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CRITICAL IMPURITY AND THE RACE FOR CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

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> *A subject who in its multiplicity perceives, understands, grasps its worlds as multiple sensuously, passionately as well as rationally without the splitting separation between sense/emotion/reason lacks the unidimensionality and simplicity required to occupy the privileged vantage point.*
>
> – María Lugones, "Purity, Impurity and Separation"

Phenomenology finds itself at a critical moment as scholars reinterpret its revered, canonical texts by Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to show their political and ethical import. More specifically, phenomenologists wish to demonstrate phenomenology's relevance to critical analyses of various social identities. Given methodological commitments to the transcendental method, a predilection for apodictic evidence, the call for the bracketing of the natural attitude, and the quest for general ontological categories, contemporary scholars have not immediately recognized phenomenology as a likely source for theorizing contingent, historical structures. Perhaps the problem is that philosophy itself, as Helen Ngo (2019) notes, has "a well-known tendency toward abstraction and conceptualization that can make it difficult to *reckon* with the deeply historical nature and situated specificity of racism" (207; emphasis added).[1] Indeed, Ngo's description of philosophy's "reckoning" with race is very apt; philosophy needs to confront its practices of omission and elision or, in short, its racism. Certainly, a

[1] Linda Martín Alcoff (2021) notes that critical philosophy of race emerges in the late twentieth century and constitutes a philosophical study interested in "engendering a critical approach to race and hence the name of the sub-field." In the case of phenomenology, race and ethnicity have been discussed by Simone de Beauvoir (1999; 2011), Edith Stein (1989), and Jean-Paul Sartre (1995). Frantz Fanon's (1967) *Black Skin, White Masks*, originally written in 1952 is a key example of an early "critical" deep and sustained engagement with race in phenomenology. In the contemporary context, work by Alia Al-Saji (2014; 2018; 2019; 2020), Helen Fielding (2006; 2021), Lewis Gordon (1995; 2000; 2022), Lisa Guenther (2013; 2020; 2021; 2022), Emily Lee (2019), Linda Martín Alcoff (2020; 2021), Jacqueline Martinez (2000; 2014), Helen Ngo (2017; 2019; 2022), Gayle Salamon (2018b), Gail Weiss (2008; 2015; 2017), and my own work (2009; 2013; 2019a; 2019b) engage questions at the nexus of phenomenology, race, and racialization.

philosophy such as phenomenology that takes lived experience and life-worlds seriously needs to theorize race as a key feature of lived experience and meaning-making. Not doing so would point to a deep failure to engage with the famous "problem of the color line" that W. E. B. Du Bois (1989) so acutely understood as the main problem of the twentieth century, but which clearly continues to haunt us.

Fortunately, this critical moment in phenomenology carries with it a demand that we no longer consider race and racism as the proper subject matter of the sociologist or historian, or as simply belonging to the realm of the ontic. Yet recent calls for critical phenomenology, especially from scholars such as Gayle Salamon (2018b) and Lisa Guenther (2020; 2021), who explicitly discuss a *critical* turn in phenomenology, have led to a number of difficult questions about phenomenology's relevance in the quest for racial justice. Such issues range from debates about the very meaning of "critique" or "the critical," to the usefulness of phenomenological methodologies in analyzing the complex, multilayered, historical processes of racialization, to what I describe here as the race for critical phenomenology of race.

In this work I am inspired by Black literary critic Barbara Christian's (1988) influential essay "The Race for Theory" that carries out a critique of literary criticism's reliance on European theories that, according to Christian, turn hegemonic by way of appeals to an organizing general principle; a tendency toward the monolithic; overly theoretical, inaccessible writing; and the transference of norms of texts by white males to "Third World" women of color writers. In this influential text, Christian states, "[m]y major objection to the race for theory . . . really hinges on the question, 'For whom are we doing what we are doing when we do literary criticism?'" (77). While I am deeply supportive of critical phenomenological analyses of social identities, following Christian, I wish to ask the question: for whom are we doing what we are doing when we do critical phenomenology of race or, for that matter, critical phenomenology? Christian's discussion prompts me to ask about the current race to explain the origin of the critical in phenomenology and prompts me to reflect on what María Lugones (2003) calls the "logic of purity" in connection with critical phenomenology (126–34).[2]

In the following, I thus discuss what I regard as the current race for critical phenomenology in light of María Lugones's (2003) understanding of the "logic of purity" and her call for impure theorizing. My aim is twofold: (a) to suggest how Lugones's analyses of the logic of purity may guide us in developing phenomenological studies of complex social identities such as race, thus warning us about categorial logics that highlight fragmentation, sharp dichotomies, and univocity; and (b) to provide a brief example on how Lugones's call for a logic of impurity that acknowledges multiplicity problematizes some specific moves

[2] My comments on Christian's (1988) critique of the new literary criticism are not suggesting that critical phenomenology has the same problems that Christian saw in literary criticism. Yet her essay inspires me to reflect on key issues that need to be considered regarding highly theoretical work inspired by white male Europeans that attempts to enhance knowledge about people of color's lives, knowledge, and struggles. Her essay thus closely accompanies me in this reflection on critical phenomenology of race and plays a heuristic role in my discussion.

by recent critical phenomenological analyses of race. In the first section I explain some of the characteristics of the logic of purity and Lugones's critique of it. I also discuss some of the problems in the search for the origin of the critical in phenomenology. In the second section, I engage specifically with critical phenomenology of race. I introduce an analysis of the problematic Black/White binary that dominates US discussions of race and move on to critically assess a methodological move in the work of Guenther, namely the reduction of what in her view are "quasi-transcendental" structures such as white supremacy and racism.

In line with my 2017 analysis of "decolonial woes" and "practices of un-knowing,"[3] I wish to note how phenomenology's own *project of reckoning* with the complex notions of race, racialization, racism, and their epistemic and material consequences stands to benefit from an attitude of *critical criticality*. My discussion in this work points to the importance of this meta-critical attitude and practice of checking for the different ways in which a logic of purity persists, even if in traces, and even in the most critical and self-critical phenomenological methodologies. It also calls for an openness to *critical impurity*, to an acknowledgement that a critical phenomenological project needs to be open to ambiguity, multiplicity, and impurity, and attuned to how these elements affect methodologies, descriptions, and conclusions, especially as they pertain to the study of social identities that are to be understood as complex and enmeshed or intersectional.[4] Ultimately, this work reveals how Latina theoretical contributions such as Lugones's stand to help the development of critical phenomenologies in general and critical phenomenologies of race in particular.

I. ON THE LOGIC OF PURITY AND THE *CRITICAL* IN PHENOMENOLOGY

Given the phenomenological desire for apodictic truth, particularly in the Husserlian transcendental approach, phenomenology could be dismissed rather easily as incapable of forging projects attentive to specific social identities, especially race. However, as work by Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Frantz Fanon, and Lewis Gordon have shown, there are various ways in which phenomenology can be enlisted in projects related to race. Yet recent discussions, in particular the work of Salamon (2018a; 2018b) and Guenther (2013; 2020; 2021) take such projects to be proposing a "critical" phenomenology rather than adhering to "classical" phenomenology (namely the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl and existential phenomenologies that borrow from his approach). Salamon

[3] I define "practices of un-knowing" as practices that distort or negate the very projects that have been deployed to fight ignorance regarding marginalized identities. I point to ways in which decolonial projects, including those carried out by scholars of color, may inadvertently have colonial impulses or practices, hence my claim about "decolonial woes" or the affliction connected to these practices and their consequences (Ortega 2017, 510). The analysis I provide here is thus part of my broader interest in epistemic ignorance and epistemic justice.

[4] Lugones opts for "interwoven," "intermeshed," or "enmeshed" instead of "intersected." While the notion of intersectionality is key to Lugones's (2003) work in *Pilgrimages*, she critcizes it in her later decolonial work.

(2018b), whose essay "What's Critical About Critical Phenomenology" has sparked much discussion, appeals to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology for the purposes of a critical approach. She takes the critical phenomenological project to be one that reflects on the conditions of its own emergence and describes "what it sees in order to see it anew" (12), illuminates what is true, and attends to "the power that is always conditioning that truth" (15). Salamon agrees with the editors of the first issue of *Puncta*, who describe critical phenomenology as multiple and continuously questioning its own practices, methods, and assumptions (Ferrari et al. 2018).

While Guenther (2020) agrees with Salamon regarding the self-criticality of critical phenomenology, she highlights Husserlian phenomenology but does not see it as sufficiently critical.[5] In her view, critical phenomenology is different from classical phenomenology in that it fails "to give an equally rigorous account of how contingent historical and social structures also shape our experience," hence her call for an analysis of what she takes to be "quasi-transcendental structures" such as heteropatriarchy, anti-Black racism, and colonialism (12).[6] This distinction between "classical" and "critical phenomenology" has sparked a number of responses. Notably, it has mobilized Husserlians to defend the critical and self-critical elements within Husserl's phenomenology, claiming that

> From its Husserlian inception, through its manifold developments and modifications, phenomenological inquiry has, by its very design, always produced and developed intentional-historical methods of reflection well-equipped to tackle the genetic as well as generative dimensions of experience. (Heinämaa, Carr, and Aldea 2022, 5)[7]

At this point, the reader may be aware of a critical issue (if I may use different senses of "critical"), that commentators are working with different senses of "critique," "the critical," and "criticality." Stella Gaon (2021) makes this point and goes back to Immanuel Kant's critical project in order to show the aporias of a critical project, and the way that Derridean deconstruction points to the impossibility of critique establishing normative grounds to interfere in political struggles. Gaon (2021) thus calls for a phenomenology that

[5] In her latest thinking regarding critical phenomenology, Guenther (2022) takes the self-reflexivity of critical phenomenology to be so open as to allow for a recognition that phenomenology might not survive. She asks, "Is this not also the challenge facing critical phenomenology: to review our categories, rearrange our project, and interrogate our basic premises, without any guarantee that phenomenology as we know it can or should survive?" (41).

[6] In a more recent work Guenther (2021) admits that "classical phenomenology" is "an imperfect term." However, she still notes that there is "a significant difference between a practice of phenomenology that explicitly engages in social critique—let's call this critical phenomenology—and a practice of phenomenology that does not" (5). She further comments that she does not take classical phenomenology to be uncritical and suggests that the difference between the two rests on the types of critiques they enact.

[7] In the collection edited by Sara Heinämaa, David Carr, and Andreea Smaranda Aldea (2022), *Phenomenology as Critique: Why Method Matters*, commentators vigorously defend Husserl's approach and point to criticality as a key aspect of Husserlean phenomenology, thus strongly disputing the recent relegation of his work to "classical" (and thus uncritical) phenomenology. It is my hope that my analysis and suggestions in this work can inform analyses of the approaches found in this volume.

is critical "[n]ot by revealing what is true, but on the contrary, by challenging the givenness of experience relentlessly, without telos, without closure, and without respite" (2021, 43), what she calls a "quasi-critical" phenomenology (23).[8] Yet other commentators such as Johanna Oksala (2016) call for a "postphenomenology" that employs a method of partial bracketing in order to study questions of gender.[9] The current moment, then, is indeed critical as there is a race for critical phenomenology, a race prompting commentators to find the origin of the critical in phenomenology (and thus to announce to whom critical phenomenology belongs), and to determine whether so-called classical phenomenologies are to be merely revisited, substantially reframed and reconfigured, or left behind in projects of social justice connected to marginalized social identities. Gaon's (2021) appeal to a "quasi-critical" phenomenology as in need of constantly challenging the givenness of experience directs me to think about Lugones's critique of the logic of purity and the need for a philosophy that is attentive to impurity and multiplicity. That is, I am led to reflect on how such impurity and multiplicity may inform critical phenomenological theories committed not only to a description that does justice to the experience of marginalized identities, but also to a concomitant call for change. In the following, I thus provide some details about Lugones's understanding and critique of the logic of purity, and then comment on what I call the question of origins in critical phenomenology.

Inspired by Latina writers and theorists working on and embodying the notions of mestizaje and multiplicity, Lugones (2003) contests the "logic of purity" and calls for an impure logic and theorizing that she calls "curdling." With the general aim of distinguishing between the notions of multiplicity and fragmentation in the context of people of color's lives, Lugones calls for an understanding of this pernicious "logic of purity." In her view, this logic is fundamentally tied to the assumption that there is unity underlying multiplicity—an assumption that posits an understanding of the heterogeneous as capable of "split-separation," that is, as parts that are internally separable and divisible and thus in need of unification (126). The social world, then, is understood as both unified and fragmented. Key to this vision is a particular kind of subjectivity, modern subjectivity, that aims at the creation of an ahistorical vantage point whose main function is unity. This unity, however, is not a mere metaphysical desideratum but rather, a function of what, in Nietzschean fashion, Lugones (2003) calls the need to control and order people's lives and psyches (127).

According to Lugones, by way of what can be understood as a magical feat of abstraction (and self-deception), the preferred subject of the logic of purity—the rational unified subject

[8] Gaon's appeal to the openness of phenomenology is shared by both Salamon and Guenther. Yet these theorists have different understandings as to what constitutes "better" phenomenological descriptions. My own position is that phenomenology is indeed in need of better descriptions, understood as fuller, more anchored and inclusive descriptions, especially of marginalized experience. While such a quest is not its only aim, it is a key aim. Dan Zahavi (2018) notes that "phenomenology cannot be reduced to a concern with that topic" (3). In my view, it cannot be reduced to methodological concerns either.

[9] The notion of postphenomenology appears in the early 1990s in the work of Don Ihde (1993) whose work highlights human relations with the environment as mediated through technology. In order to explains such relations, Ihde proposes a postphenomenology that is nonfoundational, nontranscendental, and accepting of contingency, fallibility, and perspectivalism (7–8) that he contrasts with "classical" phenomenology. In an earlier work, Idhe (1986) discusses a "non-foundational Phenomenology."

and the "lover of purity"—creates himself and a simple, one-dimensional vantage point that only he can see. His rationality allows him to put to the side his own multiplicity, the markings of his own gender and race, and see and understand the world as if from "above" or from "a view from nowhere." As Lugones states:

> The modern subject must be dressed, costumed, masked so as to appear able to exercise this reduction of heterogeneity to homogeneity, of multiplicity to unity . . . As the lover of purity, the impartial reasoner is outside history, outside culture. (130)

Ultimately, Lugones claims that the logic of purity leads the lover of purity to maintain a "paradoxical incoherence," since he must ignore his own multiplicity while, at the same time, be dependent on it. As such, Lugones claims that he is at the mercy of his own control and "shuns impurity, ambiguity, and multiplicity as they threaten his own fiction" (132).

Given the damaging consequences of a logic of purity with its predilection for a unified subject who is allegedly capable of understanding the world from "above"—the covering up of what Frantz Fanon (1967) calls the historico-racial schema being just one such consequence—Lugones introduces a logic of impurity, of "curdling," whose main characteristic is the unfolding of the complexity and multiplicity of the subject and social worlds. In so doing, Lugones opens the possibility for a full engagement with what the lover of purity understands as tainted: the subject's own embodiment, social locations, and identities. Via an everyday example, the making of mayonnaise, Lugones explains the instability of the mixture and the way it may curdle if too much oil is introduced, the result being yolky oil and oily yolk. Her main point is is that there is not split separation but an "impure" end-result that she reads as a positive element because this condition of impurity resists the attempt to breaking down parts into pure elements that can then be easily categorized (read controlled). The subject of this logic of impurity is what Lugones calls a curdled, multiple, and active subject or a "multiplicitous self" that has an epistemic advantage or epistemic privilege insofar as it has multiple viewpoints (Ortega 2016).[10] It is also a subject whose embodied lived existence and "tainted" gendered and racial markers are of the utmost importance, as they are key not only epistemically but also existentially.

In sum, the logic of purity is pernicious, according to Lugones (2003), because (a) it is committed to an underlying unity that covers up the multiplicity and heterogeneity of human experience; (b) it theorizes this unity in order to control a heterogeneity that is understood as fragmented; (c) it takes this unity as the ground for the creation of an ahistorical vantage point or a "view from nowhere," thus ignoring human situationality; (d) it postulates a modern subject (the lover of purity) understood as primarily rational in need to abstract himself from the world and to remove himself from his very embodiment; (e) it understands the modern subject as transparent to itself; and (f) it posits a modern

[10] There are various understandings of selfhood and subjectivity in Lugones's texts. More specifically, while in some discussions she seems to be referring to multiplicitous subjects, in others she explicitly discusses the self as multiple or being different selves in different worlds. See chapter three of Ortega (2016). Ultimately, Lugones (2003) opts for the notion of active subjectivity understood as "I —> we" that has an attenuated sense of agency (6).

subject that, in his love for purity, shuns impurity, ambiguity, and multiplicity. In my view, all these features of the logic of purity do not neatly fit all characterizations of the subject of modernity. They also do not serve as full critical points against phenomenology either, as various phenomenologists, notably Heidegger (2010) and Merleau-Ponty (2012), aim precisely to offer a critique of modern subjectivity, especially in its Cartesian version. Nevertheless, Lugones's (2003) concern about this logic of purity pertains to the fact that (a)–(f) enact a categorial logics—an understanding of selves and groups as fragmented, or as she would say, "split separated," and thus in need of control. Such split-separation is also understood as in need of unification, thus undermining impurity, ambiguity, and multiplicity. Ultimately, Lugones's key concern is the possibility of complex coalitions across differences that can enact resistant responses against dominant structures. Her critique of the logic of purity, however, provides important insights for the development of critical phenomenologies calling for justice for marginalized social identities.

How then is a logic of purity relevant to the understanding of the notion of criticality itself, and more specifically to critical phenomenology? In other words, how does a Lugonesian critique of the logic of purity help a critical phenomenological approach to various social identities? I proceed with a discussion of what I am calling the question of origins, and subsequently point to an attitude and practice of *critical criticality* that stands to alert the critical phenomenologist to the ways in which the logic of purity trickles in even the most critical and self-critical projects.

The Question Of Origins

First, I would like to consider the issue regarding the origin of "the critical" in phenomenology, a question that has become relevant as commentators try to forge the field of "critical phenomenology." Quoting Donn Welton, Salamon (2018) notes that "a more dialectical and critical phenomenology" as opposed to "classical phenomenology" was practiced at the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy in the 1980s, and points to *Critical and Dialectical Phenomenology* edited by Welton and Hugh Silverman (1987) as an early text specifically using the label "critical phenomenology" (Salamon 2018, 8–9). For their part, other scholars are not looking at specific texts labeled "critical phenomenology" but at the critical aspect of phenomenology itself, even in transcendental phenomenology (Guenther 2016; 2020, 202; Heinämaa, Carr, and Aldea 2022), while others are looking at Wilhelm Dilthey for insights about historicity (Myers 2021), and, as we have noted, other commentators are examining Kant's critical project (Gaon 2021). There is also discussion regarding sources of the critical in phenomenology outside of philosophy. As Jarrett Zigon and Jason Throop (2021) state: "To the best of our knowledge, however, it was anthropologists who first articulated the necessity of, and then actually did, a critical phenomenology." They point to the work of Byron Good (1994) as "developing an anthropologically-based critical phenomenology in the late-1980s and early 1990s" (Zigon and Throop 2021, 10).

Finding the origin of the critical in phenomenology becomes as difficult as the question of the meaning of "the 'critical'" itself. After all, depending on how we understand this

term, we might find its roots back in Kant (1929; 1993), Husserl, critical theory, or in Beauvoir or Fanon, who provide early phenomenological analyses of social identities. My point is not that there should not be an interest in the question of origins of the critical in phenomenology, or of any particular philosophical project—there is room for both intellectual history and genealogical analysis—but my concern is with the impetus to purity that lies behind an attempt to catalogue the precise beginning of the critical in phenomenology and what such an impetus might mean or lead to methodologically. In other words, what does it mean to lay claim to an intellectual enterprise, as if we were able to own split-separated ideas and methods, and what practices could follow from such a move?

As we have seen, according to Lugones (2003), a logic of purity categorizes the social—and I would add philosophical fields and academic disciplines—into discrete compartments that can be split-separated. The implication here is that different aspects of phenomenology, or for that matter, other philosophical fields and disciplines, can in principle be understood as self-contained. As such, we could engage in an investigation of the precise moment in the field, the point of origin, the precious *arche* as it were, that launches the critical project. Yet doing so would fail to understand that criticality itself, in reflecting on its own operations, would profit from reflecting on the linkages and interconnections not only within the particular domain being studied but also with what is deemed as "outside" of it. Chela Sandoval (1991), whose Latina feminism is approached in a critical and decolonial manner, points to the detrimental results of what she calls the "racialization of theoretical domains," and the "apartheid of academic knowledge," or the neat compartmentalization of academic disciplines (68–69). She notes the ways that white and European progressive thinkers such as Roland Barthes missed the contributions of scholars of color whose aim was also to critique capitalist norms and to develop a consciousness that could deal with the violence derived from those norms (68–78). This is a particularly important point by Sandoval as it suggests that the fragmentation of disciplines (and subdisciplines) leads not only to a lack of intellectual cooperation but also a failure on the part of dominant white scholars—even those engaged in critique and trying to shift oppressive structures—to see and understand how their critical efforts may be connected to and enhanced by critical efforts of scholars of color in other domains or disciplines.

Were critical phenomenology to engage in a race to find its origin while not recognizing how a logic of purity may still be informing its work, it would miss the theoretical, methodological, and literary opportunities that arise from a more expansive understanding of the ways in which critique is connected to other philosophical aims and movements, as well as the ways that other domains deemed outside the field can come to its aid—for example, the way that Latina feminisms can inform not only a critical phenomenology in general but one related specifically to race. Latina feminist theory has not always been acknowledged in early discussions of the critical turn (or return) in phenomenology. Moreover, Latina feminist theory *explicitly* engaging phenomenology, such as Jacqueline Martinez's (2000) does not appear in discussions on critical phenomenology in general and phenomenology of race in particular. Latina feminist theory that does not explicitly engage with phenomenology is even less likely to be considered by phenomenologists,

especially those who have been described as "classical" in their orientation. The reasons for this exclusion are overdetermined; yet I can comment on some of the reasons why these theories are left out of discussions, especially those engaging phenomenology and race. They have to do to with the compartmentalization (read fragmentation) of theoretical domains and disciplines, and with the lack of insight that Latina feminists are theorizing in different ways than it is traditionally understood—Christian (1988) makes precisely this point regarding Black women writers (68).[11] Moreover, a reason why Latina feminist theory is not always included in phenomenological analyses of race has to do with the fact that Latinx identity is highly heterogeneous, difficult to classify, and is understood as ethnicity rather than race, while in other cases, it is understood as an ethno-race (Alcoff 2000). As I will discuss below, questions of race are generally subsumed under a Black/White binary that dominates US discourses on issues of race and racism, thus invisibilizing identities and work on identities that do not fit neatly in this binary.

The race to find the origin of the critical in phenomenology alerts us to assumptions connected to the logic of purity, not just in what may be an obvious problematic claim of ownership of the critical, but also in the assumption of distinct or split-separated intellectual domains that further preclude cooperation within and across disciplines, and in the recognition of the work of writers and thinkers that do not follow normative conventions of theorizing. It is thus necessary to cultivate an attitude of *critical criticality*, a constant awareness of the different ways in which critical projects themselves, even those that are understood to be robustly self-critical, may contain traces of the logic of purity so as be ready to modify and revise our theories. Moreover, it is important to think *of origins and convergences*, of an openness to multiple origins and theorizations of the critical, even within critical phenomenology, and to the multiple lines of connection that critical phenomenological projects have with other domains of knowledge and experience.[12] This

[11] Christian (1988) states,

> For people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, because dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity? (68)

Similarly to the writers that Christian discusses, Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) writes what she calls *autohistorias-teorías* (autostories-theories), personal narratives that include theoretical points (6).

[12] Gaon's (2021) critical analysis of "criticality" is an interesting example that looks at the notion from a political philosophical perspective attuned to critical theory as well as the Kantian critical project, thus showing important interconnections and understandings of the critical. It is necessary to be aware that these interconnections may not follow a linear developement. Guenther (2021) is also interested in both theoretical as well as political connections between critical phenomenology and other disciplines. Importantly, she recognizes that there are multiple senses of critique in both what she calls classical phenomenology and her work. Most recently, she is also willing to "abolish" phenomenology, if necessary, in order to "abolish the world as we know it" (2022). My view is that even within this vision of critical phenomenology that is attuned to openness and multiplicity an attitude of *critical criticality* is needed. This will become clearer in the next section .

practice is part of what in the next section I introduce as a mode of *critical impurity*. Before discussing this mode, I turn to a more specific analysis of critical phenomenology of race that begins with comments on the Black/White binary, followed by some comments on what for Husserl became a necessary methodological practice for transcendental phenomenology, the transcendental reductions (the *epoché* and the transcendental/eidetic reduction). I comment primarily on the *epoché* in light of some questions related to race and privilege.

II. PHENOMENOLOGY, RACE, AND THE CRITICAL

Moving to an analysis more specific to critical phenomenology of race and racialization, I wish to give a warning about a possible intrusion of the logic of purity. Following Lugones's (2003) explanation of this logic, it can be seen that the "lover of purity," as Lugones calls the subject ruled by the logic of purity, is keen to parcel out the world and its beings into ready-made compartments of opposites and clear dichotomies, thus not allowing multiplicity, enmeshedness, and in-betweeness to come to the fore. A world reigned by dichotomies is preferable to the lover of purity, because it is more epistemically accessible (things and beings can be better understood in terms of the dichotomy), and it is a world where control is easily wielded (there are clear definitions of who belongs in the "good" or "bad" side). Here it is helpful to recall Gloria Anzaldúa's important discussion of the consciousness of the new *mestiza* that inspired Lugones's overall vision of multiplicity and the social. Anzaldúa (1987) insists that the work of *mestiza* consciousness is to transcend dualities and understand the importance of ambiguity and contradiction. As she puts it, "[a] massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle" (80).[13] As Ronald Sundstrom (2008) writes in his important commentary on what he calls the "browning" of the US, the Black-White binary is thought as a "sort of master key to all things racial" and that "[i]n naïve hands, the binary is used to make the absurd claim that it *describes* the totality of racial diversity, or at least the diversity that matters" (Sundstrom 2008, 69).[14] If it is to provide careful analysis of race and racialization, critical phenomenology needs to problematize an understanding of race dominated by a Black-White binary. This is yet another characteristic of the mode of *critical impurity*, the avoidance of simple dichotomies that cover up the complexity of experience

[13] When describing her account of a new *mestiza* consciousness, Anzaldúa (1987) mentions how its energy "comes from a continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm" (80).

[14] Sundstrom (2008) provides a nuanced, complex analysis of how the Black-White binary can be understood as stemming from important circumstances and appeals to justice in the context of the US, but also as deeply detrimental in analyses of race. He provides six interpretations of the workings of this binary, showing how there needs to be an acknowledgement of how the binary may serve as a "conceptual baseline of race in the United States," so that we can also understand why discourses on race in this country center Blackness (84). He notes, "[t]he future of race in the United States, or elsewhere, will not be determined solely through the American instinct to return to black-white politics—as if the question of the conservation or elimination of race and racial justice is in the hands of white and blacks who need to hash out their issues for the sake of all of us" (65).

or phenomena. In this context, the contributions of Latina feminist phenomenologies are crucial as they problematize not only binary thinking itself, but provide analyses in which race is not understood through a reductive Black-White binary. They bring in the experience of brownness, indigeneity, mixed race, and of those who quickly fall out of conversations of race due to the way that the Black-White binary is operationalized.[15]

In addition to not adhering to dichotomies that might occlude the complexity of racialization, another aspect of critical impurity is an awareness that traces of the logic of purity need to be understood as part of critical projects despite the latter's attempts at radicalizing philosophy or countering established philosophical notions or methods. This is not surprising, especially when discussing a tradition of canonical figures such as Plato, whose philosophical vision prioritized rationality over embodiment. It is also certainly the case in phenomenology in which we find Cartesian impulses in thinkers such as Husserl and Sartre.[16] It is important to be aware that despite phenomenology's fundamental critique of the Cartesian unified subject, especially in Heideggerian and Merleau-Pontian existential phenomenologies, traces of the logic of purity remain.[17] The key issue is the direction to which such traces propel the overall critical project. That is, traces of the logic of purity may be part of even the most critical projects; yet the crucial issue is to spot them and to recognize their scope, influence, and ramifications. Are they mere residues not obfuscating degrees of criticality in the project? Do they pose complications or obstacles for a critical phenomenology of race?

Here I thus want to point to an example that is particularly interesting and complex as it poses serious questions regarding the viability of critical phenomenologies that rely in one of two key Husserlian methodological moves from his "pure phenomenology": the phenomenological and eidetic reductions, the first of which is the *epoché* (a suspension/bracketing/putting out of action of the natural attitude), and the second of which is a transcendental reduction that calls for a reflection that yields essential structures of consciousness. While this methodological move in Husserl is notoriously complicated and has an extensive history and revisions in his writings, here I wish to make an isolated point

[15] Here I want to make sure that it is clear that I am not calling for a reification of *mestizaje*, substituting *mestizaje* for a Black-White binary, or trying to minimize or undermine projects seeking justice for Black lives. As I note in my discussion of Anzaldúa, her understanding of *mestizaje* leads to serious criticisms (Ortega 2016, 29). More recently, Latinx Studies is in a moment of self-reflection as scholars such as Claudia Milian (2013; 2020), Lorgia García-Peña (2016) and many others bring to the fore questions about the meaning of "Latinidad" and the voices of Afro-Latinxs in the context of the meaning of "Latinidad."

[16] It is interesting to note the crucial yet paradoxical philosophical moment of Cartesian philosophy. Despite Descartes's utterly radical project of engaging in methodological doubt that leads him to hyperbolic doubt regarding all of his beliefs, including those beliefs deemed indubitable such as those of mathematics, he theorizes the ultimate lover of purity, the Cartesian epistemic subject, whose own quest for certainty leads to dichotomies (subject-object; inner-outer) that set the stage for philosophy's future—solving the deep problems introduced by the Cartesian vision, the problem of the existence of the external world and the problem of the existence of others.

[17] Such traces and even more explicit aspects of the logic of purity can be found in Husserlian transcendental phenomenology, even despite claims to its commitment to criticality and positive characterizations of its ability to engage in analyses of the historically contingent.

about its applicability to philosophical engagements with race and racialization. The issue at hand is the question of whether critical phenomenology should appeal to the reduction. This is a question that is of particular concern to those committed to the Husserlian project in its fully transcendental methodology as well as to those who call for a revision of this project in order to offer a phenomenology that can fruitfully engage questions of race and racialization so as to enact change.

The "Who" Of The Reduction

The role of the transcendental reduction in Husserl's (1999) methodology is crucial to a transcendental project, as it is the first step toward bringing to light the transcendental structures that Husserl is intent on reflecting upon to prevent phenomenology from the mistakes and assumptions of the empirical sciences. In this transcendental approach, the *epoché* is necessary in order to suspend/bracket the natural attitude that takes the world for granted or the view that there is a world out there. A naïve realism about the world and all the assumptions supporting such realism are not to taint an investigation searching for the essences of consciousness, for that which makes possible experience in the first place. Unlike the Cartesian method of doubt, this method does not call for a radical doubt about the existence of the world, and thus is not to be faulted on this account. Instead, I wish to think through a key issue that arises when this particular transcendental method of reduction is still appealed to, albeit in a revised form, in more explicit critical phenomenological analyses of race and racializing with the aim of undermining oppressive structures, for example, in Guenther's critical phenomenology.

I wish to ask the question: who is supposed to be doing this reduction in the first place? Who is being asked to suspend or ignore all that pertains to everyday existence? Is this reduction possible when thought from the point of view of racialized, marginalized, multiplicitous selves? In other words, what does it mean to bracket or suspend the world and all the assumptions that inform one's everyday experience when that world is constantly, endlessly impinging not just in the ways one (read a marginalized, racialized self) understands the world but in one's very flesh? Here I am reminded of Anzaldúa's (1987) key insight about embodiment as lived in a state of liminality and in-betweenness. She writes: "*Escribo con la tinta de mi sangre*" (Anzaldúa; 1987, 71; italics in original).[18] That is, her intellectual and artistic productions, her *autohistorias* (fictionalized stories of her life) and her *autohistoria-teorías* (narratives that include theoretical reflections informed by her life) are fundamentally informed by the ways she (her "body-mind-soul") is impacted by the different normative structures of power regulating social identities, be it race, class, gender, or ability. What would it mean to suspend or bracket the wounds of colonization, racism, sexism that she carries in her body and that are an integral part of her self-understanding and of her creative movement to forge a new resistant consciousness? As Alia Al-Saji (2020) puts it when discussing the possibility of suspension of the natural attitude in the context of Fanon, another thinker of color who carries the wounds of colonization on his body, as if they were part of his very bones and sinews:

[18] "I write with the ink that is my blood" (my translation).

> Neither can colonization be bracketed to reveal a core of sense, as if racism were an afterthought; nor can it be put out of play to conceive a universalizable subject free of historical violence. Critical phenomenology cannot stay at the level of constitution of sense, for colonization already structures the phenomenological field of sense and draws the borders that differentiate sense from non-sense. (211)

Anzaldúa and Al-Saji, then, can be taken as alerting us to what might not just be traces of the logic of purity but to fuller instances of it in an investigation proposing the possibility of a suspension of features of embodied experience that are in fact deeply connected to the possibility of self-understanding and self-transformation (Anzaldúa) and to sense-making itself (Al-Saji). In this vein, it will be key to examine whether transcendental phenomenology (and existential phenomenology) can be modified to provide nuanced, complex analyses of race, racialization, and racializing perception.

With attention to *critical criticality*, I now turn to a project to which I am very sympathetic but about which I am also concerned given its continued appeal to a reduction: Guenther's (2020) proposed critical phenomenology, which she describes as "a way of doing philosophy and a way of approaching political activism" (15). Guenther's critical phenomenological approach is indeed attuned to what I have above described as *critical impurity*. Importantly, she expands her understanding of the critical so as to engage different senses of critique (Guenther 2021), thus moving away from rigid understandings of the critical. Her approach is also open to interdisciplinarity, and to the different ways in which critical phenomenology may be engaged in conjunction with, not only other theorists, but also political activists, and what she calls "creative reparative" action that may "(re)open horizons of indeterminacy, possibility, and becoming otherwise" (2021, 9). For example, she takes Audre Lorde's understanding of poetry as "a revelatory distillation of experience" to be a phenomenology in so far as it calls for critical scrutiny that matters to those engaged in it, thus opening the possibility for poetry as both a descriptive and transformative practice (Lorde, quoted in Guenther 2020, 14).

In addition, Guenther (2020) provides a significant revision to Husserl's transcendental reduction (15). She proposes a phenomenology capable of rigorously analyzing contingent historical structures such as heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity that she deems "quasi-transcendental" insofar as they normalize and naturalize experience.[19] Although not *a priori*, these structures are supposed to be constitutive to meaning-making and norm-making in life-worlds and are thus, according to Guenther, "what we must bracket to get into the phenomenological attitude" (12). Presumably, a rigorous quasi-transcendental critical phenomenological analysis of these structures moves us closer to understanding how they structure the world and experience, hence opening possibilities for change. By bracketing specific contingent, historical structures that uphold racism, we

[19] The status of a "quasi-transcendental" structure is difficult, as it is not clear that there is room for such an entity in the first place. I take it that what Guenther means is that these structures can be understood as *if* they were transcendental in organizing our experience.

will be in a position to provide "an equally rigorous account of how contingent historical and social structures also shape our experience, not just empirically or in a piecemeal fashion, but in what we might call a quasi-transcendental way" (2020, 12).

Let us go back to my question of the "who" of the reduction. Who can carry out a reduction, this time, of quasi-transcendental structures such as colonialism? As we have seen, to ask a marginalized, oppressed person of color to carry out such a suspension amounts to asking her to suspend her own body, which carries the wounds of coloniality as well her history. Is it more possible for a member of the dominant group (i.e., a white person or a member of a dominant group) to perform such a suspension? A possible answer is that a white person could be better able to carry out the reduction as an exercise in abstraction. After all, he might not carry the wounds of colonization (at least in the same way that a person of color does). There is also a second alternative: in the context where whites are dominant, a white person could not possibly bracket coloniality and its concomitant structure of white supremacy, given that he is so thoroughly immersed in it and defined by it that performing the suspension would amount to becoming a fiction of himself, a subject that is not marked by privileged race.[20] Here, I don't mean to suggest that whites should not unlearn their white supremacist ways or that they are determined to be racist due to reigning structures organizing present experience. Their actions in a world that privileges their existence depend on a complex web of operations linking power, practices of ignorance, deep forgetting, intentional avoidance, unconsciousness, belief in superiority, and many other practices that uphold white dominance. The point is to consider whether a reduction of quasi-transcendental structures is a tenable approach that opens fruitful possibilities for racial justice. While this is an issue in need of further analysis, the proposed bracketing of quasi-transcendental structures raises serious issues in connection to the logic of purity. If a white dominant subject is better able to perform the reduction of white supremacy, it could be precisely because he does not carry the wounds prompted by that structure and could then perform an abstract exercise. Conversely, if he cannot perform that reduction and is being asked to do so, he is being put in the position of abstracting his very embodiment that reaps the privilege of whiteness. Both operations would require methodological commitments tied to the logic of purity. They would also make the project dependent on a methodological move difficult to put in practice.

One could respond that a privileged subject is always involved in a process of bracketing—not in a phenomenological reduction, but as an everyday project of epistemic ignorance, a forgetting that he is also racialized, that the world has been set up for his ease, that he can deem himself neutral in the face of his own understanding of the race "problem" (although of course, there is no phenomenological reduction here). As noted above, the racialized subject in the midst of marginalization and worlds that are not welcoming does not get a theoretician's methodological privilege of suspending the very structures that have, through time, become embedded in her very flesh and that fragment her into scattered body parts

[20] See Ngo (2021) for an interesting account of the "banality " of white supremacy explained through the workings of "pre-thought" bodily habituation (8).

to be controlled, used, and abused.[21] It it would be precisely this forgetting and ignorance of white supremacy that needs to be put out play. Yet this would entail a suspension of the very ignorance that gives meaning to his existence and that makes his life one of privilege, control, and power.[22]

Importantly, Guenther (2021) is aware of the difficulties raised above. She explicitly states that white supremacy cannot be simply bracketed or put out of play in order to carry out a reflection on how it shapes experience, and she adds that "the challenge of bracketing white supremacy, even just methodologically in order to 'think what we are doing' (Arendt 1958, 5), will be different depending on how one is situated in relation to this structure" (7). In her view, this recognition is one of the major substantive differences between her project and that of "classical" phenomenology. Unfortunately, she does not elaborate on the ways in which the bracketing is different for selves that are differently situated in the structure of white supremacy. As I note above, the bracketing performed by either a white dominant self or a marginalized, person of color seems problematic.

Importantly, there are some clues regarding the reduction in light of questions of racialization in Guenther's (2020) explanation of critical phenomenology. There, she briefly comments on how Lorde's (1987) poetry may be helpful in connection to questions related to racialization. She quotes Lorde's comment that "[t]he quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives" (quoted in Guenther 2020,14). She then engages in an insightful analysis of what Lorde's words can teach the phenomenologist:

> In phenomenological terms, we could think of this "quality of light" as the affective tonality or mood that both motivates and contours one's meaningful experience as an embodied Being-in-the-world. This affective tonality cannot be understood apart from one's social location in a specific historical lifeworld, and yet social location is not reducible to a causal or determinative force. For example, an affective investment in whiteness as property, whether conscious or unconscious, will bring a different quality of light to one's experience and generate a different understanding of the world, than a Black, Indigenous, or Latinx investment in abolishing white supremacy. But the structure of whiteness as property is not an inexorable destiny condemning white people to racism and absolving us of the responsibility to become otherwise. Rather, a critical phenomenology of whiteness inspired by Lorde's account of poetry would have to scrutinize the quality of light that illuminates the world from a white perspective

[21] Think here of Anzaldúa's (2015) preoccupation with Coyolxauhqui, the Aztec goddess of the moon whose body has been torn to pieces, and Anzaldúa's desire to put Coyolxauhqui together (95–116). For her part, one of Lugones's (2003) principal aims is to reject fragmentation given its connection to the logic of purity.

[22] This is not to say that all whites have power in all respects, but even when economic power is not present, there may be racial privilege.

> and to name the feelings that motivate this perspective, with the hope of bringing about a change. (Guenther 2020, 14–15)

Guenther is reminding us that while whites have a different affective investment in whiteness than BIPOC people do, they are nevertheless not condemned to being trapped in a pernicious affective investment to whiteness. I read her as adding an affective dimension to critical phenomenology that must be considered if an investment in whiteness is to be modified or dislodged. Such an addition strikes me as a crucial for her project, as it should be very clear to us by now that the racism associated with white supremacy cannot be treated as solely a theoretical, discursive, or legal matter. This is the reason why Guenther is also a proponent of supplementing critical phenomenology with praxical, activist political projects. I also see an opening here toward the aesthetic, in the possibility of alternative modes of aesthetic production being capable of changing the affective tonality that Guenther discusses. The question that arises, then, is regarding the relation between this appeal to affective tonality and the reduction of quasi-transcendental structures. If the quality of light is not to be read as a metaphor for what a quasi-transcendental reflection reveals, how is it to be read, or, rather, felt? How does it connect to the findings of the reduction?

In her most recent discussion of critical phenomenology turning into abolitionist phenomenology with the aid of the work of Ferreira da Silva (2014), Guenther (2022) re-imagines and re-thinks the *epoché*, suggesting a movement from a Husserlian project to Fanon's (1967) account of radical disruption of his body schema and a rethinking of the *epoché* as a "tracking and hacking" of the material-historical and quasi-transcendental structures that structure the world (Guenther 2022, 39). She also comes back to the theme of the aesthetic, in this case the "poethic," and moves toward a "feel for poethical (im) possibilities beyond critique" (32). Guenther goes as far as saying that phenomenology itself may be abolished or perhaps phenomenology will become abolitionist phenomenology. A sustained analysis of Guenther's latest additions and revisions, especially concerning the relationship between poetry, poethics and critical phenomenology, is beyond the scope of this discussion. Yet I welcome this move toward the aesthetic. With Anzaldúa, I recognize the potential for what I call aesthesic production to open possibilities for transformation and for perceiving the world otherwise.[23] But how does critical phenomenology transform into an "abolitionist praxis of Black feminist poethics"? The question of the who returns here. Who is to perform this praxis? What affective tonality does it depend on? And

[23] Alia Al-Saji has recently theorized about the need for strategies that foster affective responses to negative racialized perception (2014) as well as the importance of aesthetic works to redirect affective and embodied harms of colonization (2019). In my work, I have also discussed the importance of the aesthetic in dealing with questions of racialization (2019a; 2019b; 2013; 2009). In my current research, I am particularly interested in the nexus between critical phenomenology and artistic practices understood in terms of the ways in which they reshape, redirect, or transform perception and thus our affective modalities. I thus interpret aesthetics as *aesthesis* in terms of its potential to redirect normative modalities of sensation and affect. See Mignolo and Vazquez (2019) for a discussion of a turn from "AestheTics" to "AestheSics" as a decolonial challenge to modern conceptions of the aesthetic.

bringing back the spirit of Christian's discussion on the race for theory, I ask again: for whom are we doing what we are doing when we do critical phenomenology of race?

CONCLUSION

Lugones's (2003) analysis of the logic purity warns us about the impulses, characteristics, and traces of this logic—traces that can be found in the quest to answer the question of origin of critical phenomenology, as well as in more specific critical phenomenological methodologies such as the reduction of quasi-transcendental structures. Traces of this logic appear in split-separation or compartmentalization of disciplines, adherence to dichotomies to cover up the complexity and multiplicity of experience, and a resurgent methodological abstraction from the very conditions that wound racialized beings and uphold dominant beings' existence. In the face of this intransigency of the logic of purity, even within critical phenomenological projects, I call for the nurturing of an attitude and practice of *critical criticality* that takes seriously the possibility that even already critical and self-critical projects may contain traces of purity that need to be discovered and assessed in light of methodological commitments, explanatory aims, and praxical, political aims. This *critical criticality* may be understood as one of the various aspects of a mode of *critical impurity* that also calls for an openness to multiple origins; inter and intra-disciplinary cooperation; alertness to convergences of ideas and methods; avoidance of simple dichotomies that cover up the complexity of experience; understanding the constructive aspects of ambiguity, multiplicity and contradiction; and self-critical analyses that look for traces of the logic of impurity and how they problematize methods and aims. Informed by scholars of color, in this case Latina feminist theorists, whose understanding of multiplicity and impurity is both existentially and theoretically crucial for analyses of race, the mode of critical impurity stands to enrich a phenomenology that is critical, not only in the sense that it critically engages social identities but in the sense that it is much needed at the present time in which racism and white supremacy are even more explicit.

A critical impure phenomenological approach might suggest a movement to postphenomenology. It all depends on what is meant by the "post" in postphenomenology, as there are still various resources that may be found within phenomenology (classical or critical) that can be thought and praxically engaged with theoretically, politically, and imaginatively rich resources in other disciplines and practices, as Guenther's critical phenomenology endorses. It also depends on our ability to think together with the contributions of scholars of color who can teach us much about race and racialization, and how to handle the impure, the contingent, the multiplicitous—what the lover of purity fears. I look to Lugones, other Latina feminist theorists, and Latina feminist phenomenologists in their understanding that our theories arise from the flesh, from the wounds of liminality and in-betweenness (Anzaldúa 1987), from the tensions of the fractured locus (Lugones 2010)—in their recognition of the seductiveness of the logic of purity and its deep traps, in their concerted effort to warn us not to fall in love with the lover of purity, and in their call for us to recognize how the "art of curdling" encompasses practices that people of color

engage in order not only to survive but also to transform themselves and to resist racial and other injustices. As Lugones (2003) reminds us, "It is the impulse to reject dichotomies and live and embody that rejection that gives us some hope of standing together as people who recognize each other in our complexity" (143). Let us then practice critical phenomenology impurely.

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