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(Un)Disciplined futures: Women of color feminism as a disruptive to white affect studies

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to demonstrate how women of color feminism predates and disrupts dominant dialogues in the field of White affect studies. I introduce the concept of White affect studies as an arena of inquiry that draws from Western-European theories and literatures and architects a sociopolitical structure of affect that positions White affects as universal. Scholars contributing to the field of White affect studies posit theories of affect, embodiment, subjectivity, phenomenology, violence, war, and more, while disregarding the theoretical contributions made by women of color feminism in thinking through these notions and social issues. This is done by engaging in a citational practice that results in an epistemic erasure of women of color feminist thought. The voices of women of color feminists are thus disqualified, and their theoretical contributions are not acknowledged as significant or relevant in conceptualizing affect, affective economies, and the social. By turning to the writings of women of color feminists, I demonstrate how their theories on embodiment, subjectivity, and social structures predate the institutionalization of White affect studies. Feminists of color from the past and present have and continue to theorize through a language of self their experiences as subjects embedded within matrices of violence, power, and pleasure. Lorde, Martinez, and Chinchilla write about the ways in which lesbian and queer women of color institute different affects that counter dominant structures of emotion, systems of power, and heterosexual modes of being. In developing conceptual methodologies, Lorde, Martinez, and Chinchilla are able to weave into the dominant discursive logic a language of self that both introduces new queer subjectivities, while reinterpreting existing forms of thought, thereby contesting mainstream economies of White affects and White affect studies. It is through a language of self that Lorde, Martinez, and Chinchilla develop an ethic of survival that countermobilizes against White hegemonic apparatuses.

KEYWORDS

Women of color feminism; White affect studies; White affects; the affective turn

Introduction

In this article, I illuminate the ways in which women of color feminists\(^1\) disrupt dominant dialogues in the field of White affect studies. By White affect studies
I mean an arena of inquiry that draws from Western-European theories to establish a sociopolitical structure of affects that positions White affects as universal, concrete, and true. As I define further below, White affects can be understood as affects that become socially recognizable through a disavowal of women of color feminism. From this perspective, I advance the argument that women of color feminists reorient our understanding of affective economies, and institute new concepts about the complex interactions between bodies, geographies, and structures. By analyzing the specific conceptual methodologies and theoretical analyses put forth by lesbian and queer women of color, I demonstrate how these concepts function as a language of self. This language emerges from the embodied and experiential self and operates as a lens through which women of color feminists examine and expose systems of power and oppression, hegemonic knowledge structures, and dominant economies of affect. It also enables women of color feminists to posit an ethics of survival that makes possible the production of new affects.

Language of self as I conceive of it in this article builds upon what Chicana feminist writers Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* term a “theory in the flesh.” According to them, a theory in the flesh illuminates how women of color “fuse [contradictory experiences] to create a politic born out of necessity” (23). These contradictory experiences reveal how women of color are marginalized both within and without their racialized communities due to their race, gender, and sexual identities. “We are the colored in a white feminist movement,” they assert, “we are the feminists among the people of our culture. We are often the lesbians among the straight” (23). Women of color feminists bridge these contradictory experiences by writing their lived experiences, developing in the process a political language and identity that calls into question homogenized forms of subjectivity and knowledge. As they state, “We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words” (23). Women of color feminists thus produce a language of self that gives way to an ethics of survival insofar as this ethics makes possible new visions and spaces, new words and worlds for living. By ethics of survival I mean founding worldviews made possible by and for queer women of color that ignite and cultivate individual passions and social erosics. In this manner, the language of self that women of color feminists introduce enables the disidentification from and subversion of White affect studies, a dominant field of inquiry that smothers the intensities, erosics, and pleasures of lesbian and queer women of color.

The language of self that women of color feminists put forward functions as a form of expression, evaluation, and articulation that elucidates their positionality as desiring subjects within heteronormative, heterosexist, and capitalist systems of oppression. Since women of color theorize from a structural position that implicates not only their embodied selves but also their communities, the language of self that they put forward reflects how they navigate intricate desires, hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality, institutions of power, and social structures of violence that have historically and continue to disproportionately impact the livelihood of
their communities and themselves. Women of color feminists thus use writing, the disidentification and subversion of dominant forms of knowledge, and the introduction of new forms of thought to cultivate intimacies, sexual agency, and queer subjectivities. In this regard, women of color feminism counters a system of thought that has been made possible by White affect studies. As a systematized field of thought, White affect studies prioritizes White histories of affect that inform and are informed by Western-European forms of knowledge, while eliding how women of color feminism prefigure White affects and White affect studies.

Although women of color feminists were theorizing embodied feelings and social emotions before the emergence of White affect studies, their theories are either denigrated or excluded altogether. Black feminist scholar Barbara Christian argues accordingly in her landmark essay “The Race for Theory” that women of color such as Norma Alarcon, Toni Cade Bambara, Cheryl Clarke, Claudia Jones, June Jordan, Mary Hope Lee, Naomi Littlebear, Rosario Morales, Cherrie Moraga, Pauli Murray, Nellie Wong, Barbara Smith, The Combahee River Collective, and many others “have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic” (68). Indeed, women of color, but particularly Black feminists, continue to be at the forefront of questioning socialized scripts of gender, race, sex, and class, in addition to traditional scholarship. This has led to conceptualizing new modes of queer subjectivity.

The language of self that women of color introduce facilitates the construction and deployment of different queer subjectivities that speak to their desires that are precluded by systems and structures of power. In examining the conceptual methodologies and theoretical analyses introduced by Guatemalan poet performer Maya Chinchilla, Black lesbian poet and socialist Audre Lorde, and queer Chicana theorist Natalie A. Martinez, I show how the production of a language of self helps decenter systems and structures of power that marginalize and oppress queer desires and subjectivities. Furthermore, I argue that their conceptual methodologies and theoretical analyses enact affective turns that destabilize White affects and White forms of knowledge.

The language of self advanced by Lorde, Martinez, and Chinchilla also serves to reframe the intersections of race, gender, sex, and class, alongside notions of citizenship, nation, empire, diaspora, and transnationalism. In exploring the enmeshment between bodies and capitalist economies through an affective framework, Lorde, Martinez, and Chinchilla expose new critical strands of thought for understanding how queer subjects create alternate ways of moving, knowing, and being that do not fall within dominant paradigms of knowledge. Moreover, in establishing a language of self, Lorde, Martinez, and Chinchilla posit a counter-identity that resists an abstract and hetero-normative discursive logic that is divorced from practice. As such, the three vignettes that I offer on these thinkers demonstrate how they spotlight the conjunctures and disjunctures of immaterial and material forces, all the while revealing how material assemblages enable alternative modes of living. Chinchilla, Lorde, and Martinez also shift how we think
about the affective politics of embodied emotions and experience and, as such, develop an ethic of survival that counter-mobilizes against White hegemonic apparatuses, against White affect studies.

The formation of White affect studies is most clearly marked with the invocation of “the affective turn” (Clough & Halley, “Theorizing the Social” 1). This turn took place within the historical terrain of Western-European thought in the early 1990s and is said to have shifted how the body is conceptualized alongside notions of bio-politics, matter, and technologies. For this reason, I begin with a discussion of the affective turn and how it disavows women of color feminism. Seen from this perspective, I move to demonstrate how women of color feminism serves as a disruptive to White affect studies. Beginning with Lorde, I show how her theorization of the erotic functions as both a conceptual lens and a reorientation device that cultivates a politics of erotic autonomy, joy, and relationality. Next, I put forward that Martinez’s term Poch@ operates as a political hermeneutic that allows queer Chicana and Latina women to individually and collectively examine histories of violence, loss, and longing, in order to inspire different affective futures that reconcile the past with the present. Finally, I posit that Chinchilla’s term, “Guatemalan-hyphen-American,” allows her to generate distinctive queer affects and epistemologies that help recover queer women’s subjectivities from razed Central American histories of colonialism, civil and cultural war, and transnational migration.

The affective (re)turn: The institutionalization and destabilization of white affect studies

In recent years, much attention has been paid to what sociologist Patricia Clough calls “the affective turn.” Marking a shift in post-structuralism and deconstruction discourses that argued the death of the subject, Clough’s invocation of the affective turn signals a renewed interest and commitment on behalf of critical theorists and cultural critics in the import, utility, and political valence of affect theories, or theories that spotlight the subject’s capacity for, immersion within, and relation to subliminal intensities and impulses. Clough argues in The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social that this revived interest led to investments in the affective dimensions of the body, how bodies affect each other, and the inherent limitations in thinking of the subject as a subject of emotion.5

In pointing to Clough’s conceptual term in this section—the affective turn—I am not interested in analyzing the theoretical merits of the term but rather in asking what the invocation of such a turn does. In other words, this is a question about conceptualizing the affective turn as not only an epistemic process but also as an epistemic practice with social, cultural, political, and material implications. When posing this question, a number of other queries follow: when White affect studies scholars revoke the idea of the death of the subject, what subject(s) are they referring to? Similarly, when it is argued that the affective turn enables us to identify...
the limitations of thinking the subject as a subject of emotion, what subject comes to mind? How might the affective turn be leveraged to think about both its ability to illuminate patterns and transitions within what I am calling White affect studies, and also to destabilize this body of knowledge?

By White affect studies I also mean a structure of White affects and social emotions that was constituted through the enslavement and genocide of Black and native indigenous populations, in addition to colonial practices of violence and terror. It is this historical ontology that informs the structure of emotions that serves as the foundation for the institution of White affect studies, an institution that has been maintained through strategies designed “not only to destroy peoples,” as indigenous studies scholar Andrea Smith argues, “but to destroy their sense of being a people” (“Conquest” 3). Rather than accept the affective turn as a momentous and universal phenomenon that looks past these histories, in this section my aim is to demonstrate two things. First, the affective turn as articulated and presented to us by scholars that invoke the turn to affect further contributes to the institutionalization of White affect studies. Second, it is women of color feminism that enables radical shifts in thought by unsettling this dominant structure through theorizing a language of self. Women of color feminism exposes how gendered and racialized subjects are embedded within multiple matrixes of power and violence whose experiences do not align with those presented by continental theorists.

Clough’s affective turn takes place within the theoretical terrain of a Western-European historical ontology. That is, the affective turn is not an actual turn to affect but, as I argue, a reproduction and reinforcement of straight lines. That is, lines that center the textual archives of continental philosophers and psychoanalysts whose scholarship foregrounds White affect studies as an exclusively White body of knowledge. As Clough explains in the introductory chapter of the book, The Affective Turn “draws on the line of thought from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari back through Baruch Spinoza and Henri Bergson” (1). The line that Clough reproduces is a straight line that revives and reinvests in the White sociality of Western-European thought. In the book’s foreword, Michael Hardt extends this line of thought to include contemporary White feminist and queer intellectuals. He explains that U.S. feminist and queer scholarship was precursive in the affective turn, stating that “the focus on the body” within U.S. academic scholarship “has been most extensively advanced by feminist theory and the exploration of emotions conducted predominantly in queer theory” (Hardt ix). The feminist scholars Hardt names, who are relegated to a footnote at the end of the forward, are all White: Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick. Clough and Hardt’s reliance on Western-European epistemologies to draw attention to fundamental notions and questions that predate the conceptualization of the term “affect” spotlights a larger systemic issue, namely how epistemic practices culminate into the disappearing act of historically marginalized women of color.

In “Making Feminist Points,” race and cultural theorist Sara Ahmed elaborates on how citational practices as epistemic practices lead to disciplinary formations. She
argues that citation is a “successful reproductive technology, a [way of] reproducing the world around certain bodies.” In her most recent article “Feminist Shelters,” she builds on the argument by describing how citations can be viewed as bricks, adding, “when citations become habits, bricks form walls” (Ahmed, “Feminist Shelters” 2015). Thus the act of citing only White scholars of affect to draw attention to the affective turn as an event illuminates a selective process that systematically produces a formation of knowledge wherein women of color feminist thought is relegated elsewhere, beyond what can become discursively known. Seen from this perspective, women of color feminism sits on the other side of a brick wall.

In turning away from women of color feminist theory and citing only White thinkers, scholars contributing to White affect studies knowingly disavow theories by lesbian and queer women of color that provide critically distinct notions of affect, and how their understandings of affect influence theories of desire, embodiment, and subjectivity. By locating the “origin” of these ideas within the continental tradition of the social sciences, such as philosophy and psychoanalysis, these scholars continue to not only elide how women of color feminists have conceptualized intensities, impulses, feelings, and emotions, and, therefore, how these articulations enable a different understanding of affective economies, but they also establish a methodological practice that systematically excludes a feminist women of color politic, a language of self. It is through practicing and contributing to a politics of citation that erases women of color feminism that these scholars disavow lesbian and queer women of color articulations of affects, bodies, geographies, and social structures. Whereas a turn to affect as a phenomenon explained through The Affective Turn maintains a loyalty to White affects and to upholding White affect studies, the writing of women of color feminists enacts affective turns by destabilizing White affect studies and White regimes of power.8 For this reason, I argue that women of color feminisms develop formations of knowledge that speak to the political implications of affects avant la lettre. Scholars from the past and present, such as Ahmed, Chinchilla, Christian, Martinez, Lorde, and numerous others, theorize that embodied and social emotions hold political import. In the following vignettes, I introduce the conceptual methodologies that women of color feminists have produced that function as a language of self, and as affective shifts that in turning away from White affect studies destabilize White affects.

**The erotic as power: Lorde’s erotic as a reorientation device**

In Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power, Audre Lorde theorizes that the erotic is a conceptual lens for destabilizing structures of power and oppression, systems of dominant language and knowledge, and for reconceptualizing existence by introducing new life forces that emanate from the embodied self. By examining how Lorde reconceptualizes existence and its affective dimensions, I demonstrate how, as a conceptual lens, the erotic also functions as what Ahmed calls a reorientation device (“Queer Phenomenology” 37). Because Lorde conceptualizes the erotic as
that which cultivates an affective power that emerges uniquely from intersubjective relationships, the erotic can reorient the dynamic of social relations, of “sharing deeply any pursuit with another person” (Lorde 56). As Lorde explains, the erotic is “a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence” (57), and I take all aspects to mean our unique intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. She further argues that the erotic lens forces us to “evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives” (57). Seen from this perspective, the erotic, as a conceptual lens, allows lesbian/queer women of color to engage in self-reflection about and interpretation of their unique position in relation to others, to objects, and to power structures.

By looking at Lorde’s uses of the erotic, I show how the erotic lens facilitates what M. Jacqui Alexander calls an erotic autonomy that illuminates a “belonging to oneself, beyond state interpellations, inscriptions, and exclusions” (qtd. Allen 326). Rather than accept the conditions of state systems that oppress queer subjectivities, the erotic incites transformative desires in lesbian and queer women of color that resist “plasticized sensations” (Lorde 54). Plasticized sensations delimit women of color to dominant modes of being and feeling that align with the nation-state’s racist, homophobic, and patriarchal norms. This kind of alignment disenables women of color from tapping into their affective energies and fully developing their psychic and spiritual passions. In other words, instead of listening to their emotive and corporeal needs, women of color are pressured to align their desires with societal ideals. Lorde cautions against this alignment by stating: “[t]he principle horror of any system which defines […] human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need […] robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment” (55). The erotic thus serves as an inner guiding force that has the capacity to counter powers that discipline the body into plasticized modes of being, which prohibit exploration of what is sensual and pleasurable for the self. It is for this reason that Lorde argues in favor of the erotic but against the pornographic. While there are different ways to interpret Lorde’s opposition to the pornographic, I read Lorde’s use of the term as a critique of how structures of power superimpose representations of the self that are empty of meaning; pornography is determined by routinized and performative acts that deplete the queer subject’s affective energies. “Pornography,” Lorde writes, instead of cultivating feeling, “emphasizes sensation without feeling” (54). It is for this reason that Lorde asserts that the pornographic is a “denial of power,” since it suppresses the capacity to tap into inner sensations that exceed a signifying capacity and, therefore, an ability to vocalize those feelings. The erotic, on the other hand, serves as a luminous source of knowledge about how the embodied self is situated in matrixes of power.

By serving as a source of knowledge, “power and information” (Lorde 53), the erotic enables women of color to identify “those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us” (56). As the “nurturer and nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge,” the erotic leads to the
creation of new language, in addition to making possible the “reclaiming [of] language” (55). With the erotic, lesbian and queer women of color both powerfully introduce new modes of knowledge while also reinterpreting dominant forms of thought to destabilize mainstream economies of ideas. By turning inward in self-reflective thought and analysis, queer women’s desires become illuminated, which allows women of color to bring to light new information about how we desire, what we desire, and how we want our desires to continue guiding our movement forward in the world. Lorde echoes this when she theorizes that the “erotic is a resource within each of us that […] is firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling” (53). In exploring internal desires, women of color feminists tap into urges, impulses, and drives that give expression and form to those deep unrecognized feelings. Because the erotic is also an embodied power, it gives access to an “energy for change” (53) so that women of color do not have to merely look away from the structures of oppression that vilify, devalue, and abuse their worth “within western society” (53). Instead, the erotic allows for a reorientation of the corporeal and spiritual self that enables women of color to develop different practices of desire that are not exclusively informed by the “European-American male tradition” (59) of knowledge. In developing different practices of desire, women of color institute new pathways of survival, being, feeling, and power that counter-mobilize against White hegemonic apparatuses.

The erotic enables new pathways of power for women of color because it facilitates a reorientation of perspective, which opens up different affective possibilities. I am using reorientation in the same way that Ahmed defines it in her discussion of lesbian desire, coupling, and spaces in Queer Phenomenologies. Here, I wish to extend Lorde’s theorization of the erotic as a critical hermeneutical lens by putting her in conversation with Ahmed. In doing so, I demonstrate how, as a lens, the erotic also functions as what Ahmed calls a reorientation device (Ahmed, Queer Phenomenologies 3). To understand how the erotic functions as such, we must first understand Ahmed’s conceptualization of orientation and reorientation.

In her book, Queer Phenomenologies, Ahmed cleverly situates the concept of orientation within the fields of queer and phenomenological studies in order to ask: “[w]hat difference does it mean for sexuality to be lived as oriented? What difference does it make ‘what’ or ‘who’ we are orientated towards in the very direction of our desire?” (1). For Ahmed, researching the question of sexual orientation through a phenomenological lens allows her to show that emotions are intentional insofar as they “move us ‘toward’ or ‘away’” (2) from bodies and objects. Furthermore, this movement shows how bodies “reside in space” (1). She states, “[i]f orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we inhabit spaces with” (p. 1). Ahmed implies that through the repetitive gestures of others the body orients itself along and seamlessly follows straight lines that have already been established. She maintains that “we are ‘in line’ when we face the direction that is already
faced by others” (15). Through a series of repetitive encounters, the “body gets directed in some ways more than others” (15). These encounters shape the gestures of the body. The lines that we follow similarly shape our desires. In this manner, sexual orientation “shapes what bodies can do” (91) and the propinquity that bodies develop towards each other. Phrased differently, bodies take on shapes that “enable some action only insofar as they restrict the capacity for other kinds of action” (91). Thus “being ‘in line,’” according to Ahmed “allows bodies to extend into spaces that, as it were, have already taken shape” (15).

Crucially, Ahmed points out that not only are bodies shaped by the lines that get repeatedly traveled, but also histories emerge out of the patterning of gestures that inform which actions a body can enact: “[w]e could say that history ‘happens’ in the very repetition of gestures which is what gives bodies their tendencies” (52–58). Repetition “orients the body in some ways rather than others […] orientations shape what bodies do, while bodies are shaped by orientations they already have” (58). For Ahmed, being lesbian means that desire opens up “lines of connection between bodies that are drawn to each other in the repetition of this tendency to deviate from the straight line,” and as such, lesbian desire “opens up other ways of facing the world” (105). In this manner, the erotic lens opens up other ways of cultivating affects that allow women of color to intentionally navigate away from plasticized modes of being. Lorde’s conceptualization of the erotic is queer insofar as it functions as a power that is intended to move lesbian and queer women of color away from straight lines and toward new affective states of being. To return to my initial argument, the erotic functions as a reorientation device. According to Ahmed, a reorientation device facilitates “ways of extending bodies into space that create new folds, or new contours of what we could call livable or inhabitable space” (11). It is through an erotic autonomy that women of color are able to institute new public spaces that move away from patterned lines, while enabling us to create new lines that do not repeat the gestures of “racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society” (Lorde 59).

In sum, Lorde’s theorization of the erotic serves as a conceptual lens that allows women of color feminists to cultivate an erotic subjectivity that counters an anti-erotic politic. In so doing, women of color feminists are able to enrich their erotic autonomy, which enables them to question and contest racist, patriarchal social scripts, while instituting a different ethic of survival that is premised on an “open and fearless […] capacity for joy” (56). Because the erotic also functions as a reorientation device, it reorients women of color away from those “supplied states of being which are not native” (59) to queer subjectivities. The erotic also strengthens intersubjective relationships, thereby making possible “joint concerted actions not possible before” (59), in addition to enriching inner and outer energies necessary to “pursue genuine change within our world” (59).
Focusing on “queer Latin@ lives,” rhetoric studies scholar Natalia A. Martinez writes on the new life worlds they make possible through performative writing. More specifically, in her text *Towards a Disruptive Theory of the Affectual: Queer Hemispheric Theories of Affect and Corporeality in the Americas*, she offers an analysis of how queer Latina women develop conceptual methodologies in an effort to theorize their experiences as mestiz@ (hybrid) women who inhabit the borderlands, in addition to their queer desires and affects. She argues that queer Latina women “utilize a unique set of complex rhetorics for a racist, homophobic, and classist world’s ‘learned affect’” (Martinez 6). In this respect, queer Latina women’s conceptual methodologies counter racist, homophobic, and classist narratives and structures of feelings that do not account for the experiences of women of color. A self-identified queer Chicana, Martinez carefully explores the range of “rhetorical concepts [that are] reinvigorated by studying emotion, feelings, and affect as categories of analysis within the decolonial and contemporary contexts of queer latina, mestiz@, or chicana rhetorics” (19). While Martinez considers the “rhetorics” produced by Gloria Anzaldua, Maria Lugones, and Chela Sandoval, among other queer Chicana/Latina women, I am interested in discussing Martinez’s own conceptual methodology that she introduces to examine her cross-cultural identity, and the affective economies that are specific to women of color feminists.

In her chapter “Hemispheric Mournings: Objects of Resonance and Queer Diaspora in the Americas,” Martinez puts forward the term poch@ as a conceptual methodology for understanding the queer subjectivities of Mexican-American women (*Towards a Disruptive Theory of the Affectual*). According to Martinez, poch@ is a term used to connote a “rejected or assimilated [queer latina subjectivity] into dominant culture,” and “this rejection has mostly been linked to the language or discourse one uses” (70). As such, the term poch@ denotes histories of loss, longing, melancholia, metaphorical border crossings, and literal mestizajes. Martinez further explains that she posits “poch@ as a form of queer racial melancholia” (70). She draws her understanding of racial melancholia from David Eng’s *Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy*, and Eng and Han’s “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia.” In the latter text, Eng and Han intervene in psychoanalytic discourses, arguing that while Sigmund Freud defined melancholia as “a pathological form of individual mourning for lost objects, places, or ideals” (Eng & Han 667), Eng and Han propose a concept of melancholia as a “depathologized structure of everyday group experience [that spotlights how the] processes of immigration, assimilation, and racialization are neither pathological nor permanent but involve the fluid negotiation between mourning and melancholia” (667). Because mourning and melancholia shore up a diverse range of feelings from anger and sadness to exasperation, Martinez explains that she fathoms poch@ as a “potential structure of feeling” (70) that is a product of violent colonial
and imperial legacies that have consequently led to the formation of disparate diasporic identities and relations. Developing in relation to this point on diasporic identities and relations, Martinez asserts that she considers “marginalized [queer Latina subjectivities] not as permanently ‘damaged’ or incomplete subjects, but as subjects in ‘conflict’” (70).

Martinez offers Latinas who engage in acts of self-injury as an example of subjects in conflict. Martinez details that these acts are reflections of how Latinas are “coping with the complexity of societal violence” (70) that results from sexual, gender, and racial discrimination. Self-injury thus represents “a larger effect” in that it is an inscription “of melancholia on the skin, and an attempt to mark on the body publicly, very private losses, the kind of losses not sanctioned in everyday discourse” (71). Poch@, then, discursively and symbolically reflects these affective economies of anger, sadness, rage, and loss that go unaccounted for in White affect studies. Within this realm of dominant discourses, poch@ articulates the same sentiments that motivate self-injury. Martinez, however, also expands the term to not just economies of affect, but also economies of labor, in addition to histories of broader racialized violence, and violence against immigrant, trans, and lesbian/queer communities. She says:

> When I think of the word poch@ […] I can’t help but link it to its literal meaning—bruised fruit, and all that this image conjures up for me. At its most literal, I think of the skin. A distinct marked difference. A record of activity. I also imagine the labor, networks of capital, and communities connected to fruit as an industry. I think of fruta and its link to idiomas surrounding one’s sexuality. I think of strange fruit and artist Ken Gonzales-Day’s work that makes the absent present in his Erased Lynchings and Hang Trees series which chronicles ‘19th Century concepts of difference’ as a reason for immigrant Latin@s in the Western United States to be hung at a time when [B]lack lynchings were epidemic and horrifically spectated as a norm. I think of Communication professor and GLBTQ activist Karma Chavez’s work on Victoria Arellano, a transgender immigrant who was denied AIDS medication while being detained by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in San Pedro, California and who later died while in custody because of inadequate care (71).

It is important to enlist this passage in its entirety because Martinez powerfully demonstrates the affective links between these communities that are further conveyed by impact that the text’s affect has on the reader. In reading Martinez’s conceptualization of poch@ as a term that encompasses the affect of feeling bruised, silenced, and uncared and unaccounted for within an imperial nation-state, it becomes clear that Martinez’s term vocalizes the melancholic feelings that “largely go unseen or unfelt” (71) within larger immaterial and material economies of emotions, labor, and violence. She furthermore conceptualizes “poch@ as ‘a conflict, rather than the damage’ within the ‘continuum between mourning and melancholia’ of an idealized form, never subsumed by idealized feelings or affects around the experience of being Mexican-American or mestiz@ but in a constant state of negotiating the demands of institutions, history, and society” (72). In identifying poch@ as a conceptual methodology that points to conflicting tensions, poch@
serves as category of analysis that can consistently spotlight the processes of how queer Latinas negotiate their hyphenated identities, desires, and relations. Martinez adds that we can also read poch@ as a *queer* conceptual methodology because its “methods rely on a non-normative approach” (72). “Poch@ then is not an essential estrangement, an essential difference,” she says, “nor an essential lack, but rather a state of constantly negotiating these various structures of feelings,” in addition to structures of power and oppression that contribute to queer Latinas lived experiences of loss, longing, and pain. Seen from this perspective, enlisting poch@ as a conceptual lens for analysis functions similarly to Lorde’s conceptualization of the erotic. That is to say, both the erotic and poch@ enable new orientations. Therefore, as a conceptual methodology, poch@ also creates a space for individual and collective analysis that can inspire different futures.

**A Chapina poètica: In-between-ness hyphen life, (un)disciplined destinies**

Central American/Guatemalan performance poet Maya Chinchilla focuses on U.S. Central American trans-identities in *The Cha Cha Files: A Chapina Poètica*. She interweaves autobiography, essay, oral history, and poetry, in order to develop what she terms a Chapina poètica. In addition to this, she formulates a political hermeneutic that enables her to enact radical modes of inquiry regarding her own transnational identity and history, and the individual feelings and social affects that accompany these lived experiences. In my reading, Chinchilla speaks her Chapina poètica from the “epicentro” of her hyphenated, or as she calls it “Guatemalan-hyphen-American” identity, generating distinctive queer affects and epistemologies that help recover queer women’s subjectivities from razed Central American histories of colonialism, civil and cultural war, and transnational migration. Chinchilla echoes this when she says: “How to write you when we are always one/cycling through cutting in/unos cuantos piquetes/a few little cuts to bring your life force to the fore” (35). Here, Chinchilla likens the process of writing from the “epicentro” of her hyphenated identity to being slashed or, as she puts it, “cycling through the cutting” (35). This slashing is represented by the hyphen. If we conceive of the hyphen (-) as a metaphorical border, then it follows that the hyphen and the border both come to represent blades that metaphorically slash the queer hyphenated subject. This is due to the fact that the hyphen does not only represent the intersection of two axes (Guatemalan and American), but also a “third axis along which the force of differentiation unfolds” (Chung 108). The hyphen initiates a dialectical move between the two axes. The hyphen thus metaphorically constitutes a “border separating two concepts that together convey one meaning, but separately embrace a series of dissimilarities” (Foster 27). To return to Chinchilla’s versification, the hyphen functions as a lens that is at “once what separates and confronts the image portrayed [the slashing] with the connotation conveyed [a hyphenated identity], thus rendering [hyphens/borders] intelligible” (Foster 27). It is important to note, however, that for Chinchilla the hyphen does
not solely reflect histories of violence, but also comes to represent new prospects. In this way, Chinchilla theorizes alongside Lorde and Martinez a language of self that opens up new pathways, new words and worlds.

Chinchilla tells Chicana and Latina studies scholar Amelia Montes in an interview for La Blog that the hyphen represents a “unique position place” (qtd. in Montes) that is also a “place of endless possibility” (qtd. in Montes). Chinchilla uses the phrase “in-between-ness hyphen life” to describe what it feels like to inhabit an identity that is always in transition, tracking movement, an identity-in-crisis and an identity-in-the-making. By drawing from the experiences of her unique hyphenated identity, Chinchilla also produces an archive of “truths untold” (5) that invites into the dominant discursive logic the voices and stories of queer Chapinas. In this manner, The Cha Cha Files (her archive) is about lost voices, unarticulated affects, and invisibilized subjectivities that are recuperated through body movement, body memory, and language.

In her poem “Tres Pasos,” Chinchilla likens the act of recuperating lost voices, unarticulated affects, and invisibilized subjectivities to the cha-cha-cha dance. She writes: “On the first beat hit the body remembers/the way a bordered people traveled forced/movement pass culture teaching to young” (17). In recuperating the Guatemalan-American diaspora and the self from histories of violence and imperialism with her political hermeneutic, Chinchilla opens a space for “calling on the silence and making it loud” (49). It is through corporeal movement that the body is able to summon up the lived experiences and memories of past and present generations from a “muscled memory” (16). As Chinchilla maintains in “Tres Pasos”: “[R]hythm is your voice. Let her speak/Feet document story. Let them speak/Base boom. Let you speak/In the circle calling. Let us speak/Habla. The body remembers” (17). Because the corporeal movement takes place through a cycling of cutting, the body speaks truths through a “broken/tongue harmony” (57). This broken-tongue harmony resists “hierarchy towers where pressed chests gasp for breath” and, thereby, enables a “transnational decolonized” future that not only radically contests imperial histories, but also radically disrupts “hetero-norm-ativi-ty” (90). In recuperating lost memories and histories, Chinchilla also recovers the stories of queer Chapinas, which allows her to generate distinctive queer affects and epistemologies. Chinchilla says: “Broken tongues speak/Jotas into harmony/full of living theory/and supported creativity” (56). Here, it is the jotas (queer Latin@ women) who introduce into the narrative logic a rhythmic harmony that weaves in lived theory and creativity, thus producing a “jota poetics” (56) that has the capacity to heal the queer subject. English scholar Ellen Gil-Gomez advances this argument when she bridges the term mestiza with jota, illuminating how:

The mestiza nature is antiessentialist and therefore breaks down all identity categories; it is joteria, queers of color, who can most connect people, combine cultures, and head liberation struggles, because they can most directly experience the mestiza way (Gil-Gomez 125).
Gil-Gomez draws from lesbian Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa who defines mestiza as a “woman of mixed-race—Spanish, the conqueror, and Indian, the conquered—who embodies the paradox of two things that seemingly cannot coexist” (125). According to Anzaldúa, mestizaje is also a “‘consciousness of the Borderlands,’ a holistic, nonbinary way of thinking and acting that includes a transformational tolerance for contradiction and ambivalence” (qtd. in Keating 320). Here, I connect Gil-Gomez and Anzaldúa’s notion of mestizaje to Smith’s deconstruction of the term in “Against the Law,” remaining mindful as Saldana-Portillo argues that “we can no longer uncritically celebrate mestizaje” (Saldana-Portillo 12). In my reading, while Chinchilla speaks of hybrid subjectivities, she does so thinking critically how a legacy of colonialism, neocolonialism, and neoliberalism produces such subjectivities. In the process, Chinchilla’s play with the hyphen demonstrates how the hyphen, as symbolically representative of the queer hyphenated and hybrid subject, gives way to “storyteller strategies” that produces “radical loving,” (46) healing, and poetics. By piecing together words, images, and emotions, Chinchilla generates a different language of self that gives way to a jota poetics, a Chapina Poetica, that institutes a “dynamically (un)disciplined destiny” (5) for the queer Chapina.

Chinchilla’s notion of (un)disciplined destinies offers an image for what the future of women of color feminism can continue to look like: undisciplined. By this I mean that through the deployment of a language of self and an ethics of survival that emerges from the core of their experiences, women of color feminists enact a resistance and refusal to abide to disciplined futures that are anchored in dominant Western social scripts. In their continued pursuit to cultivate words and worlds that enable them to think new social erotics, women of color feminists contest a structure of White affects and social emotions instituted through White affect studies. Presenting us with distinct notions of embodiment, subjective pleasures, and power, women of color feminism serves as a disruptive to White affect studies.

Notes
1. In Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization, Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson theorize women-of-color-feminism as a comparative analytic that comprehensively encompasses a queer-of-color-critique. As Hong and Ferguson make clear, “lesbian practice and identity” (2) was central to the women of color feminist writers of the 1970s and 1980s who were organizing and writing against “capitalist patriarchy” (Eisenstein 5), institutionalized racism and sexism, heteronormativity and homophobia. Hong and Ferguson argue that by centering sexuality in their analyses of state violence, women of color feminists, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, and Barbara Smith, demonstrate how “sexuality is constitutive of race and gender” (2). Importantly, it is through this practice that women of color feminists gave way to an alternate mode of comparison that resists normative modes of comparative analysis. What I mean by this is that women of color feminism, as Hong and Ferguson show, makes possible an examination of different historical and contemporary cultural, economic, political,
and racial assemblages that contribute to the oppression of lesbian and queer women of color. Developing in relation to this point, women of color feminism also challenges dominant terms such as lesbian, queer, femme, butch, sexuality and subjectivity, which, as Black feminist theorist Evelyn Hammonds argues in “Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality,” are “stripped of context in the [white mainstream] works of those theorizing about these very categories, identities, and subject positions” (128). In this perspective, Hong and Ferguson situate queer-of-color-critique as “emerging from women of color feminism rather than deriving from a white Euro-American gay, lesbian, and queer theory tradition” (2). It is for this reason that in this article I enlist the terms women of color feminism and women of color feminists, while also retaining the terms lesbian and queer as understood and theorized by women of color from the 1970s and 1980s.

2. I am borrowing this concept from race and cultural theorist Sara Ahmed who describes affective economies as “emotions [that] circulate between bodies and signs” (“Affective Economies” 117). She explains that “emotions work as a form of capital,” and, therefore, “affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation” (119). Ahmed maintains that “while emotions do not positively reside in a subject or figure, they still work to bind subjects together” (118).


4. Martinez employs the arroba, or what is known as the “at sign” in English. The arroba is commonly used by scholars to problematize the gender binary endings in the Spanish language that use an “a” to represent a feminine notion and an “o” to represent a masculine notion. From this perspective, it is also used to queer the term itself.

5. Of importance to note is where Clough intervenes in these dialogues and where she specifically takes her own argument. In her essay, she asserts that the “most provocative and enduring contribution of the affective turn” is that it turns our attention to the “dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter generally—matter’s capacity for self-organization in being in-formational” (“Political Economy, Biomedia and Bodies” 1). Clough like the continental philosophers that she builds upon contest the immediate linkages some critics and theorists make from “affect to emotion” arguing that this leads to thinking affect as “subjectively felt states of emotion,” to thinking “the subject as the subject of emotion” (“Political Economy, Biomedia and Bodies” 2). The aim then is to consider how different material and technological assemblages impact the subject’s corporeal capacities to act, move, and impact space and subjects, to “affect and be affected” (Clough, “Theorizing the Social” 2). The affective turn thus focuses our attention on a wider set of phenomena such as capitalism, trauma, violence, and war. I do not engage her arguments thoroughly in this article since the primary focus is to consider the affective turn as a recent phenomenon.

6. Contemporary Black studies scholars such as Angela Davis, Saidiya Hartman, Katherine McKittrick, Fred Moten, Horten Spillers, and many others, have drawn connections between the transatlantic slave trade and the forms of logics and technologies that emerged within colonialism, subject formation, geographies of domination, and the types of sociality that practices and forms of (mundane) violence and terror created. Historically, Black feminist theorists, activists, and abolitionists such as Anna Julia Cooper, Amy Jacques Garvey, Claudia Jones, Pauli Murray, Sojourner Truth, and Michelle Wallace, to name a few, have paved the way in thinking how capital intersects with race and gender, labor and class, and also dismantled dominant notions of gender and sexuality, theorizing all of these categories from personal experience, thus offering alternate and more productive genealogies for thinking through the body, space, and affect.

7. For a description of straight lines see: Ahmed, Queer Phenomenologies.
8. To be sure, the goal is not to equate White affect studies with White bodies, but to examine a deliberate epistemic practice of erasure that prioritizes White affects and White histories of affect. This practice is maintained through a rigorous engagement with continental theories and literatures and a citational practice that advances the work of continental thinkers. Doing so contributes to the institutionalization of White affect studies as an arena of inquiry that draws upon the scholarship of White men. As Ahmed writes, “‘White men’ is an institution” (Ahmed, “White Men”). I quote her here at length to anchor what she means by White men as representative of an institution: “An institution typically refers to a persistent structure or mechanism of social order governing the behaviour of a set of individuals within a given community. So when I am saying that ‘white men’ is an institution I am referring not only to what has already been instituted or built but the mechanisms that ensure the persistence of that structure. A building is shaped by a series of regulative norms. “White men” refers also to conduct; it is not simply who is there, who is here, who is given a place at the table, but how bodies are occupied once they have arrived; behaviour as bond.” Although scholars of color such as Ahmed have also engaged theoretical strands of continental philosophies and literatures, and offered continental treatments of affect and phenomenology, Ahmed demonstrates there are different ways to leverage theories of affect. Ahmed, for instance, has written on her deliberate decision to cite feminists of color. Her examples and artifacts are often located within the context of queer women of color experiences.

9. Feminists of color who work on borderland theories, Chican@ literatures, and borderland theories have rightfully problematized the terms mestiza and mestizaje by illuminating how they are both limiting. Smith argues that Gloria Anzaldúa, a lesbian Chicana feminist who introduces the term mestizaje in her acclaimed book Boderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza, presumes indigenous identity as a pre-modern precursor to mestizaje. From this perspective, Smith turns a spotlight on how borderland theory, which situates borderlands as site of change, is often contrasted with indigeneity, which is seen as unchanging. She writes: “New mestiza consciousness illuminates how to enact a (border) crossing from marginalized other to whole woman who constantly shifts, crosses, and gains power from contradiction and ambiguity” (8). As such, indigenous women, unlike mestizas, are not seen as whole women but perceived as fractured subjects. Social and cultural analyst Maria Josefina Saldana-Portillo wages a similar argument against mestizaje. She says “We can no longer uncritically celebrate mestizaje [and I would argue mixed-bloodedness] in Chicana/o and other social formations as a positionality of radical, postmodern hybridity but must recognize it is a racial ideology with its own developmentalist history” (12). Martinez points to how mestiza/mestizaje are problematic terms, and explains that she opts for Alicia Arrizón’s definition, which she defines as the “intercultural subject in the performance of endless alterity” (qtd. in Martinez 7). With this in mind, scholar of Chicano/a literatures Sheila Marie Contreras nonetheless advances the argument that mestizaje is a critically important term since it allows scholars, including Anzaldua, to manipulate primitivist discourses in order to create a new subject (2371) and, therefore, a new language of self.

10. It is important to offer some context here on the term/trope poch@. It is from within a context of colonial history that scholars in the fields of Ethnic, Latin@, and Chican@ studies seek to recover the trope poch@. Historically, it has been used to identify cultural traitors who assimilated into U.S. culture. By drawing from a multimedia archive of pop culture producers, scholars such as Medina demonstrate how the trope is currently being used to institute a counter-narrative by artists, performers, and writers. He argues in his newly published text Reclaiming Poch@ Pop: Examining the Rhetoric of Cultural Deficiency, that “the once pejorative poch@” now stands as a “symbol of resistance” (7). Medina maintains that poch@ “re-emerges as a self-identifier for Latin@ pop culture producers who respond and
resist rhetoric framing Latin@s as deficient” (1). Martinez, like Medina, considers how poch@ serves as a political hermeneutic although her analysis departs from a pop-culture-specific analysis, focusing more on literatures that promote the visions of queer Latin@ women who theorize on the realities of societal violence and subjugation at the hands of the nation-state. Both Medina and Martinez offer a great point of departure for understanding how different scholars engage the trope poch@. Medina’s text in particular offers a great start. From political cartoonist Lalo Alcaraz’s website Pocho.com to controversial artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s theater group La Pocha Nostra to “proto-poch@ pop cinematic depictions” of Latin@s during the eighties and nineties, Medina troubles a traditional notion of poch@ by illuminating how an array of pop cultural producers are subverting its negative connotations using different strategies of resistance.

Notes on contributor

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