovement may restrict Rich's ability to forge alliances across racial lines, and perhaps more important, may fail to interrogate a critical component in locating her white subjectivity against racism—an affective investment in the lives of racialized subjects. As Cherríe Moraga writes, "so often the [white] women seem to feel no loss, no lack, no absence when women of color are not involved; therefore, there is little desire to change the situation. This has hurt me deeply" (1981, 33). If accountability is constitutive of community formation, it is vital that cultural workers seeking to dislodge their privilege be mindful of where they are placing their loyalties through such gestures. Imagine where it travels.

Imagine the solitude of the tiny boat too far from shore. Chela Sandoval's reading of Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* in dialogue with Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, gives texture to this tiny boat. She argues that while Barthes should be understood as a "de-colonial" theorist because his work responds to the "ongoing and defiant demands of the colonized" (87) that the colonizer develop strategies for undoing colonial practices. By mapping modes of dominant ideology through the tropes of the "cynic," the "mythologist," and the "dominant perceiver"—Barthes provides a "schema in which a coalitional form of consciousness among dominant citizen-subjects committed to the equal distribution of power, and those who have occupied outsider status, is made thinkable—and yet," Sandoval continues, this schema "remains unthought" (113). The

leap that Barthes was unable to make was from his location as “renegade scholar” of the West to a subject of belonging to or with the “colonial other” to whom his work strives to be accountable. Barthes’ figure of the mythologist remains an “individual practitioner [who] can only act alone, isolated, and in despair” (113). Sandoval’s footnote here is illuminating. She writes:

For the Western theorist to give up the figural pose of being *alone* is no mean feat. Barthes’s inability to theoretically recognize the coalitional consciousness connecting his own theory of semiology and the methodology of the oppressed did not arise through any personal or idiosyncratic lack on his part, at the level of psychological maturation for example. Rather, his inability to make these connections occurs at the level of glitches in the technology of theory itself, and, above all, glitches in the structures of *accountability*—*who one talks to, and writes for and with*: that is, at the level of the *material apparatus of theory production at a sociological and institutional level*. (2000, 202, italics added)

Like Barthes, Rich gestures toward the transformative possibilities of affective ties across lines of power as a point of entry into examining her own blind spots. She writes,

A movement for change lives in feelings, actions and words. Whatever circumscribes or mutilates our feelings makes it more difficult to act, keeps our actions reactive, repetitive: Abstract thinking, narrow trivial loyalties, every kind of self righteousness, the arrogance of believing ourselves at the center. (1986, 223)

Rich gestures her desire for rupture, a way out of the “repetitive” and “reactive” modes through which her consciousness is confined. And this confinement evokes questions of belonging within the confines of whiteness, heterosexuality, U.S. citizenship, and other alienating modes that demand “trivial loyalties, self righteousness, and arrogance.” Like Barthes, Rich is seeking a way out of the trivial and arrogant constitution of colonial subjectivity, but remains bound to her own location as “individual practitioner” acting “alone, isolated, and in despair” (113). Her attachment to her own sense of self as individual arises in absence, or a lack of passionate engagement with others, to reinscribe her “location” in the very terms she seeks to overturn. As Sandoval notes, this is no personal or idiosyncratic failure on her part, but rather a function of the “material apparatus of theory production” inscribed within the politics of seeing, knowing, being derived from Western thought. It is a loss also inscribed within the politics of (non)belonging. This reinscription, then, signals the failure to theorize coalitional consciousness as a profound sense of loss—sensuous loss—faced by the first world theorist who seeks to disembark from the colonial constraints of her belonging, but who remains stranded on the shores of her limited imagination.⁷ A tiny boat is fragile so far from shore.

As I seek to reveal in the following section, such a “change in feelings, actions and words” becomes possible when white women follow these passions Rich articulates across hegemonic divides and locate belonging to/with “others.” But Rich’s “location,” at least at the historical juncture out of which this text emerges, seems to remain alienated from the women to whom her text may seek to reach. This is not to suggest that she did not participate in multiracial communities, but rather that the very conception of “location” might be reimagined in ways that make community and belonging central to its interrogation.

What is at stake in this move is to fortify the alliances across lines of difference in ways that reconfigure the relationship between “colonizer” and “colonized” and to revolutionize belonging by forging the insights and power of the “view from below” with the “power to speak” from above. bell hooks’ commentary at the “politics of location” forum opens up this possibility for coalitional subjectivity. She foregrounds her critical agency as one who chooses marginality not as a site of abjection, but as one of radical critique that refuses assimilation, even as she negotiates with power. She writes: “Within complex and ever shifting realms of power relations do we position ourselves on the side of colonising mentality? Or do we continue to stand in political resistance with the oppressed, ready to offer our ways of seeing and theorising, of making culture towards that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible?” (15). Here hooks reveals the contradictory hailings that constitute her location—of the “side of the colonising mentality,” on one hand, and the side of “political resistance with the oppressed,” on the other. The “or” within the passage suggests that these interpellations tug at her in contradictory ways, or that there is a forced choice for hooks between standing with the oppressed or with the oppressor. In the following section, I work toward a “differential” mode of belonging in which such binaries might be disrupted to allow the cultural worker to move among and across these various positionalities and loyalties. But for now I wish to call attention to the radical possibility that hooks sees in “standing with the oppressed.” This standpoint offers “ways of seeing and theorising” that creates space for “unlimited access to the pleasure and power of knowing where transformation is possible.” Here hooks shifts the terms of privilege, signaling a redefinition of power and resistive belongings.

If Rich seeks “a movement for change [that] lives in feelings, actions and words,” hooks’s vision from her chosen location on the margins provides directions for such movement. The problem of subalternity raised by Wallace, however, remains at loose ends. hooks points out that the language of the oppressed is spoken with a “broken voice” that reveals “pain contained within that brokenness—a speech of suffering; often it’s a sound nobody wants to hear” (16). Mirroring this gesture, Rich comments on

her inability to hear, "How did I look without seeing, hear without listening?" (223). Placed in conversation, hooks's and Rich's texts speak to one another. Placed in mutual belonging, such conversations hold tremendous transformative potential for grappling with these difficult issues of speaking, listening, and being heard across lines of difference. Yet the spatial and affective divides that constitute the production of these texts leave each voice alone and thus the visions that they hold are not tapped to their fullest potential. The questions that remain include: (how) do alternative modes of belonging challenge hegemonic forms of speaking/listening? Can locations be rewritten by challenging dominant modes of belonging?

Cartographies of Belonging: Affect, Power, Accountability

[A]s we develop more complex, nuanced modes of asking questions and as scholarship in a number of relevant fields begins to address histories of colonialism, capitalism, race, and gender as inextricably interrelated, our very conceptual maps are redrawn and transformed.

—Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle" (1991, 300)

In order to articulate a shift from location to belonging, I want to plot a few points on the map of belonging by tracing some of its constituents: an affective component, which is spatially situated; the conditions and effects of belonging thought through questions of power, including reimagining power; and accountability as a function of belonging. I do not necessarily examine these points sequentially, but they are part of the fabric of belonging from which to weave a framework for naming a space of "clinamen." Feminist and cultural studies literature provide the threads of this fabric from which to piece together some strands of belonging as a terrain for the use, "ab-use" (Spivak 1992), and reworking of power and identity.

Elsbeth Probyn in her book, *Outside Belongings*, theorizes belonging as a mode of affective community-making in ways that help us think subjectivity beyond, or more accurately to the left of identity. She locates queer sexuality and desire within specific geographic locales in an effort to rethink the "self" and identity. The introductory chapter evokes the proximity, or the "drawing of new frontiers," that becomes possible in the summer months in Montreal when the balconies of her neighborhood thaw and people reemerge to garden. To live life on the "outside" for a while. She considers how the balconies signify "a certain movement as different and distinct elements are brought together, if only momentarily. Lines of class, gender, sex, generation, ethnicity, and race intermingle as people hang out" (1996, 5). The balcony is/represents a site where "an ongoing inbetweenness" becomes visible, revealing the "necessity of

getting at the minuteness of movement that occurs in the everyday processes of articulation" (6). The balcony in Probyn's work provides a point on entry into the spatial and affective components of belonging that are continually unfolding and often mundane. The balcony of the summer months becomes a site in which spatial proximity acts upon people living "difference" in community. Various lives brush up against each other and become visible to one another. The thrill of coming out/side—after long months of interiority, imposed on warm bodies by cold climates—evokes an affective impulse to reach beyond one's self in the direction of the others all around. Long-lost strangers. The thrill of coming out/side, of risking rejection in striving toward the mundane intimacy of seeing and being seen.

Probyn defines "belonging" as a "sociology of the skin"—a "heightened sensitivity to the sensibilities, to being captured by other manners of being and desires for becoming-other" (5). In marking the space at the edge of "subjectivity" as not only a desire for an-other, but rather "manners of being and desires for *becoming-other*" (5), Probyn signals to the direction of the "clinamen." Belonging is that movement in the direction of the other: bodies in motion, encountering their own transition, their potential to vary. Probyn's question, why it is that skin should end at our individual bodies, asks us to expand Massumi's frame of bodies in motion to imagine its unfolding in conversation/contact with so many others (2002). The space of radical in-between-ness evoked by the hyphen between "becoming" and "other" (dis)places subjectivity within the process of "becoming" in the direction of "otherness." Belonging is about where you long to belong, whom you want to nestle beside at the end of the day, who you call when you are in pain, or who accompanies you in ritual—in signifying practices that give life meaning, if by no other means than to call mindful attention to the awesome beauty of now. It is a concept that permits us to imagine life beyond our own skin because what is foregrounded is a space of "yearning to make skin stretch beyond individual needs and wants" (1996, 6). In other words, belonging helps us imagine "identity," subjectivity, and a sense of self that goes beyond the (interiority of the) self, that strives to connect, that yearns to live "on the skin" and in contact/community/communion/communalism/communism⁸ with others. This inclination toward another involves seeing others to whom we belong as inseparable, not separate, from us. "Giving and receiving are the same gesture," my friend tells me. The outstretched hand signals both. Her words are still taking root in me. If we are truly inclined toward each other, when I give, I also receive. When I receive, I also give. I get what I give. Accountability: to you and thus to me. And what is at stake to think belonging in terms of power?

This yearning to belong is grounded in politics. Belonging, in and of itself, is neither resistive nor oppressive. One can belong to or with a

skateboarding group, a white man, a community of color, or the Ku Klux Klan and feel the desire for connectivity being produced and conveyed. A sense of national belonging often evokes military patriotism, corporate belonging evokes competition, and belonging to whiteness evokes a sense of entitlement that the world is our oyster. Thus it becomes vital to interrogate the conditions and effects of inclusion within various sites of belonging. The ways in which hegemonic discourses “hail” us as subjects can thus be rethought through belonging: not only in terms of how power hails us, but also the ways in which power may be hailed by us as a resistive reinscription. Both gestures—the ways in which ideology interpellates subjects and “differential belonging” as subjects hailing ideology—are mapped to belonging. Here I trace the former and the latter in the final section.

Interpellation may be read as a function of hegemonic belonging. What often gets overlooked in the framework of “identity” (or “location” as above) are the ways in which dominant identity categories interpellate subjects through regulatory practices that essentially condition belonging. From the perspective of identity, one is merely white or female or heterosexual, or all three, and this identity conditions one’s standpoint in various ways that must be interrogated (see Frankenberg 1993). But in thinking belonging, these identities are placed into motion and the terms and the effects of inclusion/exclusion come into sharper focus. And with these come the possibility for the formation of critical and collective modes of agency, as well as new demands for accountability. For, if as Simone de Beauvoir argued long ago, “one is not born a woman, but made one” (1989)—then how can we become active participants in this making? How can we become accountable for the processes which produce us? Or is it more convenient to remain continuously (re)produced as effects of power?

With these questions as points in this cartography of belonging I turn to two intertwined discourses of hegemonic belonging: whiteness and heterosexuality. These are thought here not as identities, but as modes of belonging. This shift aims to reveal the often overlooked conditions of belonging that these forces impose, as well as their effects on resistive and/or transformative affinities. My interest in these forces arises from my own shifting notions of belonging across time and space. Once I strongly identified with white and heterosexual belongings. Racial assimilation is a big part of it, all of us striving to gain power by fitting in, by putting those who hold power at ease by being like them, by belonging to them. I identify with Cherríe Moraga’s account of her “mother’s desire to protect her children from poverty and illiteracy” (2000, 43)—as my mother ushered us into Anglo cultural belongings, although we were not at risk for either poverty or illiteracy, really. Yet the sentiment that the “wolf was always at the door” lay like a heat wave over our suburban

home in Riverside. My increasing awareness of white longings for inclusion-as-safety in an otherwise unsafe world of scarcity was accompanied by my desire for intimate belonging to and with women. The latter grew, and grows, with the help of my friends like Rebecca who showed me how my heterosexual privilege excluded and erased her. I never realized that as the popular white male academic held the door open for me, it slammed in her face as soon as I walked through. I never realized how I participated in slamming doors on other women, let alone my best friend. But she taught me that through wretched moments in which our rage got played out on one another. Rage that is now consolidated and redirected as love.

One of the central preoccupations of the critical study of whiteness is to name and specify the particularities of whiteness to reveal how it secures its power through its seeming universality. Whiteness defines the norm within racial registers against which the "other" is defined, and thus always secures power through its unmarked positioning within the field of race. As Ruth Frankenberg writes in her founding text within this field, *White Women, Race Matters*, "Naming 'whiteness' displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of dominance" (1993, 6). How might we rethink such effects, as well as the normalizing processes through which they are produced, through cartographies of belonging?

One move that some scholars within this field are making is to call attention to social processes through which white privilege is maintained. For instance, Aída Hurtado notes the "oxymoron" of "white solidarity" when she states that "Ultimately, white privilege depends on its members not betraying the unspoken, nonconscious power dynamics socialized in the intimacy of their families" (1996, 149). Such modes of belonging are not limited to white people, for as George Lipsitz notes, "One way of becoming an insider is by participating in the exclusion of other outsiders. An individual might even secure a set on the Supreme Court on this basis" (1998, viii). By drawing attention to the intimate practices of whiteness as a condition of belonging, Hurtado and Lipsitz's insights expose the intimate structures of whiteness, not only as an identity to which one reverts or aspires in order to gain racial privilege, but more important, a set of regulatory practices to which one must submit in order to establish one's-self as insider. They reveal those exclusionary practices to which we submit in order to belong. "Willful ignorance," Jane Lazarre calls it. Participating in the dynamics of a zero-sum mode of power that secures unearned privilege is the condition for belonging, and as Lipsitz notes, this entails excluding others from belonging. Often framed in our current cultural climate as "color blind," this "white solipsism" places white accountability at odds with accountability to racialized groups. To speak of unearned privilege and unfair (dis)advantage is to be accountable for race privilege and simultaneously to betray whiteness.

In this sense, we understand whiteness as a mode of belonging in order to dismantle its force of privilege and marginalizing tendencies. This reading reveals an underbelly of whiteness that may be exploited by those who seek to challenge its juridical apparatuses. If the hegemony of whiteness is contingent upon both whites and people of color abiding by its norms, and striving to belong within its ranks—then what happens when we begin to challenge these norms and seek alternative, counterhegemonic sites and modes of belonging? How do we assess the resistive or recuperative effects of such transracial identifications as “passing” for white, assimilating to whiteness for people of color, or for white “slumming” across racialized, classed, and heterosexed barriers?⁹ I return to this question in section three, but now I wish to make the point that belongings in which we become accountable to power can produce a space of alterity, a space of resistance, and spaces that disrupt these hegemonic forms of belonging. Belonging, then, is intimately tied to power. It is an affective force that can be used to reproduce and/or to challenge whiteness as a hegemonic form.

But whiteness does not exist as a field of force in a socio-cultural vacuum. Indeed, whiteness intersects with other normalizing discourses of belonging: heterosexuality, middle-classness, Christianity, nationalism, masculinity, ableism. Each of these intersections needs more adequate attention in order to more adequately map the production of normative privilege and how it wields power to hail subjects into hegemonic forms of belonging. Indeed, heterosexuality, and other structuring forces of privilege, shares with whiteness its seeming invisibility to those who reap advantage under their umbrellas. As Adrienne Rich pointed out in her well-known essay, “Compulsory Heterosexuality,” feminist scholars do not even see that they are reproducing the normalcy of heterosexuality in their exclusive treatments of gender that erase sexuality. Heterosexuality becomes a “compulsory” mode of interacting with people. Its invisibility undermines our agency: we cannot alter that which we cannot see. Monique Wittig echoes Rich’s observation when she writes of “the straight mind,” which “cannot conceive of a culture, a society where heterosexuality would not order not only all human relationships but also its very production of concepts and all the processes which escape consciousness as well” (1992, 28). This “straight” mind also blocks our vision of various and shifting modes of belonging that queer gendered norms of belonging.

Because such processes are invisible to the “heterosexual mind,” they function as a normalizing force that tells us who we can be in relation to others, to whom we can rightfully belong and how. Rich points out that such forces tell us to and with whom women *must* belong (men), as well as those to whom women may *not* belong (other women). Compulsory

heterosexuality positions women to compete with each other for male attention and approval. Thus the desire to belong to and with men functions to discourage communities of belonging to and with other women. How many doors will we slam on our "sisters" in our efforts to see and be seen by men in power? As with whiteness, heterosexuality conditions women's accountability to men, which demands that we not be accountable to each other. If, as Audre Lorde says, women fail to meet the challenges that face us as women seeking to forge alliances with other women, it is a failure of the *imagination*. Compulsory heterosexuality disciplines our imaginations. It teaches women to decode each other's bodies as sites of competition and comparison, as opposed to compassion, community, and belonging.¹⁰

And what is at stake in the interface between whiteness and heterosexuality? Mason Stokes writes in *The Color of Sex* that "whiteness bears a necessarily anxious relation to reproduction, a relation mediated through the not-always-dependable structure of heterosexuality" (2001, 16). She explains, along with Richard Dyer (1997), that the reproduction of whiteness is contingent upon desire as a sexualized mode of belonging that makes for an "inherently unstable quantity—part longing, part repulsion, part fascination, part horror" (17). In other words, heterosexuality is necessary to the reproduction of whiteness, both literally and figuratively. The white family, the white nation, and the birth of white offspring are all contingent upon white heterosexual coupling. And yet it is precisely this dependence of whiteness upon heterosexuality, particularly on desire, that destabilizes whiteness. Colonial desire spans racial and cultural boundaries, producing mixed offspring who either pass or are/become "other" (see Young 1995; and Hurtado 1996). Heterosexuality as reproduction within the affective bounds of whiteness, positions white women in the ambivalent space of being simultaneously pure and not pure (Dyer 1997). This ambivalence constitutes the "double bind" that women face as they navigate belonging within white and heterosexual cultural spaces (Frye 2001) and is one that I believe may be rewritten. The uneasy space in which it positions women who love each other in unequal relations becomes a naturalized default mechanism through a series of reiterations that "norm" it (Butler 1993), but only through the failure of imagination. How to expand the imagination?

Differential Belonging

[T]he differential mode of consciousness functions like the clutch of an automobile.

—Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000, 58)

Above I argue that the presumption of belonging that undergirds dominant identity formations, such as whiteness and heterosexuality, erases the choices that we make around our belongings which are constitutive of our identities. This erasure fixes identity, however unintentionally, in individualistic terms: “I am.” The transformative possibilities of a “politics of location” are limited by such oversights. The absence of critical interrogations of the conditions of possibility for hegemonic modes of belonging produces two erasures critical to forging resistive or transformative modes of belonging: agency and accountability. It erases agency because it positions the scholar/critic/activist as always already belonging to a group, but fails to call attention to the ways in which subjects negotiate the hegemonic hailings and/or counterhegemonic affiliations that s/he per/forms. This move, in turn, displaces critical interrogations of accountability that condition belonging by skipping over this phase of the process of identity formation. Whiteness and heterosexuality, for instance, “interpellate” subjects to and through the privileges of belonging to these identity groups.

Here I wish to pose an alternative mode of interpellation: differential belonging, to call attention to the ways in which we are already constituted in and through often overlooked modes of belonging, and also to suggest a resistive command. In terms of the latter, Chela Sandoval writes in *Methodology of the Oppressed* of a “differential” form of resistance, or consciousness, which weaves between and among oppositional ideologies and, unbound by any one particular ideology or an adherence to consistency, gains power through the tactical agency enabled by its fluidity. As such, differential resistance strives for Althusser’s “hoped-for but unachieved 1960s’ ‘science of ideology’” in that it is “the citizen-*subject* who interpellates, who calls up ideology” (31). She writes:

I think of this activity of consciousness as ‘differential,’ insofar as it enables movement ‘between and among’ ideological positionings. . . . The differential represents the varying; its presence emerges out of correlations, intensities, junctures, crises. Yet the differential depends on a form of agency that is self-consciously mobilized in order to enlist and secure influence; the differential is thus performative. (2000, 58)

Sandoval compares differential consciousness to the clutch in an automobile, the mechanism that permits the driver to decide, from moment to moment, how the engine’s power is used. When you use the clutch, you

momentarily disengage and then reengage the gears, crucial to the car's movement and your ability to control it.

It is this movement across ideological positionings that I wish to draft to belonging. Differential belonging, like differential consciousness, allows us to move among different modes of belonging without feeling trapped or bound by any one in particular.¹¹ The point is not to be correct, consistent, or comfortable. We need not, or cannot, be the same person everywhere—in different communities, on different occasions, at different times in our lives. We may move among various stages of belonging throughout our lives. Our relational needs may shift over time and across space. And as we move among these sites, the contradictions and crises that arise are most instructive of our becoming.

The four modes of consciousness Sandoval describes can also be read as modes of belonging. They are: Assimilationist, Revolutionary, Supremacist, Separatist.¹² Each consciousness, translated into conditions of belonging, suggests a way of being together, a way of structuring social relations.

1. Assimilationist: In assimilationist belonging we want those in power to recognize us as equals. Even though we recognize ourselves as different, and are recognized that way by others, we don't emphasize those differences when we are assimilating. We want those in power to value our universal humanity over our departures from what's valued by dominant culture. Our struggles will take place on a variety of fronts: in our families, in our workplaces, with our friends, and sometimes with the government and the legal system. For example, if we are queer, we may want the right to marry, to have legal parental status over our children, and to visit our partners in the hospital. I want my mom to treat my queer relationships with the same legitimacy she extends to the heterosexual partnerships of my siblings. If we are people of color, we want to be seen as legitimate colleagues, as acceptable lovers and friends across racial lines, as people worthy of equal access to housing, employment, and education. I want my colleagues to legitimate my scholarship, seeing it as equal to their own, not reduced to "Chicana," "cultural," or "the minority" perspective.

2. Revolutionary: In this mode of belonging, people of difference recognize and value our difference as the foundation of our humanity. We are not trying to assimilate, but to show people of privilege and ourselves that our humanity is being damaged by the current social arrangement. We criticize the broader culture because reaping its rewards would require that we set aside too much of ourselves in order to belong. We seek to create a larger society that allocates and defines power differently. For examples, within NWSA, an historically white dominated feminist organization, a multiracial group of feminists works to reconstruct the organization to be more inclusive and self-reflexive. At the University of Iowa, I work with several white male colleagues to reconfigure an intellectual site and community outreach group to address and transform power.

3. **Supremacist:** In a supremacist mode of belonging we recognize our differences and want them to be recognized and valued. We believe that these differences make us better, that they provide us with a particular vantage point on social relations that create new visions for social change. We want to share those visions with the wider world to transform the sites of belonging we inhabit. Because of these visions we believe people in power should entrust us to lead. For example, many of my friends belong between cultures, identities, nationalities. Our locations are constantly placed in motion as we relocate, go home, build new relations, and end old ones (see afterword). Our shifting vantage points allow us to see new possibilities for love, community, home. It is precisely these shiftings that we hold out as a vision here.

4. **Separatist:** In separatist modes of belonging, we not only recognize our differences, but we value them and seek to nurture them solely among people “like us.” This mode of belonging can be vital when the work of engaging the wider world becomes draining. Separatism offers an important site to dream, to create visions and try them on with others who begin with similar assumptions, politics, and experiences. And sometimes these visions and dreams remain exclusively within our ranks, intended to sustain us, not the wider world. For example, sometimes at the end of a day spent in the white workplace, people of color need to come home and just be around other people of color and/or antiracist whites. Or for queer people there is a pleasure in going to a queer bar, knowing that you can dance and play among people who share alternative assumptions about loving. Last summer I attended a conference open only to women of color—this organization (INCITE) operates separately at this time so it doesn’t have to expend its energy preventing privileged people from taking over.

5. **Differential Belonging:** In differential belonging, we recognize the lessons that come from moving among these various modes of belonging. While each mode provides a vital component to our growth and the formation of our politics, becoming stuck in any mode or seeing modes as mutually exclusive can be counterproductive. It is precisely the movement across these modes that allows us to be politically productive. Our separatist belongings can nurture the work we do when we are assimilating; our supremacist belongings can provide insights into our revolutionary belongings. We may engage in more than one mode of belonging at the same time, and the emphases on different modes of belonging will shift throughout our lives. For example, a Chicana friend of mine came to see me deliver an earlier draft of this paper to a group of my white male colleagues. “Why do you work with these people?” she asked me afterward, over drinks. Part of the answer is that here I have some power and I’m using it to revolutionize this group. Part of it is that in learning to talk to these white male academics about my work I am learning to talk to

my father. Her work is different. She is coming out, leaving her husband and their Chicano community: "What I need right now is to talk to other Chicana dykes." We all have work that is urgent now, and new work that will present itself when this work is done. New modes of belonging will become more appealing or necessary as our work clarifies itself. I am not less political because I am building community with these white men (assimilationist/revolutionary), and her work is no less legitimate because she is seeking other Chicana dykes (separatism/supremacist). There is no one superior mode. There is no judgment because we trust each other's politics. There is a recognition that resistive work must be done on a variety of fronts and in this moment over drinks, these fronts intersect and inform one another.

Differential belonging calls us to reckon with the ways in which we are oppressed *and* privileged so that we may place ourselves where we can have an impact and where we can share experience. The key to differential belonging is that you do not have to *be* someone, in terms defined by identity politics, in order to do the political work that differential belonging entails. The conflation between identity and politics is unnecessarily limiting. For instance, some of my white female students, when we read brilliant woman-of-color theorists, worry that they cannot produce such theory because they are not as oppressed. They worry about their privilege. But good theory does not arise naturally from dark skin. It arises not merely from experiences of oppression but from grappling with those experiences and their larger social and political connections. Interrogating the politics of our belonging is something that anyone can do and all of us should do, regardless of the degree to which we are privileged. Good critical/feminist theory emerges from placing ourselves in community with visions of social justice. Placing ourselves there with a certain openness and the intention of being transformed. When we place ourselves with people aware of their oppression, we begin to see how we are implicated, to wrangle with the connections between privilege and oppression, not as abstract concepts but as constituting "our" lives. As we engage in differential belonging and the consciousness that arises from it, women of privilege can build a more radical feminist vision through their belonging in communities of difference.

For instance, Ann Russo, who identifies as an antiracist white feminist, recounts that "for many years as an active feminist I thought issues of race and class were important to deal with in the women's movement. Yet until I began to work and hang out with women of color, I did not fully understand the enormous ramifications of multiracial groups of women developing feminist theory and working together for social change" (Russo 1991, 297). Ruth Frankenberg, whose work is largely responsible for ushering in the current wave of critical whiteness studies, echoes Russo's account: "by going where Estée went, meeting who she met, part of the

time living [in her community] . . . —my worldview, my sense of self and other, of history, identity, race, class, culture, were remade” (1996, 12). In alliances across power lines such transformations become possible. Russo and Frankenberg describe their shifts as not merely intellectual but also affective, palpable, and experiential. The meanings we make along side of those we love, particularly across lines of difference, allow us to remake our assumptions and widen our vision of the political field.

By rendering visible the conditions and effects—both oppressive and liberatory, and more often both—of belonging, the multiple sites and communities to which we belong or don’t belong become apparent. This awareness pushes us to consider the political, social, and spiritual effects of our choices to belong. This is not to suggest that belonging is merely free-floating and that we are free to choose our belongings outside of the bounds of power. As Kamala Visweswaran warns, “Not all identities are equally hybrid, for some have little choice about political processes determining their hybridization” (132). Likewise our belongings are conditioned by our bodies and where they are placed on the globe. And yet, the point of “differential belonging” is to call attention to the multiple paths we may travel in our circles of belonging, and to consider the implications for each on the other. It is not to be bound by the regulatory practices of any particular group nor by the need to remain consistent or “pure,” but rather to take a risk and move in the direction of multiple others. As in “becoming-other.”

Transracial feminist alliances offer one illustration of this move of differential belonging. Women of color have called attention to feminism’s whiteness for the past two decades, yet relatively few white women have seriously wrestled with the implications of these critiques as laying the groundwork for a “more possible” (Lorde 1984, 184) feminism.¹³ As Moraga’s words about white women’s lack of longing for the presence of women of color reveal, belonging figures centrally in this struggle. Russo’s and Frankenberg’s accounts of the transformative effects of forging deep affective and political ties with women of color demonstrate this point. For these women their lives, their identities, their relationships to whiteness, their affective investments in relations of domination and resistance have been altered (see also Bulkin, Pratt, and Smith 1984; Frankenberg 1993; Frankenberg 1996; Harris 2000; Moon 1999; Russo 1991; Segrest 1994; Thompson 2000). The presence of transracial alliances often anchors a process of transformation that goes beyond intellectual understandings of power and privilege and moves into the realm of embodied knowing.

I want to draw attention to what is at stake in such intimate forms of knowing as twofold: that power is remade within such relations, and that transracial belonging becomes a vehicle for walking a healing path of awareness. As Albrecht and Brewer write in their introduction to *Bridges of Power: Women’s Multicultural Alliances*, “We believe that the

boundaries of doubt, pain, and fear can be overcome. If we are to successfully mediate these boundaries, it is critical that we listen and respect each other, learn about our differences, and make ourselves vulnerable" (1990, 6). This kind of critical and intimate work transforms how power functions between and among women. They continue by marking different forms of power: "power over" and "power with." As I argue above, hegemonic belonging entails a turning away from others, which is also a lack of accountability to others whom are excluded from the powerful group(s). Thus "power over" others functions through such exclusionary modes of belonging by defining power as a limited and scarce resource that must be hoarded and doled out. It also relies upon (potential) members holding something of value to the group as contingent for inclusion (it might be financial security, public authority, "good" looks).

Yet "power with" envisions power as creative and generative. Energy that is expended is also received—giving and receiving are the same gesture in resistive belonging. Differential belonging is based on inclusion as a vehicle to move as with hooks' notion of the revolutionary potential of the powerful view from the margins. This means reconsidering what counts as "value," particularly within the choices we make around belonging. For example, Mab Segrest in "Of Soul and White Folks" raises the question that riddles folks doing work on whiteness and antiracism, "Why should anyone give up such privilege?" (2002, 158). Her response is that the vehicles of domination through which white power is secured take a toll on the soul so that "whites lose comfort of the nonmaterial kind: ease, well being, consolation, help, solace, and relief. In acquiring hatred, whites lose feelings and practices of love" (159). She notes that the business of therapy serves as a bandage to cover over the broader social and political forces through which such alienation of domination occurs. Such forms of recovery locate damage within the individual. Not the subject of belonging, but rather the isolated, alienated individual who is charged with illness and must seek the courage to individually conquer it. The battle over wider issues of social justice, then, often takes place through individualized outlets: drug use, alcoholism, stress-related illness, eating disorders, and sexual abuse (160).

As we choose belongings based in "power over" others, Segrest continues, we participate in an "anesthetic aesthetic" in order to deal with this pain. Aesthetics, from "to perceive," and its prefix, "insensibility . . . the loss of sensation without a loss of consciousness" (164). The diaries of slave mistress Mary Boykin Chestnut (in Segrest 2002) illustrate the operation of the anesthetic aesthetic. Chestnut writes of:

a mad woman taken from her husband and children. Of course she was mad, or she would not have given her grief words in that public place. Her keepers were along. What she said was rational enough, pathetic, at times heart-rendering.

It excited me so I quietly took opium. It enables me to retain every particle of mind or sense or brains I have, and so quiets my nerves that I can calmly reason and take rational views of things otherwise maddening. (165–6)

Segrest writes of the heartfelt response that the scene evokes in Chestnut, but that this longing toward the other (“becoming-other”) is quickly contained through the ingestion of opium. The drug allows her to remain “rational” in the face of an “otherwise maddening” situation. While her response is empathic, Segrest notes, Chestnut has “neither the resources, nor the courage, and resorts to opium to short-circuit the transformative process. Seeing implies action, unless the paths of perception are blocked. Action expands perceptions because it shifts and enlarges our point of view and our capacity and motivation to process bigger chunks of reality” (166). The transformative process that is short-circuited here is conditioned through hegemonic belonging. Because Chestnut belongs to white U.S. culture as a woman, she is bound by various regulations: to not speak out; to remain “rational,” which is literally disembodied; to remain separate from the slave woman, even though she identifies with her grief. The costs to both Chestnut and the slave woman are incalculable, but the bounds of belonging prohibit the possibilities for addressing and altering them.

The practices of this anesthetic aesthetic are still very much alive. They involve segregation, separation, and exclusion. Living in these ways precludes us from intimate knowledge of the struggles and joys of each other’s lives. Differential belonging entails navigating across such boundaries of difference to build intimate knowledge of that which lies between self and other. Thus differential belonging becomes a vehicle for healing by empowering us to cross the lines of separation that deaden and wound. For instance, Becky Thompson writes as the white lesbian mother of a black son in *Mothering without a Compass* wherein she builds on *This Bridge Called My Back* through her own “heartfelt grappling” to develop a concept of “bridge work.” Thompson reveals the intimate channels through which knowledge of one form of oppression can be used to understand other forms of oppression. So her lesbianism can become a vehicle for understanding racism and vice versa. Her son was able to speak more freely about his experiences with racism when issues of homophobia came up in their conversations: “It was when I said that not everyone can be counted on to deal well with issues of prejudice against gays and lesbians that he talked about not trusting very many people to understand the isolation and hurt he feels as an African American child” (129–30). And, perhaps even more important, what is gained here in “translation” is a deeper sense of empathy and belonging across lines of difference.

Thompson’s move toward “bridge-work” was influenced by Mab Segrest’s early work on whiteness and anti-racism, *My Mama’s Dead Squirrel*

(Thompson 2001a). Segrest writes of the cross-racial identification that her lesbianism enabled as she began to come to feminist-, race-, and lesbian-consciousness:

The pain of it was compounded by my growing but unacknowledged lesbianism. Increasingly I sensed that I was different from my girlfriends. I felt very alone—the source, I think, of my identification with the Black students walking across the breezeway. . . . But another part of my feelings—and perhaps this is what separated us [her and her mom]—came from my identification as a lesbian with outsiders. I think I knew deep down that people who said *nigger* also said *queer*—and killed both if they could. (1985, 165–6)

In this sense, Segrest's un-belonging, or sense that she was endangered by those with whom she should have been "at home," becomes a vehicle for her to resist the hegemonic pull of white Southern modes of belonging. She is either unwilling or unable to belong, or long to be contained within a heterosexual matrix. Her refusal to heed the "hailing" of white heterosexual belonging becomes the basis for her to configure radical belongings—from the white Southern family and friends that constituted "home" for her since her childhood to her newly awakening feelings of desire to belong to and with other women. Her queer desire, in turn, produced a sense of otherness that she translated into empathy with the struggles of African Americans. Thus the differential modes of belonging that Thompson and Segrest enact as they forge affective bonds across lines of difference become a vehicle for their own empowerment and antiracism.

Conclusion: Toward New Spaces of Belonging

As we consider new ways of imagining feminist modes of belonging that reconfigure norms of whiteness and heterosexuality, it is important to see the intersections between these forces as they constitute our daily lives. By exploring the connections between whiteness and heterosexuality, we can begin to untangle the different layers that constitute identity categories in ways that seek not to reify their meanings, but to reveal the daily practices and affective ties through which such categories emerge. As the intimate details of Thompson's and Segrest's stories of belonging reveal, the category "white woman" has no fixed or necessary meaning. Rather, these women bridged through their experiences of otherness as lesbians to strive for new and more radical sites of belonging and modes of empathy across racial lines. Perhaps we can learn from their struggles as we reconfigure a politics of location to take into account the politics of relation.

Such spaces of belonging across racial lines are precarious and present their own challenges, even as they are transformative. Segrest shares her own fear of living in between when she writes: "But I am afraid of isolation, of being caught between the white-valued world I want to leave behind, not part of a colored world, no world yet created to hold us all, truly, as 'beloved friends'" (1985, 174). Like the "glitches in the structures of accountability—who one talks to, and writes for and with" (Sandoval 2000, 202)—that leaves Barthes a "renegade scholar" of the West, Segrest names here the place between worlds into which she potentially slips as a white race traitor. I do not mean to glorify their life work, or to downplay the power of the disciplinary forces of whiteness and heterosexuality on our own choices of belonging. Rather, we can turn to the women who have forged before us and see that radical modes of belonging hold tremendous potential for transforming who we think we are and how we imagine something called "feminism." This is the aim of a politics of relation. Placing location within the "clinamen," the inclination of one toward another, as the basis for community, intimacy, and awareness.

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Notes

1. "Home" itself is a shifting construction, contingent upon temporal, spatial, and affective investments in place and relations. See Bidy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1986) and Kamala Visweswaran (1994). The girlfriend and her puffy red chair present at the time of this initial writing, for instance, no longer constitute "home" for me.
2. By "love" I mean to suggest the infinite modes of affective connection that bind us to each other: sexual, sensual, intimate, mundane, contentious, political, strategic, ephemeral, spiritual, dedicated, "charity and pleasure, emotion and pornography, the neighbor and the infant, the love of lovers and the love of God, fraternal love and the love of art, the kiss, passion, friendship" (Nancy 1991, 83). To think such infinitudes, Jean-Luc Nancy tells us, "demands boundless generosity toward all these possibilities, and it is this generosity that would command reticence [to solicit the thinking of love]: the generosity not to choose between loves, not to privilege, not to hierarchize, not to exclude" (1991, 83). What remains unthought by Nancy is love's politics. That

is, the transformative, constitutive, and also benignly rehabilitative functions that it potentially serves. The intervention I seek is one that sensitizes us to the political work our love achieves: "alliance," as the site where the intimate encounters the institutional, gives name to it.

3. I see lots of theorists trying to name such a space now and in the past. Audre Lorde's "uses of the erotic," bell hooks' recent book on love, *All About Love: New Visions*, María Lugones' "world-traveling," Chela Sandoval's "hermeneutics of love," Nancy's "clinamen," Elspeth Probyn's "outside belongings," Heidegger's "ekstasis," Barthes's "zero degree." The passionate strivings of these texts signify a trend toward some kind of vision forming on the horizon of mind, body, and soul that *moves us* beyond the limits of critique as the only weapon of the cultural critic to an affirmation of what we are for. As Jacqui Alexander said at a recent conference, it is not enough to state what we are against, it is necessary to envision what we stand for. Gloria Anzaldúa reflects this impulse when she writes, "At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes" (1987, 100–1). At the risk of impure theorizing, the work is to build a vision.
4. I use the term transracial in lieu of the term "multiracial" to signal the transformative potential of such alliances in reconfiguring lines of difference, as well as the transnational component of such ties (see Albrecht and Brewer 1990; Alexander et al. 2003; Carrillo Rowe 2002; Kaplan and Grewal 1994)
5. If "view" and "vantage point" evoke the eyes and the seer, they call forth the individual who sees. Gearóid Ó Tuathail observes, ocularcentrism privileges the faculty of vision and is deeply rooted in the Western tradition of theory production (the term "theory" derives from the classical figure who was privileged to observe an event and verbally verify that it had taken place) (1996, 69). Vision is "decorporalized" as a function of the "Cartesian separation of the subject from that which it observes" and the masculine gendering of knowledge production—disembodied knower overcomes feminized known (1996, 98–9). Inaugurate, or reinscribe, The Subject: the Western colonial who seeks to "map" unknown, wild, and feminized terrain (Ó Tuathail, 1996). Certainly the sensuous body is not lost on Rich or standpoint theorists more broadly, but to undertake a rigorous excavation of individualism within feminist thought entails dropping into the pockets of knowledge production which revert to its logic. If "theory" itself is already encoded through a language of verification, contingent upon the vision of the privileged one(s), then certainly the conditions of knowing must be radically reimagined as a function of belonging. I am grateful to an *NWSA* reviewer for suggesting I unpack the "status of visuality" in Rich's work.
6. For instance, the third cinema conference on a politics of location from which Wallace's and hooks's essays, cited in this section, emerge. See also Mohanty (1987), Kaplan (1994), Mani (1989) to name a few.

7. I have witnessed this condition among many white women who both seek and fear alliance with women of color. Sometimes the disembarkation/arrival to alliance falters because the white woman becomes mired in the fears of her own privilege; sometimes she is rejected at the point of arrival by women of color, suspicious of her desire; sometimes she remains too tightly bound to the colonial shore and buckles under the weight of its logics, she retreats from alliance at a critical juncture, when woman of color needs her most. Trust, once lost, will likely not be regained when woman of color encounters the breaking point of white woman's tenuous solidarity. It leaves her dangling in a haunting pose she seeks to leave behind.
8. The slippage among terms performed by the "/" suggests the inseparability among them sought in this articulation of belonging, perhaps sloppily mapped as: bodies/living together/in recognition of the sacred/honoring belonging/for the purpose of social justice. "The gravest and most painful testimony of the modern world," writes Nancy, is that of the "dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community," a dissolution coevally produced alongside communism's—the latter an "emblem of the desire to discover or rediscover a place of community at once beyond social divisions and beyond subordination to technopolitical dominion, and thereby beyond such wasting away of liberty, of speech, or of simple happiness as comes about whenever these become subjugated to the exclusive order of privatization" (1991, 1). The dissolution, then, is multivalent: spiritual, communal, experiential, political—as must be its (re)formation.
9. There can be no absolute determinations made in response to such questions, since the transgressive potential of alterior modes of belonging are always in process, always arising across lines of uneven difference. The compulsion to assimilate must not be equated with the desire to slum. Gayatri Spivak (1990) has noted that desire produced in the "third world" for the "first" as a respond to a "command," while the colonial desire for the other flows with the direction of power. Anoop Nayak argues in his study of "wiggers, wannabes, and white negros" that such relations of crossing might be thought of in terms of their potentiality and danger: "a sustained engagement [by white youth] with black culture through the medium of dance or basketball can open up rare avenues through which white youth may come to meet other black acquaintances" (2003, 135). For Nayak, initial contact, often driven by "fetishization, projection, and longing," *can* give way to more "lasting friendships," which *can* become a site of white youth becoming "gradually educated." Whose responsibility, burden, and accountability is at stake in "educating" must be carefully navigated because the "command" is a function of uneven relations of ruling. But there is something of the affective ties that form in these friendships that provides potentially transformative relational grounds.
10. But such modes of belonging are also rewritten by people such as my friend—now "he," formerly "she," not because he's had surgery or hormones, but because neither pronoun quite fits, so he chooses the one that confuses assumptions about masculinity and femininity that condition belonging (Rand 2003).

11. By privileging belonging over consciousness in this reinscription of differential consciousness I seek to frame consciousness itself as a collective process. That is how we imagine and make sense of our experiences, and likewise the range of experiences which we are likely to undergo, are functions of belonging.
12. It should be noted that Sandoval's modes of consciousness arise out of the experiences of women of color struggles to build coalition within various civil rights groups. Thus they assume both an oppositional consciousness and a particular social location (U.S. third-world woman). By framing consciousness in terms of belonging, the shift I propose retains the resistive qualities of these components as a framework for viewing differential belonging. Yet I seek to open up the field of differential belonging to include a wide range of social locations. There is no reason, for instance, that a "straight white man" cannot navigate differential belonging. And were he to do so, I would suggest that his identity would become destabilized by virtue of his resistive belongings.
13. "Feminism" is a formation continually in process. Its production as an inclusive space is contingent upon the imaginary of those involved in struggles under its name. When feminists become blocked around issues of power, it is in large part of a question of a blocking of the feminist imaginary—perhaps being too stuck in the head, too invested in hegemonic forms of power, or a lack of literacy in the realms of the heart. In the poetics of Lorde:

We have chosen each other
 And the edge of each others battles
 The war is the same
 If we lose
 Someday women's blood will congeal upon a dead planet
 If we win
 There is no telling
 We seek beyond history
 For a new and more possible meeting. (1984, 123)

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