

LOVE AS POLITICAL RESISTANCE

Audre Lorde taught us that caring for ourselves is “not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”⁵² And although we know how to meme and tweet those words, living into them is harder. We have a deeper socialization to overcome, one that tells us that most of us don’t matter—our health, our votes, our work, our safety, our families, our lives don’t matter—not as much as those of white men. We need to learn how to practice love such that care—for ourselves and others—is understood as political resistance and cultivating resilience.

We don’t learn to love in a linear path, from self to family to friends to spouse, as we might have been taught. We learn to love by loving. We practice with each other, on ourselves, in all kinds of relationships.

And right now we need to be in rigorous practice, because we can no longer afford to love people the way we’ve been loving them.

Who have we been loving?

- the people who cross our physical or virtual paths, spark the flame of our interest, earn our devotion and respect and protection
- our own family, because blood
- people we are committed to but don’t like anymore

How have we been loving?

- defining love by obligation
- celebrating love on externally marked holidays
- keeping the realities of love behind closed doors
- framing love as a fairy tale on social media
- framing love as a product we give each other
- framing love as a limited resource that gets swallowed and used up, tied in plastic when we’re done and piled up out of sight
- prioritizing romantic love over self, comrade, and friend love

This kind of love is not sufficient, even if it is the greatest love of our lives.

The kind of love that we will be forced to celebrate or escape on Valentine's Day is too small.

We're all going to die if we keep loving this way, die from isolation, loneliness, depression, abandoning each other to oppression, from lack of touch, from forgetting we are precious. We can no longer love as a secret or a presentation, as something we prioritize, hoard for the people we know. Prioritizing ourselves in love is political strategy, is survival.

From religious spaces to school to television shows to courts of law, we are socialized to seek and perpetuate private, even corporate, love. Your love is for one person, forever. You celebrate it with dying flowers and diamonds. The largest celebration of your life is committing to that person. Your family and friends celebrate you with dishes and a juicer. You need an income to love. If something doesn't work out with your love, you pay a lot of money to divide your lives, generally not telling people much unless it's a soap opera dramatic ending. This way of approaching love strangles all the good out of it.

What we need right now is a radical, global love that grows from deep within us to encompass all life.

No big deal.

To help make this a true day of love, here is brief radical love manifesto.

Radical Honesty

We begin learning to lie in intimate relationships at a very early age. Lie about the food your mother made, to avoid punishment, as you swallow your tears, about loving this Valentine's Day gift, about the love you want and how you feel. Most of this is taught as heteropatriarchy 101: men love one way, women another, and we have to lie to impress and catch each other. Women are still taught too often to be submissive, diminutive, obedient, and later nagging and caregiving—not to be peers, emotionally complex powerhouses, loving other women and trans bodies. These mistruths in gender norms are self-perpetuating, affirmed by magazines and movies, girded at family dinner tables.

We also learn that love is a limited resource and that the love we want and need is too much, that we are too much. We learn to shrink, to lie about the whole love we need, settling with not quite good enough in order to not be alone.

We have to engage in an intentional practice of honesty to counter this socialization. We need radical honesty—learning to speak from our root systems about how we feel and what we want. Speak our needs and listen to others' needs. To say, "I need to hear that you miss me." "When you're high all the time

it's hard for me to feel your presence." "I lied." "The way you talked to that man made me feel unseen." "Your jealousy makes me feel like an object and not a partner." The result of this kind of speech is that our lives begin to align with our longings, and our lives become a building block for authentic community and ultimately a society that is built around true need and real people, not fake news and bullshit norms.

Healing

Trauma is the common experience of most humans on this planet. Love too often perpetuates trauma, repeating the patterns of intimacy and pain so many of us experienced growing up in racist and/or hetero-patriarchal environments. Shame might be the only thing more prevalent, which leads to trauma being hidden, silenced, or relegated to a certain body of people. If we can't carry our trauma and act normal, if we have a breakdown or lose our jobs/homes/children, there is something wrong with us. What we need is a culture where the common experience of trauma leads to a normalization of healing. Being able to say: I have good reasons to be scared of the dark, of raised voices, of being swallowed up by love, of being alone. And being able to offer each other: "I know a healer for you." "I'll hold your hand in the dark." "Let's begin a meditation practice." "Perhaps talk therapy is not enough." We should celebrate love in our community as a measure of healing. The expectation should be: I know we are all in need of healing, so how are we doing our healing work?

Learn How to Change

Most of us resist changes we didn't spark. We feel victimized, so we try to hold tight to whatever we figure out as a way to survive. We spend too much time watching change happen with our jaws dropped, writing "what the fuck?" over and over. It is time to learn Octavia Butler's lessons—both that "the only lasting truth is Change" and that we can, and must, "shape change."⁵³ So we need to observe how we respond to change—does it excite us so much that we struggle with stability? Or do we ignore changes until it's too late? Or fight changes that are bigger than us? It takes time and assistance to feel into and find the most strategic adaptation.

Build Communities of Care

Shift from individual transactions for self-care to collective transformation. Be in community with healers in our lives. Healers, we must make sure our gifts are available and accessible to those growing and changing our communities. Be in

family with each other—offer the love and care we can, receive the love and care we need. Share your car or meals with a healer in exchange for reiki sessions. Facilitate a healing group in exchange for massages. Clean a healer’s home as barter for a ritual to move through grief. Pay healing forward—buy sessions for friends. Let our lives be a practice ground where we’re learning to generate the abundance of love and care we, as a species, are longing for.

This Valentine’s Day, commit to developing an unflappable devotion to yourself as part of an abundant, loving whole. Make a commitment with five people to be more honest with each other, heal together, change together, and become a community of care that can grow to hold us all.

⁵² Essay reprinted from adrienne maree brown, “Love as Political Resistance: Lessons from Audre Lorde and Octavia Butler,” February 14, 2017, *Bitch Media* (blog), <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/love-time-political-resistance/transform-valentines-day-lessons-audre-lorde-and-octavia>. Quote is from Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light and Other Essays* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand, 1988), 130.

⁵³ Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, 3.