
Love, Politics, and Public/Private Porosity

Women of Hull House

Federica Castelli



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/3224>

DOI: 10.4000/ejpap.3224

ISSN: 2036-4091

Publisher

Associazione Pragma

Electronic reference

Federica Castelli, "Love, Politics, and Public/Private Porosity", *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* [Online], XV-1 | 2023, Online since 06 May 2023, connection on 08 May 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/3224> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.3224>

This text was automatically generated on 8 May 2023.



Creative Commons - Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International - CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Love, Politics, and Public/Private Porosity

Women of Hull House

Federica Castelli

“Love is as love does.”
bell hooks

1. Constellations of Hull House

- 1 It is not difficult to consider the women who animated Hull House as a constellation. Eleanor J. Stebner did so in *The Women of Hull House* (1997), a text that investigates women’s relationships, practices, and the intertwining of activism and spirituality – broadly understood and not reducible to religious observances or institutions – in the most important social settlement of the United States, founded by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr in 1889. I too will adopt this image of a constellation and its emphasis on plurality; it is not possible to fully appreciate the beauty of a constellation by focusing on only one of its elements (most typically, Addams’s figure) without studying the relations between the different parts that compose it. The stories and lived experiences that animated Hull House evoke a detailed image in which different approaches, methodologies, and conditions address complex and articulated social priorities. Looking at Jane Addams, her companions, and the women of the Hull House neighborhood, and what they managed to accomplish with great effort, patience, and commitment, we see pulsating stars of different colors, shapes, and intensities, which together compose an evocative and lively image. Each star is unique, but it is only through their relations that we can glimpse something new. Moreover, constellations offer a possible direction for our individual and collective paths. They remind us that we are immersed in a *cosmos*: interconnected, interdependent, and caught up in a *sympoietic system* that cannot be reduced to human actors (Dempster 2000). In other words, we are embodied in a mutual relationship and not individuals without ties or context, as some Western philosophers have tried to suggest (Cavarero 2013).

- 2 Scholarly engagement with this constellation of experiences and personal stories discloses a resonance with current research and activism, while compelling us to remain aware of the temporal and material distance that separates us from the original Hull House experience. In this mixture of intimacy and distance, I argue, we are reminded that we need to turn to the past to formulate questions and not seek answers to questions that arise from our present pressures and concerns. What connections, or idiosyncrasies, then, can emanate from a decolonized, intersectional, feminist, transfeminist, and queer rereadings of Addams's thought and the Hull House experience? What do the stories and inventions of the women who created, inhabited, defended, cared for, and traversed it over the years tell us today? Is it possible to establish a dialogue between our contemporary experiences and the settlement of Jane Addams, Ellen Gates Starr, Mary Keyser, Alice Hamilton, Julia Lathrop, Florence Kelley, Helen Curver, Louise deKoven Bowen, and Mary Rozet Smith?
- 3 Feminist thinkers have emphasized the political value of reinterpreting the canon from a gendered perspective, putting it in dialogue with subjects and experiences of the past that have not been included in or foreseen by the canon; they have shown the political purpose of feminist genealogies while simultaneously warning us against the risk of speaking for others, crystallizing their experiences, and subjecting their struggles to our own urgencies. Moreover, we must not forget Addams's refusal to be juxtaposed with political labels, including feminist ones (Hamington 2010; Santarelli 2022). This refusal was anything but ideological and arose from the practical need to avoid distinctions that she felt were divisive at the time, instead focusing on collective action, cohesion, and *acting in concert*, to use a concept dear to Hannah Arendt (1958). Yet, her attitude resonates with that of some feminists because of a number of elements that characterize her approach: the link between the personal and the political; the gendered perspective and – we would say today – an intersectional approach (Gregoratto 2019); the highlighting of issues linked to the public/private distinction; the valuing of the experience of female subjects and their social skills (as the result of learning and socialization as opposed to natural features: see Haslanger 2017; Miras Boronat 2021); ethics of care (Hamington 2010), and so on.
- 4 Addams made the nexus between the personal and the political the basis for her reflections on social change. This has led some scholars to explain her approach as a true “autobiographical method” (Bianchi 2004) reminiscent of the feminist politics of location (Rich 1984) and the practice of situating knowledge, where theories merge with experience (see Buttarelli & Giardini 2008). Likewise, she rejects the abstractness of universal/universalizable categories and is suspicious of theoretical constructions that are not rooted in individual histories and experiences; her experimental method is based on cooperation and the recognition of the epistemological and political value of the subject's experience. In her writings, girls, women, the elderly, and widows are given a voice and space, not as objects of inquiry but as subjects with political agency. Addams rejects universal accounts of knowledge as an end in itself: the epistemological roots of her activism and political work can be found in the central role she gives to the uniqueness of experience. But while unique, experience in Addams also has an intersubjective dimension: she adopts an epistemological attitude in which experiences in a pluralistic dialogue with each other form the very premises for justice and social change. So, her idea of cultivated person is that of someone who is “a citizen of the

world because of his growing understanding of all kinds of people with their varying experiences” (Addams 1912a: 359).

- 5 Although some have identified Addams as the “mother” of feminism (see Bianchi 2004), fixing her in a genealogical relationship that, in turn, reproduces the traditional family structure, I stress that what indelibly characterized Addams and the Hull House years is the shared practices of sisterhood and alliances – between women, classes, and cultures – that collectively redefined and disrupted social hierarchies, exclusions, gender norms and the traditional spaces of political action. Thus, beyond Addams’s specific social claims and forms of activism, we must acknowledge the peculiar approach that marked the radical experience of sisterhood and new forms of intimacy and alliance that Addams, along with others, inaugurated at Hull House.
- 6 In my account, the Hull House experience as well as Addams’s reflections on the relationship between subjects and the city they inhabited will prove to be valuable tools to reinterpret the relationship between spaces and subjectivities in the present. Furthermore, they allow us to rethink the dichotomies and divisions that structure – symbolically and physically – contemporary public space, and hence the exclusions and erasures that these produce: above all, the disruption of the rigid division between the long-standing categories of public and private space, cherished by modern Western thought and the bourgeois structure of societies in particular, that the Hull House experience enacts. For the women of Hull House, social practice went hand in hand with relationships of love, friendship, and sisterhood between themselves and the women they encountered – within and outside the walls of the settlement. Their experience reveals the porosity of the distinction between public and private, the possibility to change the oppressive and rigid gender norms of the Victorian age, and a redefinition of intimacy, kinship, and relationships. Most of all, it stresses the fact that love is a transformative force in politics.

2. Practices of Sisterhood and Private/Public Porosity

- 7 The settlement movement was an attempt by the middle and upper middle classes to overcome – and in many cases challenge – the distances that differences of class, ethnicity, culture, and creed imprinted on nineteenth-century American society, creating inequalities and exclusions. To quote Addams,

[...] Hull-House was soberly opened upon the theory that the dependance of classes on each other is reciprocal; and that the social relation is essentially a reciprocal relation [...] that the things that make men alike are finer and better than the things that keep them apart, and that these basic likenesses, if they are properly accentuated, easily transcend the less essential differences of race, language, creed, and tradition. (Addams 1912a: 91, 112)
- 8 In particular, Hull House represented an attempt at alliance building: it tried to avoid the risk of subsuming or ventriloquizing women’s lives that is implicit in any movement of social inclusion, rejecting social divisions but also the destructive and weakening risks of assimilation (Rauty 2017). In this framework, the building and nurturing of interpersonal relationships in activism, relationships of care, friendship, and love is neither supplemental nor an organizational accident/intrusion. It grounds and gives matter to political practices and the reflections that intertwine with them. In

Addams's words, the settlement movement is a "movement based, not only upon conviction, but upon genuine emotion" (Addams 1912a: 115).

- 9 Being a community of women that was animated, conceived, and inhabited by women (and also men, including Dewey; cf. Addams 1912a), Hull House was one of the first settlements to provide spaces for women; here they could share their lives, create, and work together. They could reserve time for collective discussion and elaboration, work toward common welfare, and rethink democracy in terms of activism, sharing, and social practices rooted in the streets, the city, and the neighborhood, as a way of life and not simply a procedure or a form of political organization (Whipps 2010; Addams 1912a). Contemporaries saw the settlement in Halsted Street as a place akin to a monastery, traversed by single women who were socially engaged in activities involving the poor and oppressed segments of the urban population. In a word, lay sisters. Stebner points out that this reveals the dearth of conceptual and linguistic resources to describe the experience of women who lived, worked, and carried out a shared social and political practice through sisterhood and friendship relationships (Stebner 1997: 5). In Addams's time, women had no space other than the cramped one of private domesticity; they had neither opportunities nor places to reflect, invent, and create together; outside the meshes of heterosexual, monogamous relationships established by marriage and bound to the care of the family space, their freedom was temporary, granted for short periods and only in affluent, middle-class contexts, limited to studying in institutions reserved for them (Rauty 2017; see Addams 1912a: 89-112). Once educated, they were to re-enter private life. For women of other social classes, however, leaving the private sphere coincided with the grueling moment in which they were forced to put their bodies to work in unhealthy, disenfranchised, and alienating contexts, usually in factories and sweatshops. At the end of the work shift, then, the private sphere and its demands exhausted the last energies that remained. In the isolation that each of these women experienced on a daily basis, intellectual exchanges, dialogue, and the possibility of confrontation with others vanished. The family was the only pole of their social interaction.
- 10 In the settlement in Halsted Street, women created – for themselves and others – a space for their work and thought; a space to find and recognize themselves, outside the Victorian expectations of the feminine, as free subjects, far from the male gaze and normative rules about what they were expected to do and what they were capable of doing "as women." In a sense, Hull House was an important experiment not so much because it created "a room of one's own" (Woolf 1929), but rather *a house of our own*, and because it stressed the porosity of categories such as the home/street, public/private, domestic/political, and productive/reproductive labor.
- 11 These women were deeply in love with their city, the streets they had chosen to inhabit, and the experience that they sustained, nurtured, defended, and loved day after day. They were neither saints nor heroines: flesh-and-blood women who confronted all the cultural biases and stereotypes of their age, at times putting them to the test and disrupting them, other times unconsciously reproducing them. While the Victorian cult of femininity imposed severe limitations on women in terms of their spaces for action, thought, and personal growth, effectively making processes of subjectification and self-determination difficult and confining them in the enclosed space of their private home, these women turned the house into a space for politics, activism, and self-realization – a place from where to engage in radical social

transformations and experimentation. While women were reserved for charity, they chose political action that redefined roles, spaces, and social identities. Likewise, they redefined the house in a social sense, making it a porous and open place. In other words, they made it a political space.

- 12 Hull House was a place of political passion and enthusiasm (Bianchi 2004: 17). It became a complex and rich intercultural space, a center for research and social reform, a reference point for workers' organizations, and a mediator during strikes. It launched and experimented with unprecedented forms of association: women's unions, consumer leagues, and a shelter for young women workers. Finally, numerous proposals for protective legislation to improve working conditions arose from the settlement (see Addams 1912a)
- 13 In Hull House, the plurality of goals and spheres of action pushed many women to experiment with new forms of relationships, including with other women in the neighborhood. For them, understanding society meant experiencing the contradictions that arise from the intertwining of different struggles and experiences, seeking alliances with women of different classes by questioning structural inequalities and the privileges of some over others (Sarvasy 2010). By merging backgrounds, cultures, and values, these relationships profoundly reshaped the middle-class and bourgeois values that had marked Addams's own experience. "It is impossible that you should live in a neighborhood and constantly meet people with certain ideas and notions without modifying your own" (Addams 1897: 343).
- 14 The Hull House experience reveals the porosity of the categories of public and private, one of the most rigid and foundational dichotomies of the Western world, while also undermining the still widespread idea that "safety" – for feminine or feminized subjects – is confined to the private sphere, which led to their exclusion from public space. The settlement in Halsted Street thus challenged the traditional role assigned to the home and its relationship to public space, forcing us to rethink it, because it showed us a home with porous walls, inhabited and traversed by a community, and constantly evolving, which can be ascribed neither to the individualistic private sphere nor to the impersonal idea of public space.
- 15 The creation of an articulated and complex intercultural space, based on the idea of exchange and not the integration of or assimilation between subjects (Bianchi 2004), dramatically puts into question the public-private dichotomy. In doing so, it shows how the two dimensions are intimately linked and, simultaneously, establishes another – common – dimension (Sarvasy 2010). Hull House connects the social world to the State, neither opposing nor being contiguous to the latter. Rather, it is configured as a social space of gendered and embodied activism (*ibid.*: 307) that puts the two dimensions in dialogue, questioning them from an embodied experience. It is a daily effort of undoing the conventions of class and gender, of what is private and what is public, in a process of redefining that also passes through the structure of spaces, which constantly change meaning, use, and beneficiaries (Jackson 2010).
- 16 Existing scholarship tends to present Addams as caught in an ascetic struggle for justice (such as Bellatalla 1989; on this criticism, see also Bianchi 2004). However, if we widen our gaze, we can restore complexity to her lived experience and grasp – in the interweaving of her life with those of the women with whom she lived, shared ideas, and struggled – the various political challenges of the Hull House experience. For example, they questioned the expectations of femininity and the gender roles of their

times simply by living together, authentically, in their passion, friendship, and love relationships. Yet, seeing them together, one would hardly know this. Addams, in particular, was always “appropriately” dressed, while her attitude was composed, feminine, and at times austere. In her political battle, Addams focused on “feminine” skills and knowledge as a fundamental element of social progress. Like many of her contemporaries, in fact, Addams attributed great social and moral value to domesticity, identifying it as a specific way for women to achieve citizenship. However, her writings clearly show that the traditional domestic dimension is neither exhaustive nor effective. First, security for women is not only inside the house but also involves the streets (Addams 1909: 78); it is about more than protecting “fragile” subjects, namely setting the conditions for their self-determination; second, avoiding the harshest opinions of her time, Addams believed that a woman can embody not merely affection and family care, but also social and political engagement.

- 17 In this framework, the idea of domesticity is extended to the public and simultaneously reworked in the private (Jackson 2010: 174). The very idea of motherhood and care that were at the heart of proposals for “city housekeeping” and “mother’s politics” (Addams 1906) was, for Addams and other Hull House activists, disengaged from the purely biological aspect. Although Addams ascribed political and social value to domestic activities performed by women based on the idea that women are inclined to care and a specific way of serving others, and hence the community, she did so not because she believed women possessed a natural talent or determination, but in the knowledge that the different division of labor between men and women has historically produced specific experiences and knowledge (Haslanger 2017; Miras Boronat 2021).
- 18 In Addams’s vision, stopping the violent and exclusionary drifts of urban life requires a contribution from those who nurture, care, and protect. For this reason, the values embodied in women’s work – which Addams recognizes as such – must also be recognized in public life (Bianchi 2004). Women’s entry into public space and the recognition of the civic value of the activities traditionally assigned to them would lead to a renewal of citizenship itself; the latter would shift from the idea of war and defense embodied in the paradigm of the citizen in arms toward a form of citizenship based on work, community care, responsibility, commitment, and sharing (Addams 1906; Haslanger 2017). This position not only reassigns value to activities and practices that have traditionally been excluded from the public realm but also reconfigures the latter from a perspective that questions its norms, subjects, founding divisions, and reference values (Haslanger 2017). In fact, this proposal implies that caring activities are extended beyond the private space; simultaneously, it dismantles the domestic sphere (Jackson 2010). Not always mothers and not always women, the subjects who animated Hull House acted out “an ethic of radical locality” (*ibid.*: 168) while considering caring activities as key to action and change in public space. In doing so, they again made the porosity of these two dimensions evident (Sarvasy 2010; Bianchi 2004; Haslanger 2017).
- 19 At the same time, Addams stressed how gender stereotypes and, in particular, those related to the family weighed on the lives of women from all walks of life (Knight 2010: 193). As some queer readings of Addams have pointed out, the redefinition of spatiality in Hull House was accompanied by the redefinition of conventional sexual and kinship relations by the men and women who passed through it. The settlement in Halsted Street offered women a new kind of space in which to live fully and authentically, in a shared everydayness that ended up questioning heterosexual norms and the then

dominant concept of the nuclear family (*ibid.*). What Hull House brings to the table, then, is a new space in which to redefine the domestic – no longer a private space, no longer apolitical – and its concepts of the family and relationships, gender roles, and expectations. Nonheterosexual bonds, Sister-Settlers, and nonbiological kinship: everyday life at Hull House disrupts intimate ties and promotes an alternative concept of the family, one that resists homonormativity without being directly relatable to the categories of homosexual identity (*ibid.*: 174). This “queer domesticity” (Jackson 2010: 169) is centered on the idea of the interdependence of subjects, which exceeds the biological bonds and the only private dimension of the household. Methodologically interesting and politically significant, it gives rise to a relational complexity and a moving topography within the same private space, showing how dynamic the seemingly stable forms of love, family, home, kinship, and welfare truly are (*ibid.*).

3. Lessons of Love

- 20 “There can be no love without justice,” bell hooks wrote in *All About Love* (2001). Likewise, it is difficult to imagine justice being achieved without love.
- 21 Relationships are a fundamental element of the practices, inventions, and analyses carried forward by the women who inhabited the settlement in Halsted Street: these are relationships of sisterhood, intimacy, and love. By talking about these women and their relationships of friendship and love, we gain insight into the generative power of women’s relationships and love as a transformative, political force (Lorde 1984; Stebner 1997). Friendship, intimacy, and the erotic are powerful elements of social and personal transformation. In her essay on the erotic (1984), Audre Lorde showed how oppression passes through the corruption and distortion of the various forms of power that can give the oppressed the force to bring about change. For women, this has meant the suppression of the erotic as a source of strength, regeneration, knowledge, critique, and resistance rooted in their lived experiences (*ibid.*: 53), beginning with bodies and relationships.
- Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe. (*Ibid.*: 57)
- For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within. (*Ibid.*: 58)
- 22 A focus on intimate relationships enables and stimulates the quest for social change and justice in our world. It implies showing that the personal is political, as feminist movements have pointed out (Stebner 1997: 151), and putting women’s friendships as an element of social transformation at the center (*ibid.*: 178). To emphasize the effects and political value of friendships and support relationships in Hull House – far from suggesting that it hosted a cohesive, homogeneous group in which everyone was ideologically in a friendship relationship with one another – means to highlight the extent to which relationships constituted, for many women, a “point of crystallization for living in the world” (Raymond 1986), giving them the sense of worldliness that nineteenth-century patriarchal society denied them. The bonds of friendship and

intimacy born in Hull House gave each woman the opportunity to open up their personal worlds and acknowledge that their passions and vocations equated to social and political engagement. As Stebner observed, “the women of Hull House did not become friends for pragmatic purpose only [...] these particular women came to care deeply for one another and desired the best for one another even as they worked to improve the world” (Stebner 1997: 180). Her account resonates the definition of love that bell hooks, drawing on Fromm, described as “the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth” (2001).

- 23 In her essay *Love on Halsted Street* (2010), Louise W. Knight identified three experiences of love that, beginning with Jane Addams, enlivened the settlement’s walls. We can define these all as political experiences, with the same intensity.
- 24 The first experience is that of Addams’s *romantic, intimate love* for Ellen Gates Starr and, subsequently, Mary Rozet Smith. The intimate relationship with Starr lasted six years and led not only to remarkable intellectual exchanges but also to the birth of the Hull House experience: both shared a love of reading, had bright and inquisitive minds, and were determined to become young women of culture. In the context of a predominantly intellectual love (*ibid.*: 184) Starr and Addams called themselves a couple and thought of each other as their new family (*ibid.*: 185), talking about each other to their families of origin. The relationship with Smith – which lasted for more than forty years and until they both died – was a lifelong bond, interweaving political projects with physical closeness, passionate letters with plans for living together. In both cases, the intimate friendship provided the basis for personal growth, self-recognition, and a shared political project. Love, work, and political passion were thus combined (*ibid.*).
- 25 Many historical studies have struggled to frame these relationships, particularly that between Addams and Smith. While for some authors, the issue of the sexual element and lesbianism is “essentially irrelevant” (Davis 1973), others have raised the political need to define these experiences to create spaces of political visibility for lesbian and nonheteronormative subjectivities (Knight 2010; Stebner 1997). The women of Hull House undoubtedly lived intense and passionate relationships, in contrast to Victorian culture, which reserved an idealized and highly asexual life for them (Rauty 2017: 112-3). Could we call their relationships lesbian? And to what current – epistemological, political, and social – urgency does this need to define their relationships as such respond? Further still, what is a lesbian? Is lesbianism given on the basis of one’s sexual activities, or is it possible to access a broader dimension of lesbianism that does not exclusively coincide with sexual relations (Knight 2010: 182)?
- 26 The fact that some terms (e.g. homosexuality, lesbianism, homosexual, and lesbian) were already in use in previous ages does not guarantee a stable meaning over time: a long historical journey, different contexts for heterogeneous subjects, and a different commitment to a term (Rauty 2017: 112; Knight 2010: 182) can change its meaning. While the present culture equates intimacy with sexuality, in Addams’s time, intimacy could be spiritual, disembodied, and nonsexual closeness (Knight 2010: 183). For a long time, Addams herself was an advocate of Platonic love (*ibid.*: 186-7); she saw intimacy as the union of two souls, or the connection between two spirits, in what she sometimes called “the intercourse of two minds” (Addams 1897: 341).
- 27 When she was a child, the so-called “Boston marriages” were very common and did not necessarily imply sexual relationships. There was no stigma related to choosing a

relationship that aimed to be lasting and stable. This could involve both single and married women, students and teachers, mothers and daughters, friends, and fellow students. However, from the 1890s onward, rigid conservatism affected women and their habits. A fundamental contribution to this new hostility toward same-sex relationships was made by several social scientists, including Freud, who defined homosexuality as a disorder (Knight 2010: 193; Stebner 1997: 164). Many women decided to shift to a less visible, unspoken mode of being together. This shift had relatively little impact on the women of Hull House, as they lived together in large numbers and in a plural context that, as we have seen, was often read as the secular version of a convent. In reality, it strongly affected women's relationships in society.

28 In this framework, then, giving visibility also becomes a way to open up spaces for naming and subjectification. In the 1980s, Adrienne Rich – talking about an absence in American history – emphasized the political value of naming these affective experiences, which describe lesbianism as “a reality, and as a source of knowledge and power available to women” (Rich 1980). These women had intense bonds that combined an intellectual dimension with physical proximity in their everyday life. Being together, they imagined another way of being in the world and tried to understand democracy as a social practice, and not just an ideal; they invented practices and strategies and developed deep intellectual and spiritual reflections. At the same time, they slept together, hugged, and kissed.

29 A second experience of love that we can identify is the *affectionate, cooperative love* that Addams and the other women (and men) of Hull House nurtured in their political activism. These practices of activism (and love) also involved women and men from the neighborhood, who were active participants and not just consumers of “services,” offered by the Hull House project.

[...] the fascination for most of these volunteering residents would lie in the collective living aspect of the Settlement. [...] it is doubtless true that the very companionship, the give and take of colleagues, is what tends to keep the Settlement normal and in touch with “the world of things as they are” [...]. (Addams 1912a: 90)

They must be content to live quietly side by side with their neighbors, until they grow into a sense of relationship and mutual interests. (*Ibid.*: 126)

30 This is the love of those who gather together in a collective effort, experiencing the pleasure that comes from being together politically: what Arendt called “public happiness” (Arendt 1963) or, in the words of the Italian feminist movement of the 1970s, the *pulviscolo erotico* (erotic fine dust) of feminist politics. For Addams, cooperation was not only good and useful but the path for social theory and reform, as the pages of the *Hull House Maps and Papers* (1895) show: a collective work – indeed, the first example of urban research, which anticipated the methods of the Chicago School – that, partly through beautiful polychrome maps, sought to reconstruct the lives of the residents of the 19th district of Chicago. These studies represented a new way of investigating the city based on the idea that knowledge of the social realm derives from one's relationship with others; here, mapping becomes a tool for analysis and the construction of alternative imaginaries, a way of investigating and changing the affective relationship with the city, and an occasion to question the identity of places and a sense of belonging in light of the conditions of misery and exploitation of those who live there (Holbrook 1895; Addams 1895). In this *acting in concert*, Addams only held leadership and coordination roles when she felt it was strategically useful, that is, when

she knew that her presence could make a difference, for example when liaising with certain institutions. Most of the time, though, she was just part of the team.

- 31 Finally, Knight points us to the *love of Humanity*: a love of “the other,” a vital stimulus of Addams’s attempt to achieve social justice. When she was young, this type of love was ideal (and almost impossible to achieve); over time, it acquired the consistency of experience. Given the settlement experience and the various battles fought by Addams, *love of Humanity* would become her compass and rule of life — a guide in her social relations (Knight 2010: 183). It is also what Addams is known for best; in fact, her cosmopolitan and pacifist drive earned her the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931.
- 32 Love of humanity was an ideal that dominated the culture of Addams’s time but lost ground in the twenty-first century (*ibid.*: 190). Addams attempted to translate this ideal from its abstract form – a cold idea with homogenizing implications that risked overwhelming differences between human subjects – into a way of life, which involved respecting differences and creating a dialogue without hierarchies or implicit value judgments (*ibid.*). This ideal gained consistency because the women lived together in Halsted Street, where “humanity” was not just an abstract idea but it was instead embodied in collective lives and needs that challenged epistemological frameworks, charitable attitudes, and social judgments. Being confronted with different ethnicities, cultures, religions, needs, priorities, and economic conditions, Addams changed and was pushed toward a new definition of culture, rooted in the complexity and plurality of experiences and the exercise of *sympathetic knowledge* (Addams 1902), and trusting the other who does not share your same social and cultural background. The first task as citizens is to know one another: only thus will any risk of abstract universalism be avoided.
- 33 These three experiences of love, I argue, do intertwine – albeit in different shades – with an intense *love for public space*, which takes the form of both a passion for social democracy – a desire that constantly pushes Addams toward the search for social practices that give body to the democratic ideal – and a concrete passion for the city, its people, its streets, its vicissitudes.
- 34 With intensity, the women of Hull House studied, organized, reformed, and took care of the city of Chicago, for which they felt unconditional love. Likewise, their passionate posture has contributed to reshape relationships and experiences for many women and men in the city. The urban reality defines different spaces of possibility for its subjects and shapes their social relations, but these, in turn, modify the city and resignify it with their intensity: in this interweaving Addams sees the possibility of rethinking democracy “from the street,” toward the creation of a *passionate public space*. In this view, the city was never merely a theater of social interactions, but a place to be lived, reimagined, and refounded on a basis of justice and equality.

4. Conclusion. Counter-Politics of Emotions and Embodied Practices of Love

- 35 Friendship and sisterhood, love and intimacy: forces of change that constantly involve subjects and their collective dimension. Even in their duality, these relations overcome the exclusionary dichotomy of the self versus the other, us versus them, exceeding the purely private sphere and becoming political. They are unforeseen forms of

relationship that displace, reinvent, and cast a critical and passionate eye on our existence, making it possible to form alliances with other genealogies, subjectivities, and necessities. They avoid the risk of ideological solidarity and gender identity as a binding force that silences conflict. These relationships take charge of the disparity – where it exists – between recognition and entrustment (De Lauretis 1990).

- 36 The women of Hull House created supportive relationships of alliance that pushed the boundaries of Victorian society. They considered love, friendship, and physical contact as political instruments to question society and the relational forms it envisions and prescribes, and as forces that seek to create shared ways of life. These embodied practices of love (hooks 2001) cannot be reduced to identity, ideological solidarity, or camaraderie. Rather, they are unforeseen and contingent practices – an “unbreakable” space that locates politics beyond the State, the family, ties of filiation, and androcentric structures (Petrachi 2022). The result is an interweaving of experiences in which the heteronormative device opposing friendship and love is undermined along with the distinction between the “suspended and unproductive time” of friendship and the social, political, and economic dynamics of the “world out there” (*ibid.*: 227).
- 37 This attitude reveals the deep and radical, political significance of relationships and love understood as a form of action – a participatory emotion (hooks 2010). Many of the most recent feminist, transfeminist, and queer studies have once again drawn attention to the generative power of emotions and the relationships they give life to (Ahmed 2014), in the sense of creating a counter-politics (Caleo 2021) that takes other kinships and forms of interdependence into consideration (Haraway 2016). To politicize love, then, means to unlock a dimension in which the practice of love is not a way to achieve greater individual satisfaction but a primary tool for ending domination and oppression (hooks 2001). To recognize this, we must expand the sphere of what we consider political action. Affections, in this sense, work as intersectional tools toward the creation of new, emotionally dense public spheres (Caleo 2021: 182).
- 38 In recent years a number of feminist and transfeminist self-organized spaces have been born in Italy, trying to reproduce this political intimacy and deep connection between urban territory, neighborhood and activists. The Women’s House “Lucha y Siesta” in Rome, for example, from 2008 provides a safe space for women escaping violent relationships – interweaving services and support with activism, art, culture, education, and training courses – giving life to a shared space for theoretical and political elaboration and for political relationships, new intimacies, and transformative love. This paper was not just intended to provide a historical framework or to investigate relationships within the Halsted Street settlement in a new light. In a coming and going of intersecting gazes, it aimed to seek connections, and create *new constellations* between different temporalities, in resonances and distances, that would help us put into question our precarious and critical times taking into account emotions, love, relationships, and practices of sisterhood.

“We constantly think that there are
circumstances in
which human beings can be treated without
affection,
and there are no such circumstances.”
(Tolstoy, as quoted *in* Addams 1912b: 81)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ADDAMS Jane, (1893), "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements," in Henry C. Adams (ed.), *Philanthropy and Social Progress*, New York, Crowell, 1-26.
- ADDAMS Jane, (1895), "The Settlement as a Factor in the Labor Movement," in *Hull-House Maps and Papers: a presentation of nationalities and wages in a congested district of Chicago, together with comments and essays on problems growing out of the social conditions*, New York, Peters & Son.
- ADDAMS Jane, (1897), "Social Settlements," in National Conference on Social Welfare. Section on Organization of Charity, *Proceeding of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, Twenty-Fourth Conference, July 7-14 1897*, Pioneers press Co.
- ADDAMS Jane, (1902), *Democracy and Social Ethics*, New York, The MacMillan Company.
- ADDAMS Jane, (1906), "Utilization of Women in City Government," in Id., *Newer Ideals of Peace*, New York, The MacMillan Company, 180-208.
- ADDAMS Jane, (1909), *The Spirit of Youth and City Streets*, New York, The MacMillan Company.
- ADDAMS Jane, (1912a), *Twenty Years at Hull House with Autobiographical Notes*, New York, The MacMillan Company.
- ADDAMS Jane, (1912b), *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil*, New York, The MacMillan Company.
- AHMED Sara, (2014), *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.
- ARENDT Hannah, (1958), *The Human Condition*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- ARENDT Hannah, (1963), *On Revolution*, New York, Viking Press.
- BELLATALLA Luciana, (1989), *Tra cuore e ragione. La "filosofia filantropica" di Jane Addams*, Milan, Franco Angeli.
- BIANCHI Bruna, (2004), "Il pensiero sociale di Jane Addams (1881-1916)," in Jane Addams, *Donne, immigrati, governo della città: scritti sull'etica sociale*, ed. by Bruna Bianchi, Santa Maria Capua Vetere, Spartaco.
- BUTTARELLI Annarosa & Federica GIARDINI (eds), (2008), *Il pensiero dell'esperienza*, Milan, Baldini Castoldi Dalai.
- CALEO Ilenia, (2021), *Performance, materia, affetti. Una cartografia femminista*, Città di Castello, Bulzoni.
- CAVARERO Adriana, (2013), *Inclinazioni. Critica della rettitudine*, Milan, Raffaello Cortina Editore.
- DAVIS Allen F., (1973), *American Heroine: The Life and Legend of Jane Addams*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- DE LAURETIS Teresa, (1990), "The Practice of Sexual Difference and Feminist Thought in Italy," in Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, *Sexual Difference. A Theory of Social Symbolic Practice*, Indiana, Bloomington.
- DEMPSTER Beth, (2000), "Sympoietic and Autopoietic Systems: A New Distinction for Self-Organizing Systems," in Janet K. Allen & Jennifer Wilby (eds), *Proceedings of the World Congress of the System Sciences*, Toronto, Canada.

- FISCHER Marilyn, (2010), "Trojan Women and Devil Baby Tales," in Maurice Hamington (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Jane Addams*, University Park, Penn., The Pennsylvania University Press, 81-105.
- GREGORATTO Federica, (2019), "Critica del dominio di genere e di classe. Verso una lettura intersezionalista di J. Dewey e J. Addams," *La società degli individui*, 63, 20-34. DOI 10.3280/las2018-063002.
- HAMINGTON Maurice, (2010), "Introduction," in Id. (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Jane Addams*, University Park, Penn., The Pennsylvania University Press, 1-28.
- HARAWAY Donna, (2016), *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham, Duke University Press.
- HASLANGER Sally, (2017), "Epistemic Housekeeping and the Philosophical Canon: A Reflection on Jane Addams' *Women and Public Housekeeping*," in Eric Schliesser (ed.), *Ten Neglected Classics of Philosophy*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- HOLBROOK Agnes S., (1895), "Map Notes and Comments," in *Hull-House Maps and Papers: a presentation of nationalities and wages in a congested district of Chicago, together with comments and essays on problems growing out of the social conditions*, New York, Peters & Son.
- hooks bell, (2001), *All About Love: New Visions*, New York, Harper Collins.
- HULL HOUSE, (1895) *Hull-House Maps and Papers: a presentation of nationalities and wages in a congested district of Chicago, together with comments and essays on problems growing out of the social conditions*, New York, Peters & Son.
- KNIGHT Louise W., (2010), "Love on Halsted Street. A Contemplation on Jane Addams," in Maurice Hamington (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Jane Addams*, University Park, Penn., The Pennsylvania University Press, 181-97.
- JACKSON Shannon, (2010), "Toward a Queer Social Welfare Studies. Unsettling Jane Addams," in Maurice Hamington (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Jane Addams*, University Park, Penn., The Pennsylvania University Press, 159-80.
- LORDE Audre, (1984), "Uses of the Erotic: the Erotic as Power," in Id., *Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches*, Berkeley, The Crossing Press, 53-9.
- MIRAS BORONAT Núria Sara, (2021), "Addams and Gilman: The Foundations of Pragmatism, Feminism and Social Philosophy," in Michael G. Festl (ed.), *Pragmatism and Social Philosophy: Exploring a Stream of Ideas from America to Europe*, London, Routledge, 218-34.
- PETRACHI Lorenzo, (2022), *Rovine dell'amicizia. Il Progetto incompiuto di Michel Foucault*, Napoli-Salerno, Orthotes.
- RAYMOND Janice G., (1986), *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*, Boston, Beacon Press.
- RAUTY Raffaele, (2017), *Il tempo di Jane Addams. Sviluppo dei settlements e costruzione dell'analisi sociale*, Napoli-Salerno, Orthotes.
- RICH Adrienne, (1980), "Compulsory Eterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5, n.4, 632-3.
- RICH Adrienne, (1984), "Notes Toward a Politics of Location," in Id., *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985*, (1985), New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 210-31.

SARVASY Wendy, (2010), "Engendering Democracy by Socializing It," in Maurice Hamington (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Jane Addams*, University Park, Penn., The Pennsylvania University Press, 293-310.

STEBNER Eleanor J., (1997), *The Women of Hull House: A Study in Spirituality, Vocation, and Friendship*, New York, State University of New York Press.

WHIPPS Judy, (2010), "Examining Addam's Democratic Theory Through a Postcolonial Feminist Lens," in Maurice Hamington (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Jane Addams*, University Park, Penn., The Pennsylvania University Press, 275-92.

WOOLF Virginia, (1929), *A Room of One's Own*, London, Hogarth Press.

ABSTRACTS

This article examines the political and theoretical life of Jane Addams and the women of Hull House, who gave rise to a constellation of new subjects and practices in nineteenth-century Chicago. In particular, the article highlights the importance of women's relations in the settlement in Halsted Street, which were a fundamental part of the group's political practice and reflection on democracy, society, and justice: on the one hand, they reconfigured the traditional dichotomy between private and public space, revealing its inherent porosity; on the other, relations of proximity, friendship, and love proved to be transformative forces and an embodied practice of justice that escaped the dynamics of the dual subject/object relationship, becoming an element of social change. Love, considered in the triple sense of *romantic and intimate love*, *affectionate and cooperative love*, and *love of Humanity*, turned out to be a political element that could redefine the norms and spaces of social action for Victorian women. Moreover, it extended the sphere of democracy beyond governmental procedures and institutions and transformed it into a life practice based on *acting in concert* and being together.

AUTHOR

FEDERICA CASTELLI

University of Roma Tre

federica.castelli[at]uniroma3.it