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Identity, Breakdown, and the Production of Knowledge: Intersectionality, Phenomenology, and the Project of Post-Marxist Standpoint Theory

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Identity, Breakdown, and the Production of Knowledge:
Intersectionality, Phenomenology, and the Project of Post-Marxist Standpoint Theory

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

For my mother and father

For my nephews, for my brother and my sister

For everyone who worked to keep my mind inside my head

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This document is the written record of an extended conversation Joanne Waugh and I had during the teen years of the 21st century. Professor Waugh has been an available strategist through all parts of the dissertation process, and has led me through innumerable directed studies. She has advocated for my funding, for my ideas, and for my health and well-being. Professor Waugh has contributed to my survival not just as an academic, but also as a human being walking out of this crucible and into the world.

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ABSTRACT

After breaking with the Marxist tradition, feminist standpoint theory operated without a backing framework and explanation for the privileged perspective of the oppressed. This project investigates phenomenology and breakdown as an alternative framework and explanatory mechanism for standpoint theory. I attempt to show how certain phenomenological programs are able to "back up" the claims of standpoint theory, and I argue that such a phenomenological standpoint theory can be coherent with intersectionality.

Chapter 1 focuses on intersectionality and standpoint theory, and surveys the controversy over their demarcation. This discussion allows me to develop several desiderata for theory of identity and knowledge, which guide my phenomenology in the subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on early existential phenomenologists, detailing the different formulations of understanding and breakdown in Gadamer, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. I show how they address several different types of breakdown that reveal a variety of phenomena. This is helpful because standpoint theorists discuss standpoint privilege in several ways, many of which resemble these different forms of existential breakdown. Chapter 3 articulates and problematizes Gadamer, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty's shared assumption that, in general, experience consists mostly of smooth, nonreflective absorption into tasks. I show how Martín Alcoff and Ortega help extend Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's ideas in order to talk about our intersecting identities. I then show how Ortega advances a phenomenology that explains the persistently disruptive experiences of people who are marginalized in multiple, complicated ways. I argue that phenomenologies that account for the breakdown experiences of the oppressed, such as Ortega's, can provide an alternative framework and explanatory mechanism for post-Marxist standpoint theory.

INTRODUCTION

In this project, I draw on concepts from phenomenology, especially the concept of breakdown, to formulate an alternative framework and explanatory mechanism for standpoint theory. I attempt to show how certain phenomenological programs are able to "back up" the claims of standpoint theory, and I argue that such a phenomenological standpoint theory can be coherent with intersectionality. In this introduction, I would like to explain what motivated this program from the start, that is, how my experience as philosopher with multiple identities, located in a philosophical context that was itself an intersection of philosophical traditions, began to articulate a conceptual framework and explanatory mechanism for understanding that experience.

When I first started formulating the ideas in this text, I was studying existentialism, phenomenology, feminist theory, and philosophy of science. Phenomenological breakdown was a common topic of conversation in my philosophical circle. We were all enamored of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and some of us—Anthony Fernandez and Christine Wieseler in particular—were beginning to work in applied phenomenologies that frequently described pathological conditions in terms of the breakdown of various phenomenological structures.¹ As a recently-discovered maniac and well-established depressive, I found fascinating the idea that my mood disorder was a result of a disruption in the typical functioning

¹ Fernandez developed and extended these ideas variously in "Phenomenology and Dimensional Approaches to Psychiatric Research and Classification", "The Phenomenology of Psychopathological Embodiment: A Critique of Thomas Fuchs' Concept of Corporealization", and "Contaminating the Transcendental: Toward a Phenomenological Naturalism". Wieseler did so in "Challenging Conceptions of the 'Normal' Subject in Phenomenology", "Objectivity as Neutrality, Nondisabled Ignorance, and Strong Objectivity", and "Missing Phenomenological Accounts: Disability Theory, Body Integrity Identity Disorder, and Being an Amputee".

of some phenomenological structure. For a time, I thought I might carve out my niche somewhere in phenomenological psychopathology.

While studying feminist philosophy of science, I became preoccupied by the relationship between our identities and what we are able to know. I was particularly struck by something Sandra Harding wrote that flew in the face of established accounts of the scientific method:

Though empiricism holds that scientific method is sufficient to account for historical increases in the objectivity of the picture of the world that science presents, one can argue that history shows otherwise. It is movements for social liberation that have most increased the objectivity of science, not the norms of science as they have in fact been practiced, or as philosophers of science have rationally reconstructed them. (Harding 1986, 25)

Examination of a number of bigoted episodes in the history of science showed that in an important sense, Harding was right. Drapetomania, hysteria, and sexual orientation disturbance were all psychological diagnoses created to perpetuate white, male, and heterosexual domination, respectively. None of these diagnoses was removed from diagnostics manuals through the "normal methods of science". Rather, removing these diagnoses from psychiatric manuals required liberation movements working towards depathologizing Blackness, womanhood, and homosexuality. I asked myself, if science really is a self-correcting, objective system that ineluctably moves towards increasing accuracy, then why the need for liberation movements from outside the paradigm?

Turning to criticisms people leveled at Harding, two particular groups of criticisms were particularly striking. First was a set of criticisms charging Harding with a mistake inherited from her predecessors in standpoint theory: namely, people argued that Harding was guilty of some form of essentialism in her formulation of the groups that composed a group standpoint. In other words, Harding's opponents said that Harding conceived of the group "women" in an essentialistic fashion, construing womanhood as something uniform across group members' experiences, unchanged by race, class, or even time.

The second set of criticisms focused mostly on the absence of philosophical frameworks and explanatory mechanisms undergirding Harding's claims. These criticisms usually followed a format like the following: 1) Previous standpoint theories relied on a Marxist philosophical framework and explanatory mechanism to explain the epistemic privilege of the oppressed. 2) That project was abandoned when it became clear the Marxist framework could not explain the epistemic privilege of groups besides the proletariat. Therefore, 3) if standpoint theory is to survive, it needs an alternative to the Marxist framework. But advancing a novel schematic epistemological framework was not Harding's project; her focus was elsewhere. Still, it was the case that Harding did not provide an alternative epistemological framework, and this was a project that needed to be done.

Although the second criticism of Harding did not seem justified, the issue of essentialism was a problem, especially given the criticism coming out the tradition of intersectionality. While Harding made a few mistakes in the direction of essentialism in her early work, the bulk of her *corpus* directly addressed and deliberately avoided that criticism. In an attempt to understand exactly what theorists of intersectionality meant when they charged standpoint theorists with essentialism, I undertook a study of some of the basic themes of intersectionality and how we might think about them using phenomenology.

These concurrent investigations into phenomenology, intersectionality, and standpoint theory, began to cross-fertilize, and bear fruit, so to speak. Constantly weighing the differences between different formulations of intersectionality and standpoint theory, phenomenology seemed to offer a solution, namely, that phenomenological breakdown could operate as an explanatory mechanism for standpoint privilege. This required a phenomenological framework that was coherent with the insights of intersectionality.

Beginning with feminist theory, I turned to the development of two related schools of thought: intersectionality and standpoint theory. Both intersectionality and standpoint theory are concerned about identity categories like race, ability, and class, as well as the connection

between those identity categories and knowledge. That is, both schools of thought postulate that, say, one's race and gender impact how one goes about learning and evaluating ideas. When they are used as contrast terms, intersectionality is construed as focusing more on specific, complexly articulated identities, while standpoint theory is construed as focusing more broadly on groups. For example, while standpoint theorists might focus on the knowledge available to Black women as a group, theorists of intersectionality will be more interested in differences within the group, like how being transgender and/or disabled could change the experience of Black womanhood.

The demarcation between standpoint theory and intersectionality is controversial. Some theorists argue that standpoint theory and intersectionality disagree over fundamental assumptions and therefore cannot be combined. Theorists of this disposition may argue that intersectionality overturns certain basic presuppositions of standpoint theory, frustrating the ability to talk about a "group standpoint" in any coherent way. Other theorists argue that there is some overlap between standpoint theory and intersectionality, where a standpoint theory can take into account the criticisms of intersectionality, or where an intersectional insight can develop originally out of a group standpoint. This led me to develop a number of themes in both standpoint theory and intersectionality, and articulate them as desiderata for theory of identity and knowledge, in an attempt to formulate a standpoint theory that can avoid the more damning anti-essentialist criticisms leveled by interactional theorists. This is the project of chapter one.

The subsequent chapters look through various formulations of phenomenological structures and breakdown. My strategy here is to show how various phenomenological programs can address the desiderata developed earlier. I begin with some early existential phenomenologists. Together, they discuss several different types of breakdown that reveal a variety of different phenomena. This is helpful because standpoint theorists discuss standpoint privilege in several ways, many of which resemble these different forms of existential breakdown. I then show that these early phenomenologists share a problematic assumption.

The assumption is that, in general, experience consists mostly of smooth, nonreflective absorption into tasks. This view considers explicit, reflective thought to be an exceptional state that follows some sort of breakdown in ordinary experience.

Next, I move into more recent phenomenology. This helps me point to problems in the earlier views. In particular, I address the earlier assumption that ordinary experience is typically unproblematic. I argue that this view may be easy to maintain for relatively privileged people, but that it does not characterize the experiences of marginalized people. That is, marginalized groups frequently report everyday experiences of problematic, disruptive circumstances requiring explicit reflection. This contradicts the earlier phenomenologists' formulation of everyday experience as typically unproblematic. In addition, this testifies to one of my main arguments. If we take the phenomenological view that we explicitly notice things when something is disruptive in our experience, and we acknowledge that systems of oppression exist, then we should predict that oppressed people will more frequently encounter breakdown situations and therefore will be more likely to come to understand the subtleties of systems of oppression. This, I submit, is the basic insight from which we may develop a phenomenological standpoint theory. I conclude by reviewing the various phenomenological structures and forms of breakdown I discussed in earlier chapters. I detail the various ways in which those structures and formulations of breakdown can address the desiderata for theory of identity and knowledge developed earlier. The end result, I hope, provides a point of departure for future work that will allow philosophical discussions in epistemology, the philosophy of science, social and political theory and the intersections between them, to include, and to be applicable to, those who have been marginalized because of their identities.

CHAPTER 1: INTERSECTIONALITY AND STANDPOINT THEORY

This chapter on intersectionality and standpoint theory attempts to articulate the concerns that also provide the framework for the subsequent chapters on phenomenology. First, I discuss the history of and prominent themes in intersectionality. Intersectionality developed largely in circles of women of color feminists (who were frequently queer and poor) for purposes of addressing the oppressions they experienced because of these identities. As a provisional definition, we call intersectionality the view that different politicized aspects of identity such as race, gender, class, and sexuality come together to mold an individual or group's experience differently depending on how that group or individual "fills out" those aspects of identity. For example, the way a wealthy young Black trans woman experiences womanhood may be very different than how a poor middle-aged white cisgender lesbian experiences womanhood. The wealthy young Black trans woman may have the money to move to Greenwich Village and live in a more accepting environment. However, if she cannot pass for cisgender, there are very few places she can go outside of LGBT locations without visibly being one of the most targeted demographics in the LGBT community (young Black trans women). The poor white middle-aged cisgender lesbian does not share this high of a risk, and she may be able to pass for straight in homophobic environments. However, she will not have the money to escape the patriarchal or homophobic environments in which she finds herself. How the former experiences womanhood and specifically what is dangerous about being a woman is strongly conditioned by her status as transgender, Black, and young. With the latter, the major compounding factor in her experience of gender-discrimination is economic class. In both cases, parts of their identities other than gender condition how they experience their gender and gender-oppression.

In this way, intersectionality tends to hone in on the particular, unique ways considerations such as race, gender, and class come together to shape experience. We call this formulation of identity “multiple identity” or “intersectional identity”.² We refer to these aspects of identity like gender and class as “identity categories” or “axes of identity”. The different identity categories shape each other. Black women experience racial discrimination in ways different from Black men, and experience gender discrimination in ways different from white women. In her 1989 and 1991 “coinage articles”, Kimberlé Crenshaw details how laws and legal verdicts in the United States cannot address discrimination particular to Black women.³ Addressing discrimination against Black men or against white women does not face the same legal hold-ups. I use this discussion to identify several desiderata for theories of knowledge and identity coherent with intersectionality.

Second, I discuss standpoint theory, particularly as advanced by Harding. Various standpoint theories hold that, when something oppressive like sexism or racism is operating in a society, members of the oppressed groups (e.g. women or people of color) may come to know more about how those oppressive systems function. In this sense, standpoint theory tends to focus on the knowledges specific groups develop. We call this perspectival advantage “standpoint privilege”, a “privileged epistemic situation” or a “privileged perspective/view”. For example, a standpoint theorist might observe that because of her experiences as a Black woman, Crenshaw was socially positioned in such a way that she could more effectively diagnose and address the inadequacy of the US legal system for dealing with discrimination against Black women. I use this discussion to identify several desiderata for theories of knowledge and identity coherent with standpoint theory.

² Some theorists, e.g. Hancock, draw a distinction between multiple identity and intersectional identity. The point of the distinction is usually that the language of “multiple” implies there is something monolithic or absolute about particular identity categories such as race and sex. I do not take a stance on that debate.

³ I discuss this “coinage” narrative below.

Third, as a means of providing the framework for subsequent chapters, I address first, the problem of intersectionality for standpoint theory, and second, standpoint theory's debt of an alternative framework and explanatory mechanism.⁴ The problem of intersectionality begins with the observation that, while intersectionality tends to analyze the way identity works at increasing levels of complexity and specificity, standpoint theory tends to operate at a higher level of generality. For example, while theorists of intersectionality might analyze the situations of disabled Black lesbians in Appalachia, early standpoint theorists were concerned mostly about class dynamics.⁵ Thus, observations from the perspective of intersectionality about the differences between individuals within specific identity categories potentially threaten the more general levels of analysis typical of standpoint theories. The concern usually resembles something of this form: if the difference between Black and white women is significant, then it does not make sense to talk generally about one single standpoint of women. The problem compounds when considering more identity categories. This is what we refer to as “the problem of intersectionality for standpoint theory”.

Following this, I discuss standpoint theory's debt of an alternative framework and explanatory mechanism. Originally, standpoint theory emerged out of Marxist frameworks. Marxist standpoint theorists focused on class dynamics. When they did include analyses of race or gender, Marxist standpoint theorists usually did so by reducing race- and gender-based oppression to special cases of class-based oppression. Later standpoint theorists wanted to talk about standpoint privilege without reducing gender or race to class, and without presupposing that class-based oppression is a more fundamental form of oppression than race-

⁴ I repeatedly refer to “standpoint theory's debt of an alternative framework and explanatory mechanism”. In saying this, my goal is to point to Hekman's criticism of standpoint theory and in particular Harding, as discussed below. I refer to this as a “debt” because Hekman thinks Harding *owes an account* that explains the genesis of standpoint privilege in the form of a robust epistemology.

⁵ Neither contemporary standpoint theorists nor contemporary intersectional theorists are arguing that their epistemologies point to an Archimedean point or God's-eye view. Most (if not all) such theorists reject the possibility and the desirability of knowledge divorced from a perspective, or a perspective disengaged from a perceiver.

and gender-based oppression. However, in rejecting these Marxist presuppositions, post-Marxist standpoint theorists lost the backing of theoretical frameworks and explanatory mechanisms that justified the Marxist claim to standpoint privilege. Some theorists, for example Susan Hekman, think post-Marxist standpoint theorists need to provide such an account to justify their claims about standpoint privilege.⁶ This is what we refer to as “standpoint theory’s debt of an alternative framework and explanatory mechanism”.

I.

"Intersectionality" defies simple explanation. It is more easily approached through a familiarization with its history and recent debates surrounding it. Therefore, I begin the section by discussing the history of intersectionality's development, along with the controversy over its discovery and coinage. Rather than a canonical, unambiguously true account (which almost certainly does not exist), this preliminary introduction reflects the particular history I absorbed. At points I identify the similar historical narratives of other authors to situate and reinforce my narrative. Then, I identify a number of recurrent themes in intersectionality and formulate them in terms of desiderata for theories of knowledge and identity: theories should avoid reduction or subordination of identity categories, should formulate identity categories as mutually constructing, and should explain identity salience in such a way that avoids the "oppression olympics".⁷ Meanwhile, I show how these desiderata are articulated in recent work on intersectionality and its history. These desiderata become relevant in the later chapters on phenomenology and identity.

Many narratives trace the coinage of the term “intersectionality” to one or both of Crenshaw’s early articles: 1989’s “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” and

⁶ Even though I am interested in providing such an account, I disagree with this criticism.

⁷ Donald B. Holsinger and W. James Jacob trace this phrase to Elizabeth Martínez (Holsinger and Jacob, 23).

1991's better-known "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color". This is the case with Michele Tracy Berger and Kathleen Guidroz's 2010 *The Intersectional Approach* (Berger and Guidroz, 4), the second edition of Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* (Collins 2000, 18), Collins and Sirma Bilge's 2016 *Intersectionality* (Collins and Bilge 2016, 64), Ange-Marie Hancock's 2016 *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History* (Hancock 2016, 9), Mariana Ortega's 2016 *In-between* (Ortega 2016, 7), and Elena Ruíz's 2018 entry on intersectionality in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Race* (Ruíz, 338). Hancock traces the coinage slightly further back, to an earlier version of Crenshaw's 1989 article presented to the University of Chicago Legal Forum in 1988.

That said, while the 1989 print version of Crenshaw's earlier presentation uses cognates of intersectionality systematically, it never uses definition language. Crenshaw does not make this obvious until 1991. While pinning down the meaning of "intersectionality", the 1991 article refers to the 1989 article: "In an earlier article, I used the concept of intersectionality to denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's experiences" (Crenshaw 1991, 1244). This is the first time intersectionality is clearly identified as a specific theory or approach, even if Crenshaw's use of the "language of intersectionality" precedes it.⁸

Many scholars also include Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* in their early 1990's coinage narratives.⁹ Collins, closely following Crenshaw, distinguishes between intersectionality on the one hand, and the matrix of domination on the other (Collins 2000, 18).¹⁰ According to Collins' 2000 schema, "intersectionality" describes specific "points of intersection"—the multiple identity

⁸ By "the language of intersectionality", we mean cognates of intersectionality specifically used to discuss multiple identity, even if that use precedes Crenshaw's "coinage moment". I follow Hancock and Ruíz by referring to theory deploying the language of intersectionality prior to Crenshaw's c. 1990 articles as "proto-intersectionality" and "intersectionality-like thought", though I do not engage in the related debate,

⁹ This includes Hancock, though she is self-consciously critical of the narrative.

¹⁰ This is more the case in the revised tenth anniversary edition. In the original 1990 edition, Collins does not mention Crenshaw.

of a particular individual or group: “Intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation” (Collins 2000, 18). The “matrix of domination” describes the various workings and inter-workings of systems of oppression in a given context: “the matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are actually organized” (Collins 2000, 28).

Collins’ glossary entries are a bit more developed, and in some ways different than what we find in the main text. The entry for intersectionality reads “analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape Black women’s experiences and, in turn, are shaped by Black women” (Collins 2000, 299). While the in-text definition is largely a simple statement of multiple identity, this glossary entry frames intersectionality as a type of analysis. In addition, the glossary entry adds that identity categories are “mutually constructing”, referring to how one identity category can be experienced differently depending on how other relevant identity categories come together. We might also refer to this view by saying that identity categories are “co-constructing” or “co-constituting”. The glossary entry for “matrix of domination” reads “the overall organization of hierarchical power relations for any society. Any specific matrix of domination has (1) a particular arrangement of intersecting systems of oppression, e.g., race, social class, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, ethnicity and age; and (2) a particular organization of its domains” (Collins 2000, 299). This definition is much more elaborate than the in-text definition, and is distinguished by its nuanced articulation of how the matrix of domination operates.¹¹

¹¹ A decade after the 2000 edition of *Black Feminist Thought*, Berger and Guidroz blend Crenshaw and Collins’ language: “These intersections are referred to as the race-class-gender matrix, the intersectional paradigm, interlocking systems of oppression, multiple axes of inequality, the intersection, and intersectionality” (Berger and Guidroz, 1).

However, as contemporary scholars acknowledge, these ideas did not develop overnight.¹² The cluster of ideas we now call “intersectionality” is anticipated in preexisting traditions variously called “Black Feminist Thought” (Cf. Collins 2000, Ruíz), “African-American Feminist Thought” (Cf. Guy-Sheftall), “Latina feminism” (Ortega 2016, 5), and “US Third World Feminism” (Sandoval, 41), not to mention traditions throughout Asia, the Middle East, and elsewhere. Much of the language of intersectionality is developed by 1983, in Bonnie Thornton Dill’s “Race, Class, and Gender: Prospects for an All-Inclusive Sisterhood”. Dill uses a number of cognates of “intersect” in this sense: intersect (131, 138), intersection (137), interaction(s) (137, 138, 143), and interconnectedness (138). In 1986, Teresa Cordova et al. release a volume titled *Chicana Voices: **Intersections** of Class, Race, and Gender* (my bold), which came out of an earlier 1984 conference for the National Association for Chicano Studies (Cordova et al., ix).

It is helpful to think of these traditions as developing before Dill or Cordova, out of (and often in opposition to) 1960’s civil rights movements (Cf. Guy-Sheftall Chapters 3 and 4). That said, paradigmatically Black feminist thought is in the public sphere at least as early as Sojourner Truth’s speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” in the mid-to-late 1800s (Truth 1951). Hancock observes Black feminist thought emerging as early as 1831 in the case of Maria Stewart and mentions Latina feminists Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga’s use of “intersect” in the 1981 Introduction to *This Bridge Called My Back* (Hancock 2016, 24, 29). Chela Sandoval rehearses this history, though she does not systematically use the term intersectionality or address its coinage.¹³ Sandoval uses the language of intersectionality unambiguously only once in the main text of *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Sandoval, 164). Sandoval lists Crenshaw’s 1989

¹² (Berger and Guidroz, 4), (Crenshaw 1991, 1242-43, footnote 3), (Collins 2000, 18), (Collins and Bilge 2016, Chapter 3), (Hancock 2016, Chapter 1), (Ortega 2016, 7), (Ruíz, 336-41).

¹³ This is interesting in light of Hancock’s reliance on Sandoval in every chapter, especially chapters 2-5, in Hancock 2016.

article in the bibliography, along with a few more bibliographical items that use the language of intersectionality, but that is it.

The common Collins/Crenshaw early 1990's coinage narrative is complicated for another reason. Crenshaw and Collins' lexical similarities are significant in Collins' revised tenth anniversary edition (2000), but in the original 1990 edition, Collins does not mention Crenshaw, nor does she use cognates of intersectionality systematically. Hancock observes that Collins says "convergences" instead of "intersections" in 1990 (Hancock 2016, 101).¹⁴ However, as Hancock notes, Collins and Crenshaw were members of two different groups of intellectuals who simultaneously developed very similar theoretical approaches (Hancock 2016, 28). For one group, Hancock cites the usual "coinage moment": Crenshaw's 1989 article, its 1988 presentation, as well as Crenshaw's better known 1991 article. Representing the other group, Hancock cites Collins' 1990 first edition of *Black Feminist Thought*. Again, a historical issue prevents calling Collins' 1990 work a "coinage moment": Collins does not systematically use the language of intersectionality in 1990.

However, as Hancock notes, Dill is in the same intellectual circle as Collins (Hancock 2016, 28). Dill systematically uses cognates of "intersect" in 1983, as I note above. Moreover, in the 1990 first edition to *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins cites Dill's 1983 article, along with four other articles Dill published between 1979 and 1988 (Collins 1990, 243). This makes Dill tied (with Mary Helen Washington) for the third most common author in Collins' 1990 references, preceded only by Alice Walker (with nine references) and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes (with six references) (Collins 1990, 244, 254-55).¹⁵ Thus, in 1990 Collins is already exposed to

¹⁴ That said, Collins even uses cognates of convergences more sparingly in the first edition than in the second: about 5 times in 1990 compared to about 15 times in 2000, with some of those instances not talking about the "convergence" of identity categories or systems of oppression. Of the 1990 instances, two are eliminated (Collins 1990, 215, 219), and three are preserved (Collins 1990, 70) and (Collins 2000, 71), (Collins 1990, 79) and (Collins 2000, 89), (Collins 1990, 168) and (Collins 2000, 136), and (Collins 1990, 217) and (Collins 2000, 264).

¹⁵ Collins only self-references in four entries, tying Toni Cade Bambara and Barbara Smith for fourth-most appearances in her references (Collins 1990, 239-40, 242, 252).

the language of intersectionality not only through her connections to Dill, but also through first-hand knowledge of Dill's circa 1980s work including the 1983 article that uses the language of intersectionality systematically. Collins is then opting *not* to deploy the language of intersectionality even though she is almost certainly aware of it, further complicating her place in intersectionality's early-90's "coinage moment". Thus, associating Collins with what Hancock calls the "moment of naming" of intersectionality is historically problematic (Hancock 2016, 29). Hancock herself adds to this complication by noting Moraga and Anzaldúa's use of the word "intersect" in 1981 (Hancock 2016, 29).

Intersectionality's founding might be better seen not as a moment in history, but as an event unfolding over at least 160 years. Hancock's demonstrates the beginnings of these ideas at least as early as Stuart's 1831 work, and Crenshaw does not use definition language with respect to the term "intersectionality" until a 1991 reflection on her 1989 article, as mentioned above. This ambiguity regarding the origins of intersectionality should not be strange. Despite commonly disseminated narratives about "moments of discovery" in the production of knowledge, a nuanced reading of these events frequently shows that "discovery"—e.g., the discovery of oxygen—often follows a similar developmental trajectory (Kuhn, 53-55). Viewing the creation of intersectionality increasingly as a process has the advantage of further diversifying the "creation"—if we're going to use that term—and even the "coinage" of intersectionality. The language and theoretical approaches of intersectionality predate Crenshaw's 1988 presentation. That said, this should not diminish the importance of Crenshaw's establishing intersectionality as a central concept for feminist analysis in 1991. Nor should it diminish Collins' 2000 reworking of *Black Feminist Thought* with the term, linking her 1990 edition back to Crenshaw's remarkably similar contemporaneous work.

Defining intersectionality is arguably as problematic as pointing to its moment of origin. It is now three decades since Crenshaw started using the term, but debates over the meaning of intersectionality continue. What counts as intersectionality according to Ortega may be

inconsistent with how Hancock uses the term. Beyond intersectionality's relevance to debates over multiple identity, a few other characterizations of it are minimally controversial: the tradition of Black feminism is hugely important to intersectionality's development; the women who developed these ideas did so by interrogating and remaining faithful to their lived experiences as frequently queer, usually poor women of color; and intersectionality is inherent political, both because it rejects any claim that these identity categories are politically neutral and because its goals have always involved combatting the negatives forces it identifies.

A task less difficult than establishing intersectionality's definition or coinage date is identifying a selection of its prominent themes. I do this below by identifying a number of themes that show up across several recent books and articles either using or specifically addressing intersectionality. In 2016, Collins and Bilge on the one hand, and Hancock on the other publish monographs with the main title *Intersectionality*. Both books have extended discussions on issues in establishing intersectionality's historical origins as well as debates over its meaning. Also in 2016, Ortega publishes *In-between*. This is particularly important for my work, because Ortega more heavily emphasizes the role of Latina feminists in intersectionality's developmental trajectory and because her related phenomenology plays such a large role in my project in the following chapters. Then, in 2017, Ruíz publishes the entry "Framing Intersectionality" in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Race*.¹⁶ Here, Ruíz concisely summarizes various meanings of intersectionality and uses to which it has been put, along with the history of intersectionality's development. In addition, Ruíz discusses the relationship between criticisms of intersectionality and its recent mainstreaming and depoliticizing.

These sources point to the necessity of the following desiderata for a theory of identity: First, we need to talk about multiple-identity in a way that avoids reducing or subordinating one aspect of identity by appealing to another aspect of identity as more fundamental or important.

¹⁶ Martín Alcoff, with whom I engage in later chapters, is an editor of this volume.

Second, we need to be able to talk identity categories' mutual construction: how these different aspects of our identity combine in such a way that they modify each other.¹⁷ Third, we need to be able to talk about identity salience: how different identity categories come to matter more in specific contexts than in others.

At the turn of the 20th century, most resistance movements that achieved mainstream success and visibility focused on a single axis of oppression: for example, race *only*, or gender *only*, or class *only*. This pattern continued into the 60s Civil Rights movements. One large exception, of course, was the frequent presence of class-based analysis in Black civil rights struggle.¹⁸ That said, organizations promoting class struggle were usually racist and sexist, mainstream women's liberation was frequently racist and classist, and Black liberation movements were typically sexist. This, at least, is a ubiquitous observation in the writings of Black women working in any of these three movements towards the end of the 60s and into the 70s, and why we get anthologies with titles like the 1982 collection *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*.

It is unsurprising that Black women in the Civil Rights movement found themselves torn between these groups. Most Black women would have been oppressed by racism, sexism and classism. However, working for class struggle meant neglecting their race and their gender, working for women's liberation meant neglecting their race and class, and working for Black liberation meant neglecting their gender. Operating within these three split struggles for single-axis liberation motivated Black women to create liberatory groups and theoretical approaches that could account for their entire identity as Black *and* poor *and* female. They needed a

¹⁷ We might also refer to this "mutual construction" of identity categories as identity categories "co-constituting" or "co-constructing".

¹⁸ For a very early example of Marxist race analysis, see W.E.B. du Bois' 1933 essay "Karl Marx and the Negro" in *The Crisis*, and 1935 essays "The Black Proletariat in South Carolina" and "The Black Proletariat in Mississippi and Louisiana" in *Black Reconstruction in America*. du Bois uses the phrase "black proletariat" at least as early as 1903's *The Souls of Black Folks* (153).

movement and theoretical approach that did not require them to ignore or subordinate one identity category while fighting for the liberation of another identity category.

The accounts of identity from this period that *did* attempt to acknowledge the importance of several identity categories often did so poorly. Such attempts retained the same undergirding logic as single-axis civil rights movements: they would reduce all other identity categories to one "most fundamental" identity category (usually class), or declare one identity category to be more important and more in need of rectification than any other identity category. As a consequence, avoiding the reduction or subordination of identity categories became a prominent desideratum in intersectionality.

In their 2016 monograph, Collins and Bilge claim that intersectionality responds to the threats of reduction and subordination of identity categories through its more nuanced, "complex" account of identity: "Intersectionality adds additional layers of complexity to understandings of social inequality, recognizing that social inequality is rarely caused by a single factor. Using intersectionality as an analytic tool encourages us to move beyond seeing social inequality through race-only or class-only lenses" (Collins and Bilge 2016, 26). Note here that Collins and Bilge understand intersectionality's contribution not just in terms of its challenge to the single-axis approach as a model of identity but also its challenge to the single-axis approach in analyzing inequality more broadly. On their reading, "race-only" or "class-only" analyses of artificially reduce identity to a single category. Such reduction is usually performed by generalizing the experiences of the more powerful members in a group and applying them to all group members. For example, gender-only analyses are geared more towards the situations of women who are white and/or wealthy. This makes it difficult to talk about the unique pressures on, say, poor Black trans women, as the discrimination they face—from basic food and housing security to medical needs—are profoundly different than a white woman of class.

Hancock credits Maria Stewart with observing "sexism is simultaneously a threat as racism" in Stewart's 1833 "Farewell Address to Her Friends in the City of Boston" (Hancock

2016, 57). In 1833, the situation of Black women in America was profoundly different than the situation of white women. While some version of male domination played a key role in shaping all women's identities, white women and Black women would have experienced male domination in different ways. While many white women would have been "protected" from the perceived sexual threat of Black men, enslaved Black women were routinely raped and impregnated in order to create more slave labor. Of course, white women would have faced rape and impregnation, but for entirely different purposes. Hancock singles out Sandoval for moving towards a framework with the "ontological equality of gender, race/ethnicity, and class, rather than subordinate positions for one or more of them" (Hancock 2016, 60). According to Hancock's narrative, this framework pushed both women of color feminism and intersectionality towards "'both/and' formulations" of identity: we are both our race and our gender simultaneously (Hancock 2016, 61). Hancock sees Sandoval as rightly avoiding any sort of reduction of identities to one identity category or placing different identities into a timeless hierarchy of importance. No single identity category can account for a whole identity.

Ruíz begins her entry on intersectionality with definitions of intersectionality from a few different perspectives. Her definition of intersectionality used as a "descriptive term" addresses intersectionality's theoretical move towards understanding identity categories multiple and non-reductively: "As a descriptive term, [intersectionality] refers to the ways human identity is shaped by multiple social vectors and overlapping identity categories (such as sex, race, class) that may not be readily visible in single-axis formulations of identity, but which are taken to be integral to robustly capture the multifaceted nature of human experience" (Ruíz, 335). From the start, Ruíz confronts the many uses to which intersectionality has been put. However, as mentioned above, Ruíz show that, stated alone, this is a depoliticized popular understanding of intersectionality. When intersectionality is construed *solely* as a model for multiple identity, it is distanced from its radical origins in Black feminism and its radical potential in liberatory practice:

“an advocacy strategy forged in life-and-death circumstances became a loose academic term to denote that a person is not reducible to a single identity category” (Ruíz, 345).

Popular accounts erase intersectionality’s origins in Black feminism as well as intersectionality’s emergence from and commitment to lived experience (Ruíz, 336, 343). That said, Ruíz still includes these aspects of intersectionality as relevant to her discussion:

“...human experience is not additive but temporally thick with the simultaneous and dynamic intersections of socio-historical identity categories. One experiences a compound harm as a black woman, not as the sum of being a woman and black” (Ruíz, 339). This quote, like others in the article, does directly address the problem of reductive identity.¹⁹ Note, though, that Ruíz is careful to qualify this. Sometimes, a single identity category may be salient to the point that other identity categories temporarily become less relevant. The point is that such situations are especially rare for multiply oppressed people, and a single-axis analysis will inevitably fail to describe their situations: “Again, this is not to say that black women don’t experience discrimination or mobilize politically along a single axis, only that it’s never that simple for any subject who is multiply positioned across a number of historically asymmetrical social categories” (Ruíz, 339).

Whether as a consequence of identity reduction or as an oversimplification of multiple identity, some formulations of multiple identity make the mistake of construing the experience of, for example, racial discrimination as uniform among people of the same race and unchanged between members of that race. On this view, a poor male Afro-Latin American refugee and a wealthy female American-born Aboriginal Australian would experience the pressures of anti-Black racism in the same way. Accordingly, differences in gender, class, and national origin should not impact the experience of Blackness as such.

¹⁹ Cf. “...one cannot bracket out different dimensions of human identity in piecemeal fashion” (Ruíz, 339).

However, such a view is wildly misleading. At the time of writing, poor Latin American refugees are at risk of permanent separation from their families, of being forcibly returned to deadly home countries, and of being indefinitely imprisoned in concentration camps so unsanitary that they resemble the conditions in Bergen-Belsen, the concentration camp in which Anne Frank died, along with 35,000 others in just the last few months of 1945. Some of these refugees are Black men, and it is bigotry against their combined ethnic, national, and class identities that puts them in a cage. How these men experience Blackness will be profoundly different than a wealthy female American-born Aboriginal Australian. At least for the moment, the administration is not deporting American citizens. Wealth facilitates a greater level of security, making available better legal representation as well as the respect given to people with money. While a wealthy female American-born Aboriginal Australian is obviously not in comparable danger at present of being sent to such a camp in the US, as an Aboriginal Australian, she might be shamed (or worse) for being the “wrong kind of Black” (i.e., Aboriginal Australian) in Black communities of African descent.²⁰ An Afro-Latin American man might also be harassed for being a different “wrong kind of Black”, but for reasons to do with his Latino identity. He is always also African.

Concerns about single-axis analyses relate to concerns about the mutual construction of identity categories. The worry is that we may focus so heavily on individual axes of identity that we neglect the interplay between different axes. In doing so, we would lose sight of axes’ mutual construction. For example, if we take class to be the fundamental form of oppression, there is little motivation to incorporate other identity categories into our analysis and little reason to expect other identity categories to impact the experience of class. When theorists denied the mutual construction of identity categories, those theorists usually conflated the general experience of a particular identity category with the experiences of the most privileged members

²⁰ After the Aboriginal Act of 1905, Aboriginal Australians were placed in camps that have been described as “Aboriginal Concentration Camps”.

of the group: the needs of poor white men become the needs of poor people in general, and the needs of Black men become the needs of Black folks in general. Such a theoretical move will hide the unique needs of Black women. Such problems with single axis analyses were the reason that construing identity categories as mutually constructing became a prominent desideratum in intersectionality.

Collins and Bilge follow this view, focusing on the interplay of power dynamics that form identities: "intersectional frameworks understand power relations through a lens of mutual construction. In other words, people's lives and identities are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. Moreover, race, class, gender, sexuality, age, disability, ethnicity, nation, and religion, among others, constitute interlocking, mutually constructing or intersecting systems of power" (Collins and Bilge 2016, 26-27). To elaborate María Lugones' metaphor of "interwoven" oppressions, the power dynamics that shape our identities are like a technicolor tapestry left out in the rain: sure, you can see that one thread is primarily red and another green, but the pigments bleed into each other. A red thread crossed over a yellow thread takes on an orange hue, while a red thread near bright blues may come to be purple. Similarly, the experience of social class is modified by the gender and race with which it combines.

This metaphor breaks down in that the threads are never separate, but only ever enter the world simultaneously in an already formed tapestry: "Within intersectional frameworks, there is no pure racism or sexism. Rather, power relations of racism and sexism gain meaning in relation to one another" (Collins and Bilge 2016, 26-27). A person's experience of race is what it is only in light of the other parts of their identity. Collins and Bilge emphasize that "major axes of social divisions in a given society at a given time...build on each other and work together," calling this view of identity construction "intersectionality's core insight" (Collins and Bilge 2016, 4).

Ortega discusses Lugones and Himes-García's criticism of intersectionality that it assumes "the separation of the different axes of oppressions," as they want "to emphasize the axes of oppression are to be understood as mutually constituted" (Ortega 2016, 72).²¹ However, Ortega does not think this criticism challenges formulations of intersectionality to which she is sympathetic: "not all those appealing to intersectionality assume that the axes of oppression are separable... An appeal to intersectionality is not necessarily tied to the assumption of the separability of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and other identities and axes of oppression" (Ortega 2016, 73). A footnote from the previous chapter solidifies the interpretation that Ortega takes a view of identity categories as co-constituting or mutually constructing: "I hold on to the view of intersectionality as described by Collins, in which social categories marking axes of oppression are mutually constituted. ...an intersectional approach does not necessarily lead to a narrow identity politics, especially when considering the mutual constitution of social identities" (Ortega 2016, 226). Ortega does not share the fear that intersectionality—at least Collins' and similar formulations—makes identities fragment into separable, distinct categories, or into small, hyper-specific special interest groups. No vicious, essentializing identity politics necessarily follows from formulations of intersectionality such as Collins'.

Hancock argues that reevaluating the relationship between identity categories—i.e., the manner in which identity categories *are*—is a key move in intersectional theory. She calls it "...the second intellectual project of intersectionality, 'ontological complexity'" (Hancock 2016, 71). On Hancock's view, the mutual construction of identity categories is one of the most important components of intersectionality's reevaluation of identity. This "ontological complexity" refers to the co-constitution/mutual construction of identity categories: "The second ramification that emerges from this reshaping of ontological relationships consists of the

²¹ Interestingly, this criticism is frequently leveled by intersectional theorists at standpoint theorists. Cf. the discussion of Hancock in the section below on the problem of intersectionality for standpoint theory.

mutually constitutive relationships between categories” (Hancock 2016, 59). Identity categories are “...not conceptually distinct”: it does not make sense to talk about gender without also talking about assigned gender, sexuality, race, and so on (Hancock 2016, 71).

Ruíz is critical of versions of intersectionality that see it only as a model of identity, and not also at the same time as part of a historical tradition motivated by lived experience. Nonetheless, her descriptions of “the intersectional model of identity” still track with the previous descriptions: “Oppressions are multiple, latticed, and interlocking in ways that symbiotically co-constitute structures of domination” (Ruíz, 343). The main thing, for Ruíz, is not to flatten intersectionality down to a dry, depoliticized theory of multiple identity. Identity categories are a matter of political struggle: I am only “crazy” in a society that stigmatizes bipolar disorder.

If identity categories matter to our experience, we need to articulate how and why. Presumably, not all identity categories matter equally and at all times. If that was the case, it would be difficult to explain the observed differences between the oppression of Black men and white women (other things being equal), or first-person reports that particular identity categories matter in some situations more than in others. Moreover, such a decontextualized, levelled approach to the salience of identity categories motivates the “oppression olympics”: a search for the most oppressed person. The oppression olympics ends up being epistemically suspect, as “the most oppressed person” will be too busy trying to survive to engage in philosophical analysis. For this (and other) reasons, explaining the salience of identity categories and avoiding the oppression olympics became a prominent desideratum in intersectionality.

Investigating recent work on intersectionality suggests that advocates of intersectionality do believe that different identities should not fall prey to a vicious focus on difference—that is to say, there is no “oppression olympics” in intersectionality. Ortega uses intersectionality as a heuristic in her discussion of the multiplicitous identities of Latina women. One of her characteristically intersectional remarks that would rile up intersectionality’s opponents is the following: “...none of [the multiplicitous] self’s identities is a priori central or most important—

there is not one primary identity that negates, undermines, or makes irrelevant other identities” (Ortega 2016, 74). Here, Ortega is advocating for a notion of identity that has no bedrock, foundational consistency, which would disturb a theorist looking for something more solid. Such a theorist might criticize Ortega’s approach as an “anything goes/nothing is certain” formulation of identity. But Ortega does not think that anything goes: “My claim that not any one identity is a priori central does not mean that certain identities may not become more prominent in particular experiences” (Ortega 2016, 74). A fair reading of Ortega shows that, on her view, context can determine the salience of certain identities: “...this decenteredness and flexibility of self...does not mean that there cannot be an identity that becomes more salient for the multiplicitous self at a particular time in her life or in the context of some worlds” (Ortega 2016, 76). Depending on where you are and what you are doing, different parts of your identity may matter more—or less. Ortega is clear that the change of the salience of different identities can be deeply conditioned by concrete material circumstances:

...the multiplicitous self can shift or, as I prefer to see it, *highlight* different identities in different contexts. Of course, this highlighting of different identities in different contexts is not merely a willful action that does not have a connection to particular material circumstances. As embodied and situated in specific histories and relations of power, the multiplicitous self tactically highlights different identities insofar as those identities are real possibilities. That is to say, the multiplicitous self cannot change identities indiscriminately. (Ortega 2016, 76)

When I am with working class Latino folks towing cars in the less-white, less-monied neighborhoods of Tampa, I cannot highlight the part of me that oozes academic class standing. It would be incoherent, and potentially dangerous. I tried to manifest this part of my identity once, thinking it could keep us safe from some nearby police. The cops did not even think I was white. Presumably, this is because of the people I was with, the part of town I was in, my dark hair, and the phenotypic diversity of the surrounding Latino population. When I am in Flint, or anywhere else I have lived for long, I am never perceived as anything but white. Very few members of the local Latino population look like me. In Flint, a dress shirt, a tie, and a bit of academic language fairly reliably get me whatever I want, but not in Tampa. Such is the power

of context: despite the multiple conflicting identities we are (and sometimes the ones we are mistaken for), a particular context can more or less determine which identity categories are relevant. This is far from an “anything goes” theory of identity and oppression.

Hancock gestures towards something similar when she discusses what she calls “intersectional conceptions of power”: “The account of intersectional reality suggests that relational power structures lived experience, the shape of social locations within which people function and interact, and the discursive norms that shape how they understand and interpret the stimuli they encounter” (Hancock 2016, 107). Who we are, the way we inhabit spaces, and the values and tacit assumptions by which we operate are fundamentally shot through with the power dynamics created and maintained by systems of oppression. This account of how systems of oppression function in our society indicates that, given a context, certain norms will operate and govern who is allowed to do what, with high predictability.

Hancock identifies contingency as an ontological tenet of intersectionality. On an unfair reading, this could be construed as evidence of the anything-goes construction of intersectionality. The first subcategory of contingency Hancock discusses, situational contingency, is supposed to “acknowledge and incorporate the permeability of the binary between oppressed and oppressor” (Hancock 2016, 110). Hancock is here trying to allow for the variability and complexity of situations of oppression. For example, a white woman might be more oppressed in a space that privileges men, and less oppressed in situations that privilege white people. Further, she may experience the privileges and oppressions associated with her identities simultaneously: she may gain some privileges from the white supremacist factors of a context while simultaneously losing other privileges due to the sexist factors of a context, or she may experience privilege/oppression dynamics that are particular to white women and not shared by white people in general or women in general. Hancock’s point is that how the individual’s identity is relevant in the surrounding oppressing/oppressed context will largely

determine how they experience oppressing/oppressed dynamics within that context. Depending on context, some differences matter more than others.

Hancock's second subcategory of contingency, time contingency, is about how the experience of various oppressed/oppressor dynamics change over time: "...the notion here of contingency is not simply that we are focused on a singular moment or era in historical time, but that within the moment, the opportunity structures and options for agency are shifting and changing due to the idea that privilege itself is contingent" (Hancock 2016, 115). The way individuals fit into identity categories may not change, but the relevance of those categories can change depending on the current temporal context: "This acknowledgment of time contingency forwards the idea that oppressors and oppressed may have time-specific infusions of privilege without jettisoning these particular Black women from the category of 'Black Women' who can no longer be oppressed in particular situations" (Hancock 2016, 115). As an example, Hancock's cites the Combahee River Collective's use of the phrase "temporarily class-privileged Black women" (quoted in Hancock 2016, 115). The idea here is that a Black woman may acquire monetary wealth or other markers of class standing (e.g., academic success). At that point, she may achieve a privileged status *vis-à-vis* social class, which can change in the future should she lose her money or academic credentials, or should her level of income or education no longer confer such class status.

According to Hancock's narrative, women of color feminism and intersectionality "took divergent paths", where intersectionality conceived of identity categories as "mutually constitutive" and women of color feminism conceived of identity categories as "conceptually distinct" (Hancock 2016, 61). The latter formulation associated with women of color feminism, Hancock argues, "led to an additive logic in practice that produced competitions among differently situated activists for the role of 'most oppressed' based on a high number of marginalized identities or experiences of multiple oppressions" (Hancock 2016, 61-62). This is one of Hancock's main motivations for adhering to her particular distinction between

intersectionality and women of color feminism: intersectional theorists go to great lengths to avoid any logic that could lead to an oppression olympics.

In this vein and specifically responding to critics of intersectionality, Ruíz says, “For Crenshaw...the need to talk about black women and women of color comes from the situated realities of the ways some societies asymmetrically harm historical communities” (Ruíz, 343). For Ruíz, the relevance of intersectional analyses to particular groups is, as with the Ortega and Hancock, a function of the fact that those particular groups are oppressed due to the concrete realities of oppression in the overarching society, contingent as those realities are. Ruíz argues that the legal system, as Crenshaw diagnosed, fails to protect Black women from their unique discriminations “because the lived materiality of black women’s *experiences of* compound discrimination—*that* they were experiencing multiple oppressions—were being covered over by a framework that happened to prioritize specific understandings of identity (based on the intersectional exclusion of race and gender)” (Ruíz, 343). Ruíz’s point here is that while the US legal system could superficially “account” for the identities of Black women, for reasons built into the system it did not allow for any serious legal redress of forms of oppression specific to Black women. Ruíz finishes this thought by emphasizing that this was a direct outcome of particular, longstanding systems of oppression: “...this is due to the historical provenance of sexist racism in occidental legal systems and the covering-over of that history as part of the neocolonial operation of power” (Ruíz, 343).

II.

The basic claim of standpoint theories is that oppressed people, because of their oppressed situation, are more likely to understand the systems of oppression that affect them. The history and definition of standpoint theory is comparatively less complicated than that of intersectionality. I begin the section by more briefly discussing the history of standpoint theory, before turning to a few recent commentators on standpoint theory. In the main body of the section, I focus on Harding's project in particular for a number of reasons. First, there is less at

stake politically with focusing on a single theorist in standpoint theory than in intersectionality. Second, Harding's standpoint theory is thoroughly post-Marxist. Third, Harding's work makes for a relatively uncomplicated fusion with my phenomenological program. I shall identify a number of recurrent themes in her corpus and formulate them in terms of desiderata for theories of knowledge and identity: theories should avoid committing to identity essentialism, theories should not confer automatic standpoint privilege, exclusive or universal standpoint privilege, and theories should not be subject to charges of relativism. As with my section on intersectionality, these desiderata become relevant in the later chapters on phenomenology and identity.

Depending on how you care to construct the narrative, standpoint theory's basic insight begins with Karl Marx's appropriation of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic, or with Hegel's original insight, or with the sources that influenced Hegel on the issue of master/slave. That said, the following points are unambiguously the case: the phrase "standpoint of the proletariat" occurs at least as early as Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, and Lukács develops his view in a Marxist framework (Lukács, 149-222). Fredric Jameson credits Lukács with coining the term, and claims that Lukács' true heirs in this respect are modern feminist standpoint theorists: "Today, one has the feeling that the most authentic descendancy of Lukács's thinking is to be found, not among the Marxists, but within a certain feminism, where the unique conceptual move of *History and Class Consciousness* has been appropriated for a whole program, now renamed (after Lukács's own usage) *standpoint theory*" (Jameson, 144). When *feminist* standpoint theory began, theorists more or less preserved the Marxist framework.

Later feminist standpoint theorists left the original Marxist formulations when it was no longer philosophically fruitful to explain, e.g., sexism and racism as special, specific cases of a more fundamental class-based oppression. For example, Harding charges Haraway with this: "Haraway's analysis is weakened by its still excessive containment within Marxist epistemological assumptions" (Harding 1986, 194). As I show in later chapters, this post-

Marxist standpoint theory is particularly coherent in some important ways with the tradition of phenomenology of which I find myself a part, as well as with the feminist phenomenologists I study. This is not terribly surprising. Standpoint theorists are no strangers to Continental approaches. Hekman, herself a postmodern standpoint theorist, points out that as early 1991, Harding “advocates what she calls a ‘postmodernist standpoint approach’” (Hekman 1999, 47-48).²²

The desiderata I take from Harding are common among contemporary standpoint theorists. First, as Alison Wylie points out, these epistemologies must avoid *essentialism* with respect to identity categories, a requirement apparently aligned with the project of intersectionality (Wylie, 341). For example, standpoint theories should not construe the category “woman” as a homogenous group with the same basic make-up and experiences. Second, as Wylie states, people do not acquire privileged standpoints *automatically* simply by being in a marginalized group (Wylie, 341). For example, just being poor does not mean you will automatically understand class-based oppression. Such knowledge is usually acquired gradually. José Medina, along with Wylie, rejects the idea of automatic standpoint privilege (Medina, 43).²³ Medina adds that standpoint privilege is neither *universal* within nor *exclusive* to the oppressed group (Medina, 43). That is to say, being a member of an oppressed group does not necessarily mean you will acquire standpoint privilege, and being a member of a privileged group does not necessarily mean you will *not* acquire standpoint privilege. For example, individual Black folks can be ignorant about race-based oppression, and individual white people can be aware of race-based oppression. In 1991, Harding, referencing the Combahee River

²² Hekman does not cite the page of this quote (Harding 1991, 49).

²³ Medina discusses these issues in terms of both epistemic virtues and vices (Medina 42-43), first in connection vices (Medina, 40). In the section on vices, Medina frames group membership and standpoint privilege in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions: “belonging to dominant classes is *not a necessary condition* for having any particular epistemic vice”; “membership in the privileged classes is not a sufficient condition for the epistemic vices I discuss, either” (Medina, 40). Medina makes clear that he is doing standpoint theory in a footnote: “The particular brand of standpoint theory that I defend contains an error component” (Medina, 43).

Collective, rejects standpoint exclusivity, as well (Harding 1991, 283-84). Already in her early work, Harding, like Wylie, was keen to avoid charges of essentialism (Harding 1986, 27).

Because Harding is engaged with philosophy of science, she repeatedly responds to objections that standpoint theory is guilty of *relativism* (Harding 1986, 27; Harding 2006, 116; Harding 2015, 43). This is the fourth and final desideratum for epistemology and theory of identity that I take from standpoint theory. The relativism concern is motivated by a naïve formulation of how epistemic privilege comes from a standpoint: knowledge comes from a standpoint, but there is no reason to suspect any particular standpoint to be more epistemically powerful than another. Of course, Harding (and standpoint theorists in general) rejects the latter claim that there is no way of telling a better standpoint from a worse one.

If we are going to talk about standpoint privilege, about whose standpoint are we talking? We could be talking about the standpoint of women, the standpoint of the proletariat, or the standpoint of Black women or the Black proletariat. Granted, when we talk about standpoint theories, we are usually talking about the standpoint of *some particular group*. However, what makes some collection of individuals a group, and what it means for such a group to share a standpoint is controversial. Talking about the standpoint of Black women implies that there is a group that has that standpoint (Black women), but this language may be deceptive. If by the phrase “Black women” we believe we are talking about a group of individual Black women whose experiences or standpoints are uniform in whatever relevant respects, such a group almost certainly does not exist. No two people have uniform experience. For these reasons, we have strong motivation to avoid formulations of standpoint theory conceiving of a standpoint in an essentialist fashion.

This is the sort of problem about which we are concerned when we say that a standpoint theory must avoid essentialism—our first desideratum in this section. We say a certain conception of a group is *essentialist* when the group is construed to be uniform in any relevant respects: e.g. the proletariat, though divisible by race and gender, are sufficiently uniform in all

aspects relevant to class consciousness; insofar as it matters to the group standpoint, cisgender women and transgender women are basically the same. These views are essentializing because they construe heterogeneous groups as homogenous. In an effort to impose a monolithic, “shared” understanding of group identity, essentialist construals of groups ignore important differences between group members. While all women face discrimination with respect to healthcare and reproductive issues, cisgender women and transgender women have radically different needs in these arenas. In this respect, the group we call “women” is sharply heterogeneous. Reducing such a group to a homogenous understanding of “women” helps deflate the political visibility of “women’s issues”—reliably for the less powerful members of the group, and sometimes for all members of the group. Under essentialism, only the people who count as women according to the homogenous conception of the group—almost always the group’s most privileged members—will be considered fit to speak to the group’s standpoint. Therefore, the “standpoint” does not reflect the view of many members of the group, especially the more vulnerable members.

Harding is aware of this issue already in 1986’s *The Science Question in Feminism*: “Is [feminist standpoint theory] too firmly rooted in a problematic politics of essentialized identities?” (Harding 1986, 27). While her answer there is “no”, Harding later concedes that her 1986 formulation of standpoint was still not ideal: “Standpoint theories need not commit essentialism. *The Science Questions in Feminism* contributed to such a misreading of their ‘logic’; in this book I contest an essentialist reading” (Harding 1991, 121). Harding reinforces this view again in *Is Science Multicultural?*: “[One cannot conclude] that there are typical or essential, or fixed and unchanging, womanly interactions with nature that can define once and for all what women’s standpoints on nature are” (Harding 1998, 102).

Harding goes into detail on the issue of group essentialism in 1991’s *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* As Harding seeks to formulate it, any group standpoint, e.g. the standpoint of women, must take into account the way different identities, e.g. race and sexuality, make the

group heterogeneous: "these understandings of the logic of standpoint theory must be accompanied at every point by richer conceptualizations and analyses of the interlocking relationships between sexism, racism, heterosexism, and class oppression" (Harding 1991, 178-79). Group standpoints must be conceived of in a manner that does not present a false homogeneity. Harding continues, drawing out the sort of ontology more appropriate to understanding identity categories and the groups those categories designate: "Each of these phenomena is fundamentally a relation, not a 'thing'; each is a dynamic relationship that constantly changes, partially because changes occur in the *other* relationships" (Harding 1991, 179). Identity categories are formed in particular contexts and gain meaning in relation to each other: distinctions like masculine, feminine, and queer make sense as contrasting terms, and the precise meanings of such terms appears to change over time and across cultures. This is one sense in which group standpoints cannot be essentialist. Further, because these identity categories are relations and because any particular group is heterogeneous along other identity categories, the relations that constitute one category impact the relations in different categories.

Much as with intersectionality theorists, Harding sees this relational interplay of identity categories resulting in a complicated and ever-evolving heterogeneity within the group. This is unsurprising, as Harding at this point is already citing many of the same sources Crenshaw, Collins, and other intersectional theorists cite. At any rate, this is the anti-essentialist position Harding takes, motivating her view that simply talking about a "man" or "woman" is somewhat incoherent: "Consequently...in an important sense it is true that in societies stratified by race, class, or culture there are no such persons as women or men per se; there are only women and men in particular, historically located race and class and cultural relations. There are no gender relations per se but only gender relations as constructed by and between classes, races, and cultures" (Harding 1991, 179). Harding follows this with examples, beginning tellingly with Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?", the reading of which she credits to Angela Davis in a footnote. She concludes the paragraph by reiterating this relational understanding of identity categories that

disrupts any claim to group homogeneity: “We should think of systems of race, class, gender, and culture as interlocking: one cannot dislodge one piece without disturbing the others” (Harding 1991, 179).

To the extent that we can talk about group standpoints without committing essentialism, is standpoint privilege acquired automatically? For example, will feminist trans women automatically have a transfeminist standpoint? This is unlikely. For any individual, understanding identity and the interplay of identity categories is something that happens gradually. One gets such understanding from experience and discussion with others, and these things take time. Presumably, e.g. in the absence of sufficient opportunity or community, one might not at all develop the privileged perspective attendant to one’s group memberships. Some people die young, before they get the chance. For these reasons, we have strong motivation to avoid formulations of standpoint theory conceiving of standpoint privilege as automatic.

This is the sort of problem about which we are concerned when we say that a standpoint theory must avoid automatic standpoint privilege—our second desiderata in this section. We say a certain conception of standpoint privilege is *automatic* when members of the group do not have to undergo any group-specific oppression or experience in order to acquire the group’s standpoint privilege, but rather that individual group members will have such standpoint privilege solely by virtue of their group membership. An example of such a claim is, “Laverne is a Black trans women, so Laverne has the standpoint privilege of Black trans women”. As argued above, this seems like a hard claim to support, especially when considering severely oppressive situations. Transgender people, especially young Black trans women, are motivated to stay in the closet or to avoid organizing by very real, survival-oriented concerns: as of the time of this writing—August 19, 2019—Human Right Watch reports, “2019 has already seen at least 16 transgender people fatally shot or killed by other violent means,” 15 of whom were Black women (“Violence Against the Transgender Community in 2019”). It might be the case that a Black

trans woman (or any oppressed person) does not live long enough to develop a robust sense of group standpoint. Such threats, not only to organizing in groups but also to living openly in public, motivate trans people to avoid the sorts of community building that lead to the formation of standpoint privilege. Additionally, the existence of antifeminist trans women strongly suggests that not every trans woman develops transfeminist standpoint privilege, and therefore that such development cannot be automatic. Therefore, many oppressed people will not develop their group's standpoint privilege *at all*, let alone automatically.

As with the concern about essentialism, Harding is aware of issues surrounding automatic standpoint privilege already in 1986. In one section when explaining that standpoint theorists are not arguing for a pluralistic space in which feminist knowledge claims may coexist with sexist knowledge claims, but rather are arguing that feminist knowledge claims ought to counter sexist knowledge claims, Harding anticipates and responds to "automatic standpoint privilege" criticisms: "These claims should not be taken to support the idea that every claim a woman makes or every claim made in the name of feminism is thereby automatically more legitimate, politically and scientifically, than the understandings otherwise produced" (Harding 1986, 109). For Harding, a privileged perspective is never something that comes automatically. She reiterates this in 1998: "One certainly cannot conclude...that only women can make significant contributions to fields characteristically thought of as womanly, or that all women in these fields automatically do...; that women automatically know what women's standpoints on nature are" (Harding 1998, 102).²⁴

Harding goes into detail on the issue of automatic standpoint privilege in 2008's *Sciences from Below*. Here, she provides more insight on the relationship between group formation on the basis of identity categories and how such group formation challenges the idea

²⁴ Extra evidence from 1998: "...'peasant experience' or 'women's experience' does not automatically generate counterhegemonic analyses, since the former often exists but only occasionally does the latter emerge. Standpoint theorists are not making the absurd claim that the new postcolonial and feminist analyses simply flow naturally from these groups' experiences" (Harding 1998, 159).

of individuals automatically acquiring standpoint privilege. According to Harding, standpoints come about by groups—not individuals—struggling and organizing against the dominant culture: “The success of standpoint research requires only a degree of freedom from the dominant understanding, not complete freedom from it. And such freedom requires collective inquiry, discussion, and struggle for a marginalized group to ‘come to voice’ as a self-consciously defined group *for* itself (instead of only an ‘objective’ group in the eyes of others)” (Harding 2008, 120). In other words, the existence of a Black woman or the group “Black women” does not generate a standpoint by virtue of their group’s formation under oppressive racist, sexist conditions. Rather, for a Black feminist standpoint to exist, Black women have to come together to articulate and interrogate their experiences in light of the racist, sexist power structure in which they live. It is in this sense that, for Harding, a standpoint is “achieved”: “Thus a standpoint is an achievement, not an ascription; and it is a group achievement, not something an individual can achieve apart from an emancipatory social movement or context” (Harding 2008, 120). A standpoint is a matter of groups coming together to share experiences and develop strategies for resistance. Since the formation of groups and the development of group consciousness takes time, a standpoint cannot possibly be automatic: “Women do not automatically have access to a standpoint of women or a feminist standpoint. Such a standpoint must be struggled for against the apparent realities made to appear natural and obvious by dominant institutions, and against the ongoing political disempowerment of oppressed groups” (Harding 2008, 120).

Given that standpoint privilege is not something one gets automatically simply by being a member of a marginalized community, might standpoint privilege nonetheless come to be universal among the group? For example, will all women eventually come to have the epistemic privilege corresponding to their form of marginalization, even if that does not happen automatically? This seems unlikely, as there are women who die thinking sexism never existed. It thus appears not to be the case that all women share in their group’s standpoint privilege.

Similarly, is standpoint privilege something that is exclusive to the particular group's members? For example, can only women access the epistemic advantages of women's standpoint? Viewed from a different angle, the question of standpoint exclusivity also asks whether men can come to see from women's standpoint. It is the case that some men have studied, believed, and advocated feminist theory and praxis. While these men are not socially positioned to personally, directly contribute to women's standpoint, it is unambiguously the case that they have been influenced by and positively received in feminist epistemology circles (Cf. Medina). Thus, it seems that, at least to an extent, some men have learned to look at the world through the lens of women's standpoint. For these reasons, we have strong motivation to avoid formulations of standpoint theory conceiving of standpoint privilege as universal or exclusive.

These are the sorts of problems about which we are concerned when we say that a standpoint theory must avoid constructing standpoint privilege as universal or exclusive—our third desiderata. We say a certain conception of standpoint privilege is *universal* when *all* members of the relevant group will come to have that standpoint. For example, take the claim that *all* disabled lesbians will come to the standpoint consciousness of disabled lesbians, whether automatically or gradually. Universal standpoint claims such as this run into the same issues as do automatic standpoint claims: first, marginalized demographic reliably have members who deny their oppression as a group, and second, it sure looks like members of marginalized groups do sometimes die before ever coming to consciousness of the oppression of their group. In a similar vein, we say a certain conception of standpoint privilege is *exclusive* when *only* members of the relevant group will come to have that standpoint. For example, the claim that *only* disabled lesbians will come to the standpoint consciousness of disabled lesbians would be such an *exclusive* claim, and as mentioned above, this violates the apparent fact that some privileged people have learned to think differently through exposure to standpoints of marginalized groups. Just as Medina is a man in constructive dialogue with feminist circles, we could add Elizabeth Spelman and Talia Bettcher as white women in constructive dialogue with

women of color feminists. It appears that the knowledge originally developed from a particular social location is transmissible to people in other social locations, and least in some circumstances. Some oppressed people do not develop their group's standpoint privilege, and some privileged people do learn to see from the standpoints of marginalized groups.

We see Harding addressing concerns about both universal and exclusive standpoints in her early work again: "...the gender of the claimant is often irrelevant to the kind of reason and evidence the claim can in principle gather. After all, many men have made outstanding contributions to the feminist theory and politics of their day...and at least some women have made notorious contributions to sexist theory and politics" (Harding 1986, 109). Of course, Harding is arguing for a feminist standpoint, but the fact that a standpoint is feminist does not guarantee any particular woman will achieve a feminist standpoint. Similarly, the fact that a standpoint is feminist does not exclude men from learning from it or from contributing to its production. Harding makes a remarkably similar argument again in 1998: "Women, too, have held distorted beliefs about our bodies, our minds, nature, and society, and numerous men have made important contributions to feminist analysis" (Harding 1998, 158). The questions of standpoint exclusivity and standpoint universality are not merely theoretical. Rather, these questions have empirical answers, since it appears that there exist both antifeminist women and feminist men.

One of Harding's more extended sections on the issues of necessary and exclusive standpoints is in 1991, when she discusses "the Monster Problem" (Harding 1991, 274). For Harding, the Monster (with a capital "M") is the archetypal uniformly privileged person: "A kind of monster lurks in the logic of white feminist discourses: he is a white, economically privileged, Western, heterosexual man—and he is a feminist too" (Harding 1991, 278). In this section, Harding links whether men can achieve a feminist standpoint with whether similar issues, alluding to the fact that the women who have produced standpoint theory have been highly educated, monied, straight, and usually white: "Does [the Monster's] existence discourage

white, heterosexual, economically overadvantaged women from imagining that they should generate antiracist, antihomophobic, and anticlass analyses?" (Harding 1991, 278). Harding is asking this question to make a rhetorical point: namely, if the Monster cannot learn to see from a feminist, proletarian, or other marginalized standpoint, white women have the same problem with respect to race: "if we as white women can become knowers in this way, then so can The Monster. If he can't, then neither can we. His destiny appears to be linked to ours" (Harding 1991, 284). That said, Harding believes, and expects her (primarily white, financially stable, and female) audience to believe that they can do antiracist or anticlassist work: "As European American intellectuals, we are not oppressed by race hierarchy or, most of us, even by class structures. But we can *learn* to experience the race and class relations in which we participate" (Harding 1991, 284). If that is so, Harding argues, then privileged men should be able to learn from feminist standpoint theory.

If we are going to talk about standpoint privilege, why should we say any one standpoint is privileged over another? That is, if the standpoint of Black women offers any advantages, might not the standpoint of white men offer its own advantages? These concerns misrepresent claims about standpoint privilege: a standpoint is not privileged just because it is a particular, unique perspective. Rather, a standpoint is privileged because its particular, unique perspective offers a better understanding of things given a particular context. It appears not to be the case that all standpoints are created epistemically equal. For these reasons, we have strong motivation to avoid formulations of standpoint theory conceiving of standpoint privilege as relativist.

These are the sorts of problems about which we are concerned when we say that a standpoint theory must avoid relativism. We say a certain conception of standpoint privilege is *relativist*—at least in the vicious sense of the term—when it does not or cannot distinguish between better and worse standpoints. For example, consider the question raised above regarding the relative worth of a Black feminist standpoint as opposed to that of a white male

standpoint. Any standpoint theory that cannot account for the epistemic advantage of oppressed classes fails to make good on the basic intuition undergirding standpoint theory's full history. Further, there are troves of historical examples of privileged groups implementing foolish, harmful policies that would never have been considered reasonable by the affected oppressed community (Cf. the Flint lead crisis).²⁵ Therefore, some social groups are better positioned than others to know about the influence of systems of operation on knowledge production.

One again, Harding anticipates relativism charges in her early 1986 work: "...the reader will need to avoid the temptation to leap to relativist understandings of feminist claims. In the first place, feminist inquirers are never saying that sexist and antisexist claims are equally plausible" (Harding 1986, 27). Harding is never arguing that a feminist standpoint is valuable simply because it is a unique perspective, in the same way that an antifeminist "standpoint" is a unique perspective. Harding is arguing that a feminist standpoint is valuable because it is in fact better than antifeminist thought when it comes to identifying and correcting sexist influences on the production of knowledge. The feminist standpoint gains this epistemological edge because it comes from a tradition of reflection on the concrete circumstances of women's lives, women who have been motivated to identify sexist agendas for purposes of security and survival. In 1998, Harding makes a similar point, and this time connects it directly back to safety: "Not all proposed standards for knowledge are equally good—indeed, some are not only inadequate, but dangerous to their believers' lives" (Harding 1998, 19). We can push this farther and point out that many standpoints are not just a danger to the people occupying those standpoints. Oppressive or bigoted standpoints are dangerous to the lives of the people they oppress.

²⁵ On April 25, 2014, state-appointed emergency managers switched Flint, Michigan's water source from Detroit's water system to the Flint River (Kennedy). This precipitated a mass lead poisoning of the surrounding community that continues to the time of writing (February 8, 2020), and an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease. From the start, this seemed like a disastrous idea to citizens of Flint, as the Flint River was known locally to be so polluted that local clothing stores print t-shirts reading "Flint River Dive Team: Somethings in the Water" ("Flint City T-shirts").

Harding addresses relativism concerns frequently while talking about strong objectivity.²⁶

This shows up especially in 1998 and 2015. In 1998, Harding is keen to point out that just because knowledge is relative to a standpoint does not mean that everything is epistemologically permitted:

...the strong objectivity program rejects the epistemological or judgmental relativism that assumes that because all such assumptions and claims have local, historical components, there is no rational, defensible way to evaluate them. It rejects the idea that all claims are equally valid, that all cultures' science and technology projects are equally defensible, for any and all purposes. It rejects the assumption that if one recognizes the social, historical relativism of knowledge claims, one is forced to epistemological, judgmental relativism. (Harding 1998, 18-19)

Some standpoints are just bad for the production of knowledge. Persistent myths of Black folks as having milder experiences of pain and of white women as chronic complainers contribute to continued under-treatment and misdiagnosis of today populations. People who still operate from such standpoints make worse doctors and researchers than people who do not, other things being equal.

In 2015, Harding wants to be able to talk about the non-vicious type of relativism standpoint *theory* does endorse. After all, the claim that knowledge is relative to a particular standpoint does commit to a certain type of relativism. However, that type of relativism need not be vicious:

...one could use the term 'principled relativism' to refer to standpoint theory and its strong objectivity, as did Frederic Jameson (1988). Strong objectivity is not committed to all knowledge claims being equally valid; it is not committed to 'anything goes,' as Paul Feyerabend (1975) put the methodological point. It is committed rather to 'situated knowledge,' in Donna Haraway's (1988) words. That is, it is committed to the inevitability of deeply conflicting knowledge claims, each trailing impeccable evidence in the eyes of its holder. Yet the situations of such knowers always both enable and limit what they can know. (Harding 2015, 44)

²⁶ We do not have time here to give a thorough treatment of strong objectivity. It is enough for our purposes to note that strong objectivity is a concept some feminist standpoint theorist endorse as an alternate formulation of "objectivity" coherent with the claims of standpoint theory.

This "principled relativism" is not the same as the "judgmental relativism" Harding addresses in 1998. This "principled relativism", on Harding's view, acknowledges first, that what we're able to know is rooted in our particular situation, and second, that some situations are better than others when it comes to identifying bigotry in the production of knowledge. This defends her project from accusations of judgmental relativism.

In the previous sections we have listed a number of desiderata for epistemology and theory of identity that we get both from the tradition called intersectionality and from standpoint theory. By way of conclusion of this chapter we shall now discuss why that matters through the following two points: first, the alleged problem of intersectionality for standpoint theory, and second, the alleged debt of an alternative framework and explanatory mechanism for post Marxist standpoint theory.

Many theorists of identity see theory of multiple identity generally and intersectionality in particular as a threat to both their theoretical analyses and their liberatory strategies. Early Black feminist theory is replete with anecdotes of proponents of single-issue politics (usually Black, feminist, or proletarian) questioning the group loyalty or belittling the contributions of multi-issue theorists/activists. Single-issue activists often suggest that multi-issue theorists jeopardize their (monolithic) liberation struggle. The concern is frequently something like this: *if* we acknowledge that our particular positions in different identity categories combine to form unique experiences specific to our situation and that, therefore, there is no single, spanning essence of man- or womanhood, *then* identity categories become useless for analysis because they do not name any concrete, unified group.

Harding is aware of such threats to standpoint theory as early as 1986: "Can there be a feminist standpoint if women's (or feminists') social experience is divided by class, race, and culture? Must there be a Black and white, working class and professional-class, American and Nigerian feminist standpoint?" (Harding 1986, 26). A version of this criticism comes from within the standpoint tradition. While discussing Susan Bordo's earlier formulation of the problem of

difference (Bordo 1990), Hekman formulates the problem of difference thusly: “If the paradigm of differences precludes any discussion of gender as a general category or, for that matter, any general categories at all, then it is seriously deficient... If differences become, in a sense, the new absolute, then we have no basis on which to justify or even formulate general analytic categories” (Hekman 1999, 53). This is the basic criticism, but Hekman does not think this has to be the case: “I believe that we can justify general concepts... I also believe that this requires a detailed epistemological account” (Hekman 1999, 55). Hekman is motivated by a post-modern feminist concern that suggests, first, that categories of difference are so internally diverse that it does not make sense to talk about such categories, and second, that any analysis based on categories of difference is therefore incoherent.

A satisfying standpoint theory must be able to talk about categorical analyses in at least some sense, while at the same time acknowledging and accounting for difference. Hekman’s attempt at this invokes Max Weber’s “ideal types”, modified with a feminist twist (Hekman 1999, 69-90), in order to “justify general concepts and make moral judgments...without appealing to absolutes and universals” (Hekman 1999, 55). Her particular goal is “a feminist approach to the social sciences” (Hekman 1999, 55-56). While Hekman rightly identifies a concern common in many feminist or otherwise identity-theorist circles (viz, the so-called “problem of intersectionality”), and while it is the case that Hekman is pointing to something that admits of legitimate philosophical investigation, nonetheless I find Hekman’s use of Weber unsatisfying. I fear her approach reifies the problematic monolithic identity categories that theorists of intersectionality and difference have successfully condemned.

As intersectionality focuses more deliberately on difference, difference-skeptics are given to criticizing intersectionality. This is how the “problem of intersectionality” emerges within the standpoint tradition, as some standpoint theorists fear that accounting for difference disrupts the gains to be had from standpoint theory’s typically more general focus. Alternatively, we can see how the “problem of intersectionality” is raised from within the tradition of intersectionality as

well. It is the case that intersectional scholarship tends toward analysis at greater levels of specificity and complexity. For example, see claims about intersectionality by Hancock (87, 94, 221) and Ruíz (337, 341-42), who identify a historical pattern of greater attention to detail throughout the tradition construed broadly. For example, Chapters 3 and 4 of *Words of Fire* show Black Feminism focusing largely on race and gender in the late-sixties and early-seventies (Cf. Frances Beale, Linda La Rue, and Pauli Murray), with more of the axes coming into discussion in the late seventies and the eighties (Cf. the Combahee River Collective, Audre Lorde, and Deborah King). This is also evidenced by patterns of development in high-profile authors' projects. For example, see the "Preface to the Second Edition" of Collins' *Black Feminist Thought*: "My analysis of oppressions is also more complex in this edition... For example, in this edition, I broaden my analysis beyond race, class, and gender and include sexuality as a form of oppression. Issues of social class and culture also receive a more complex analysis in this edition" (Collins 2000, xi).

If we take this concern over the possibility of categorical analyses seriously, standpoint theory's plausibility comes into question. Post-Marxist standpoint theory's premium on "starting from the lived realities of women's lives" (Harding 1986, 146) undeniably involves some version of categorical analysis of women, though perhaps not a vicious version. Some of the more influential standpoint theories have been the proletarian standpoint (e.g. Marx and Lukács), the maternal standpoint (e.g. Sara Ruddick), the feminist standpoint (e.g. Harding and Nancy Hartsock), and the Black feminist standpoint (e.g. Collins, and, arguably, bell hooks). These are identity categories. If we judge the lesson of intersectionality to be that different identity categories complicate each other so much that analysis of particular identity categories is either futile or impossible, standpoint theory falls with that judgment. I do not think this criticism lands, but it does point to the desire for a robust explanation for standpoint privilege under conditions of intersectionality.

Hancock is a good example of a theorist of intersectionality who sees intersectionality and standpoint theory as distinct specifically because of the disagreement over levels of generality in analysis: "...the orientation toward the simultaneity of race, gender, and class oppression in a specific formulation breaks with both conventional standpoint theory and twentieth-century multicultural feminist thought" (Hancock 2016, 94). For Hancock, intersectionality is distinguished by its focus on the unique forms of oppression experienced as a result of the combination of several identity categories. On this view, in the cases of Black trans women, for example, it makes less sense to talk about the way race and gender identity change the experience of gender, or how gender and race change the experience of gender identity. Hancock thinks it is better to specify the relevant intersectional position (Black, trans, and women) and talk about oppression in terms of that particular intersection, rather than discussing the experience of individual identity categories as they are modified by some combination of other identity categories.

One reason Hancock is able to use this to distinguish her position on intersectionality from standpoint theory is because she makes a sharp distinction between "intersecting identity" and "multiple identity". This view lines up with the previous paragraph's characterization, where "intersecting identities" construes oppression as unique to particular combinations of identities, and "multiple identities" construes oppressions more discretely but as they are changed by other relevant categories. This, for Hancock, is the big difference: "This shift from a unitary standpoint grounded in material experiences to one that is not simply multiple but intersectional is deeply imbricated with [intersectionality's ontological] project. Intersectionality-like thought and transversal politics share a common interest in engaging difference without reproducing homogeneity and a theoretical foundation in standpoint theory" (Hancock 2016, 71).²⁷ I will

²⁷ "Ontological projects" are identified and developed independently in standpoint theory by Kathi Weeks (Weeks, 189) and in intersectionality by Hancock (Hancock 2016, 20, 32-33, Chapter 3).

return to the controversy over the compatibility of intersectionality and standpoint theory at the conclusion of this work.

The alleged problem of standpoint theory's need of an alternative framework and explanatory mechanism is evident in Hekman's 1999 complaint against Harding that she owes a detailed, schematic epistemological account justifying standpoint privilege. In 1991, Hekman says Harding "argues that starting research from the reality of women's lives...will lead to a more objective account of social reality. ...Harding offers no argument as to why this is the case. It is not enough simply to assume that Marx got it right on such a crucial point" (Hekman 1991, 45). Hekman is wrong to say Harding "offers no argument" that explains standpoint privilege. Harding offers arguments to this effect already in 1986 (Harding 1986, 26, 187-90).

We see what Hekman is really after in a later passage: "If Harding rejects the existing metanarrative of the scientific establishment and argues that we should not construct a rival metanarrative, then it is incumbent on her to provide a detailed epistemological explanation of how we distinguish among different accounts of 'reality'" (Hekman 1999, 46). Hekman's criticism that Harding fails to provide an argument is really a criticism for failing to provide a "detailed epistemological explanation". Again, Hekman is wrong to simply say Harding does not offer an argument. Harding does have an argument; what Harding does *not* offer is an argument that explains the generation of standpoint privilege *schematically formulated in terms of an epistemology, phenomenology, or postmodern alternative*. This latter style of argument is what Hekman is seeking, but Hekman's criticism of Harding here is mistaken. I follow Richard Rorty: "Nothing requires us to first get straight about language, then about belief and knowledge, then about personhood, and finally about society. There is no such thing as 'first philosophy'—neither metaphysics nor philosophy of language nor philosophy of science" (Rorty, 55). It is fine to say that Harding has not provided a full-blown epistemology of the type Hekman desires, or even to say that the available evidence suggests the impossibility of such an epistemology. Both Harding and Hekman entertain and reject the latter option. But providing a

schematic epistemology is not Harding's job—she is not required to work in that particular area of epistemology. That said, Hekman correctly points out that a satisfying thematically developed epistemological justification for standpoint privilege has not been given.

In the following chapters, I investigate existential breakdown as a potential explanatory mechanism for standpoint privilege. As I progress, I return back to the desiderata for theories of knowledge and identity we established in this chapter to show how these desiderata are or are not consistent with these phenomenological approaches. In Chapter 2, I discuss the genesis and development of a number of phenomenological structures. I discuss Merleau-Ponty and Hans-Georg Gadamer, Linda Martín Alcoff's fusion of them, and Ortega's contribution to Martín Alcoff's program. I expand upon the Martín Alcoff/Ortega program mostly by further articulating its Gadamerian aspect. In Chapter 3, I discuss a variety of breakdown experiences in Gadamer, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Ortega. I then discuss a form of breakdown associated with the Gadamerian structure I articulated in Chapter 2. I conclude by returning to the question of the coherence of intersectionality and standpoint theory, in order to finish evaluating my phenomenological program as an alternative framework and explanatory mechanism for standpoint privilege.

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING AND BREAKDOWN IN HEIDEGGER, MERLEAU-PONTY, AND GADAMER

In this chapter, I discuss the formulations of understanding and breakdown developed by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer. By discussing what Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer mean by "understanding", I hope to delimit phenomenological structures related to identity. This begins the search for an alternative framework for post-Marxist standpoint theory. Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer play the largest role in this project when it comes to framing identity. With Merleau-Ponty, I turn to talk about the body, which is crucial in a theory of identity dealing with identity categories that frequently, if not always, are tied to the body. With Gadamer, I begin the discussion of historical traditions of interpretation, which are crucial in a theory of identity dealing with identity categories marked as inferior or deviant for historical reasons. In doing this, I hope to provide the background for Martin Alcoff and Ortega's fusion of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, as well as for my contribution to that program in the following chapter.

Second, by discussing how Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer formulate breakdown, I begin to enumerate a variety of ways that disruptions of these phenomenological structures can contribute to the production of knowledge. This begins the search for an alternative explanatory mechanism for post-Marxist standpoint theory. I hope to show that breakdown happens in a lot of ways and for a lot of reasons. Breakdown can happen with respect to an individual's comportment, or as a result of a disruption between interlocutors. We can observe breakdown in ourselves or in others. Observing breakdown in others tells us about experiences different from our own, and can also reveal things about our own experiences that we otherwise might not have noticed. I assess these different formulations of breakdown in this

chapter's conclusion. This provides background for my forthcoming discussion of phenomenological breakdown.

I.

For Heidegger, understanding is the active, futural—which is to say, projective—dimension of Dasein: “the understanding...always press[es] forward into possibilities...because [it] has in itself the existential structure which we call ‘projection’ (Heidegger, 184-85).²⁸ That is, understanding is the structure by which Dasein gets into particular possibilities and manifests the meaningfulness of its activities in light of those possibilities. However, this is not done in any cognitive, reflective way. Heidegger is working with a version of understanding closer to “the signification of ‘being able to manage something’, ‘being a match for it’, ‘being competent to do something’” (Heidegger, 183). For Heidegger, understanding is about having the appropriate orientation to specific tasks, which only infrequently involves high-order abstractions.

Heidegger argues that this is the typical manner in which Dasein engages in things. On his view, Dasein inhabits a context involving “equipment”, i.e. that which is “in-order-to” bring about specific goals (Heidegger, 97). Heidegger refers to such a goal as a “towards-which”, “the work to be produced” by Dasein’s engagement with a particular in-order-to (Heidegger, 99). For example, I use a keyboard in-order-to type out a paper, the paper being that “towards-which” my keyboard use strives. Heidegger says that a given towards-which also “has the kind of Being that belongs to equipment”, meaning that one goal towards-which Dasein works is often in-order-to accomplish some other goal.

Much as in the opening chapters of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, Heidegger is setting up a hierarchy of activity, where, for example, I use a keyboard to type a paper, I type a paper for comprehensive exams, and I take comprehensive exams in order to be

²⁸ Like most Anglophone Heidegger scholars, I do not translate “Dasein”. The referent of “Dasein” is the same as “human being”, but the sense of “Dasein” is different. Explicating precisely what “Dasein” means is the general project of *Being and Time*.

a graduate student in philosophy. Heidegger thinks that these chains of lower activities subordinated to higher ends eventually leaves off somewhere, at a “primary” towards-which “in which there is no further involvement”, what he calls a “for-the-sake-of-which” (Heidegger, 116). A for-the-sake-of-which is something like a defining role Dasein projects, thereby displaying the full significance and reason for the chains of subordinated activities and equipment below it. To complete the previous example, all this typing and exam taking is ultimately for-the-sake-of becoming a philosophy professor, the reason I am a doctoral student.

Projecting a “for-the-sake-of-which” is the primary way Dasein understands, on Heidegger’s view. This gives “significance” to the world, significance being “the relational totality”, “what makes up the structure of the world” lit up by the projection of a for-the-sake-of-which (Heidegger, 120). Thus, in understanding Dasein projects a particular role, which in turn makes meaningful its surrounding relational context.

Returning to the specific character of understanding, it now becomes clear why Heidegger thinks understanding is usually not an explicit knowing of facts or an ability to formulate procedural instructions. Rather, he says, “As understanding, Dasein projects its Being upon possibilities” (Heidegger, 188). The “possibilities” refer to possibilities open to Dasein, like being a parent, a professor, or the president. Understanding is projecting a for-the-sake-of-which and dealing with the environment as made meaningful by that particular projection: “Projecting has nothing to do with comporting oneself towards a plan that has been thought out, and in accordance with which Dasein arranges its Being” (Heidegger, 185). While some for-the-sake-of-whiches may involve frequent reflection and deliberation, the manner in which Dasein takes on those available roles is not through some deliberate, reflective calculus. Rather, Dasein engages in the sorts of behaviors appropriate to someone in those roles.

This particular view of understanding as prereflective makes more sense when considering that, for Heidegger, understanding is part of Dasein’s structure, and as such, one must project a for-the-sake-of-which just to be Dasein in the first place: “As long as it is, Dasein

always has understood itself and always will understand itself in terms of possibilities” (Heidegger, 185). One way or another, either “by taking hold or by neglecting”, Dasein takes on possibilities: “Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them, or grown up in them already” (Heidegger, 33). Whether we willfully or unwillfully become a particular possibility, there is no avoiding become *some* possibility.

Again, understanding “does not grasp thematically that upon which it projects”, e.g., projecting what it is to be a great musician is doing the practice and playing the concerts, as opposed to displaying a broad thematic understanding of music theory or the physics of sound (Heidegger, 185). Excellent musical performance can be and frequently is enhanced by knowledge of music theory, and that knowledge often develops along with musical expertise. However, actual musical excellence is not a matter of observing or mastering an explicit theoretical structure. Excellent musicianship is a matter of absorption into the performance, something that is easily disrupted if the performer focuses on theory at the wrong time.

Heidegger tells us that attempting to take on a for-the-sake-of-which in an explicit, thematic orientation is self-undermining: “Grasping [what the understanding projects] in such a manner would take away from what is projected its very character as a possibility, and would reduce it to the given contents” (Heidegger, 185). Reducing musicianship to music theory or wave physics, an entire focus on the explicit form of the music thus conceived, takes away most of what it is to be a musician. One will never actually perform the music. This observation is interesting because it stands contrary to intuitions we inherit from modern philosophy: the abstract “contents” of experience are not the building blocks of ordinary experience, but rather projection is primary and abstraction is a specialized reduction of this ordinary experience.

Explaining the breakdown of understanding in Heidegger requires explaining equipment in greater detail. Heidegger says that the Being of equipment—the manner in which equipment *is*—is “readiness-to-hand” (Heidegger, 98). Hubert Dreyfus translates this as “availableness” (Dreyfus, xi), drawing out a sense of equipment as immediately available for use. Heidegger

claims that equipment really is what it is when it is being used smoothly to achieve its purpose: “Equipment can genuinely show itself only in dealings cut to its own measure” (Heidegger, 98). For example, my keyboard is most a keyboard when I am using it to type.

Dasein uses equipment as equipment without any explicit thought occurring: “an entity of this kind [equipment] is not grasped thematically as an occurring Thing” (Heidegger, 98). I am so accustomed to using my keyboard that I never think about the placement of individual keys or where my fingers are going. For the most part, my fingers just start moving, and I know I need to check my work when something feels off about the way my fingers have pressed into the keyboard.

Heidegger says that using equipment “is not a blind [activity]; it has its own sight” (Heidegger, 98). While I do not have much explicit awareness of how and where my fingers are moving while typing, my actions are certainly not random. It happens that the words I was looking for show up on the monitor, with very little time spent going back to correct for typos. This is because of the Being of equipment as ready-to-hand. To understand equipment is to use it appropriately, and explicit thematic thinking is often counter to such purposes.

Heidegger explains this absence of thematic thought while using equipment, saying, “The peculiarity of what is proximally ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdraw in order to be ready-to-hand quite authentically” (Heidegger, 99). The word “withdraw” is key, here: when using equipment is going well, one tends not to notice it. My keyboard “withdraws” when everything is functioning smoothly.

The explanation of readiness-to-hand helps to explain by contrast a different manner of Being to which equipment is sometimes reduced, what Heidegger calls “presence-at-hand”. Something is present-at-hand when it shows up explicitly, stripped of its usual meaning: “the ready-to-hand becomes deprived of its worldhood so that Being-just-present-at-hand comes to the fore” (Heidegger, 106). When the F-key on my keyboard pops off from overuse, I become explicitly aware of the keyboard for the first time. I stare at the mechanism that is supposed to

connect the F-key to the rest of the keyboard, though strictly speaking I am no longer encountering it as a keyboard. In this experience, I am brought out of my typical understanding compartment towards the withdrawn keyboard and encounter it as something outside of the typical relational context.

Breakdown accounts for this switch from readiness-to-hand to presence-at-hand. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes three different types of equipmental breakdown: “The modes of conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and obstinacy all have the function of bringing to the fore the characteristic of presence-at-hand in what is ready-to-hand” (Heidegger, 104). One could also describe these as three different *degrees* of breakdown. For example, Dreyfus rearranges them conspicuousness, obstinacy, obtrusiveness, and then suggests, “we can see these three modes of breakdown as increasingly serious disturbances” (Dreyfus, 71). I agree with Dreyfus, at least, that obtrusiveness is the form of breakdown that most fully forces the turnover from readiness-to-hand to presence-at-hand.

Conspicuousness occurs when Dasein is involved with inappropriate equipment: “When we concern ourselves with something, the entities which are most closely ready-to-hand may be met as something unusable, not properly adapted for the use we have decided upon. The tool turns out to be damaged, or the material unsuitable” (Heidegger, 102). A good example here is taking a metric ratchet set to work on something made in imperial units. Breakdown occurs in the sense that the metric ratchet set comes to Dasein’s explicit attention, but the transition to presence-at-hand does not happen. Rather, what is highlighted in the ratchet set is its readiness-to-hand as not fitting to this particular task: “This presence-at-hand of something that cannot be used is still not devoid of all readiness-to-hand whatsoever; equipment which is present-at-hand in this way is still not just a Thing which occurs somewhere” (Heidegger, 103). Heidegger calls this “un-readiness-to-hand” (Heidegger, 103).

Obstinacy, another milder form of breakdown, occurs when otherwise ready-to-hand equipment that is not currently needed obstructs Dasein’s current goal: “the un-ready-to-hand

can be encountered not only in the sense of that which is unusable or simply missing, but as something un-ready-to-hand which is not missing at all and not unusable, but which 'stands in the way' of our concern" (Heidegger, 102). Consider an office door with an electronic lock, the code to which needs to be reset before entry. If one is urgently involved in a task requiring entry to the office, the electronic lock shows up as a piece of equipment that must be dealt with before one can get to one's task in the office: "Anything which is un-ready-to-hand in this way is disturbing to us, and enables us to see the obstinacy of that with which we must concern ourselves in the first instance before we do anything else" (Heidegger, 103). Equipment is obstinate when it is not broken or unfitting, but still disrupts Dasein's goals by getting in the way.

Obtrusiveness, the most profound equipmental breakdown Heidegger describes, occurs when a piece of equipment is missing: "we not only come up against unusable things within what is ready-to-hand already: we also find things which are missing—which not only are not 'handy' but are not 'to hand' at all" (Heidegger, 103). Interestingly, though, the missing piece of equipment does not undergo a full transition to presence-at-hand. Rather, the sought-after equipment is highlighted still as equipment, and as in the two previous examples, show up as un-ready-to-hand (Heidegger, 103). In obtrusiveness, what undergoes the shift from readiness-to-hand to presence-at-hand is the remaining equipmental context: "The more urgently we need what is missing, and the more authentically it is encountered in its un-readiness-to-hand, all the more obtrusive does that which is ready-to-hand become—so much so, indeed, that it seems to lose its character of readiness-to-hand" (Heidegger, 103). For example, consider packing a car for a long road trip and not being able to find the ignition key just before leaving. The key stands out as equipment, as it is the one thing needed before the project can get underway. However, until the key is found, the remaining equipmental context—car, cooler, and camping gear—stands out divorced from its usual meaningfulness, and makes the shift to presence-at-hand: "It reveals itself as something just present-at-hand and no more, which cannot be budged without the thing that is missing. The helpless way in which we stand before it is a deficient

mode of concern, and as such it uncovers the Being-just-present-at-hand-and-no-more of something ready-to-hand” (Heidegger, 103).

The next type of breakdown is a full-blown failure of Being-in-the-world. This breakdown is brought about by anxiety, which is particularly dramatic during what Heidegger calls “death”.²⁹ Anxiety is a special case of what Heidegger calls “state-of-mind” (227): “What we indicate *ontologically* by the term ‘state-of-mind’ is *ontically* the most familiar and everyday sort of thing; our mood, our Being-attuned” (Heidegger, 172). State-of-mind in large part determines how entities show up: if I am angry, my whole world can show up as angering, all entities as cause for anger. Thus, Heidegger says, “A mood makes manifest ‘how one is, and how one is faring’” (Heidegger, 173). A given state-of-mind sets up what counts as appropriate comportment towards entities by coloring the whole of reality: “The mood has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct one-self towards something” (Heidegger, 176). In other words, state-of-mind determines what and how entities show up as relevant, what and how entities “matter” (Heidegger, 176).

To explain anxiety as a state of mind, Heidegger first sets up a contrasting state of mind: fear. He describes fear according to the tripartite “general structure of state of mind”: “(1) that in the face of which we fear, (2) fearing, and (3) that about which we fear” (Heidegger, 179). *That in the face of which we fear* is the particular entity showing up as “threatening”: for example, an angry grizzly bear charging at one (Heidegger, 179). “*Fearing*” is the disclosing of the world in such a way that things may show up as fearful—like the looming sense of vulnerability walking through a forest with which one is unfamiliar, readying one to encounter frightening entities: “Fearing, as a slumbering possibility of Being-in-the-world in a state-of-mind...has already disclosed the world, in that out of it something like the fearsome may come close” (Heidegger,

²⁹ As we will see below, Heidegger does not use the term “death” to mean the end of one’s life. Heidegger calls that “demise”. Rather, “death” refers to what happens when some adopted role is no longer possible.

180). *That about which we fear* is ourselves, say as potential victims of a bear-mauling: “Fearing discloses this entity as endangered and abandoned to itself” (Heidegger, 180).

Anxiety is a special state-of-mind because it is a kind of breakdown that illuminates Dasein’s manner of Being: “anxiety—together with Dasein itself as disclosed in it—provides the phenomenal basis for explicitly grasping Dasein’s primordial totality of Being” (Heidegger, 227). What distinguishes anxiety from most other moods is that anxiety does not have an object in the same way that fear, for example, does: “That in the face of which one has anxiety is not an entity within-the-world” and “is completely indefinite” (Heidegger, 231). One is not anxious about bears, for example. Bears make sense in certain relational contexts, but in anxiety, the relational context falls away: “entities within-the-world are not 'relevant' at all. Nothing which is ready-to-hand or present-at-hand within the world functions as that in the face of which anxiety is anxious” (Heidegger, 231).

Thus, Heidegger says, the entire system of meaningfulness “collapses into itself”, and that “the world has the character of completely lacking significance” (Heidegger, 231). Anxiety’s objectlessness shows up to Dasein, which forces the realization that this absence of meaningfulness is not the usual state of affairs. Usually, the world is filled with meaning, and this fact is what shows up in anxiety: “The utter insignificance...does not signify that the world is absent, but tells us that entities within-the-world are of so little importance in themselves that on the basis of this insignificance of what is within-the-world, the world in its worldhood is all that still obtrudes itself” (Heidegger, 231). Thus, the fact and structure of meaningfulness—the world—is that in the face of which Dasein is anxious. Heidegger then notes, since the world forms part of the larger structure of Being-in-the-world, Being-in-the-world is another way of identifying anxiety’s object: “Being-in-the-world itself is that in the face of which anxiety is anxious” (Heidegger, 232).

That about which Dasein is anxious also is indistinct: “That which anxiety is profoundly anxious [*sich abangstet*] about is not a definite kind of Being for Dasein or a definite possibility

for it. Indeed the threat itself is indefinite, and therefore cannot penetrate threateningly to this or that factually concrete potentiality-for-Being” (Heidegger, 232). It turns out, Dasein is anxious about exactly what it is anxious in the face of: “That which anxiety is anxious about is Being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 232).

Since anxiety dissolves all meaningfulness, it turns out that anxiety takes away Dasein’s everyday public way of interpreting itself, what Heidegger calls the “they-self” (Heidegger, 167). Heidegger says, “If Dasein is familiar with itself as they-self, this means at the same time that the ‘they’ itself prescribes that way of interpreting the world and Being-in-the-world which lies closest. Dasein is for the sake of the ‘they’ in an everyday manner, and the ‘they’ itself articulates the referential context of significance” (Heidegger, 167). The “they-self” is the anonymous public source by which Dasein typically understands itself and its environment. The they-self does “what one does” and understands “how one understands”. As such, when Dasein exists as the they-self, it understands itself and the possibilities it projects through the they-self.

However, Dasein can distinguish itself from the they-self and instead be an authentic self, “the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way” (Heidegger, 167). Since anxiety collapses the world into meaninglessness, this includes Dasein’s everyday manner of interpreting itself according to the “they”: “Anxiety thus takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself...in terms of the ‘world’ and the way things have been publicly interpreted” (Heidegger, 232). This being the case, anxiety reveals to Dasein that its possibilities need not be governed by the they. Instead, Dasein can lucidly choose possibilities for itself: “Anxiety makes manifest in Dasein its Being towards its ownmost potentiality-for-Being—that is, its Being-free for the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself” (Heidegger, 232). In this way, anxiety can serve as the occasion for living authentically.

Death produces the breakdown of Being-in-the-world in a much more profound way. Death is a technical term for Heidegger. It does not refer to the end of a life, as when one is on

one's "deathbed". That is what Heidegger calls "demise" (Heidegger, 291). Death does not necessarily involve demise: "Dasein dies—and even when it dies authentically—it does not have to do so with an Experience of its factual demising" (Heidegger, 291). Death, for Heidegger, is an event of complete, permanent world collapse, "the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything" (Heidegger, 307). Whatever meaningful context in which Dasein was operating is no longer available, and neither is any sense of identity Dasein got from participating in that context.

Dasein is able to live in light of the fact that it is going to die, keeping in mind that it is the author of its decisions, not the they-self. Heidegger calls this "Being-towards-death" (Heidegger, 307). This ends up being key to authenticity: "Dasein is authentically itself only to the extent that...it projects itself upon its ownmost potentiality-for-Being rather than upon the possibility of the they-self" (Heidegger, 308). Here, "its ownmost potentiality-for-Being" refers to death (Heidegger, 307). The point is that in order to be authentic, Dasein must face the fact that it is the sort of entity that dies, and Dasein needs to make its choices for itself in light of this finitude, knowing that its choices—not the values of the they—determine who it is. Anxiety plays an important role here as the state-of-mind that keeps us "face-to-face with the 'nothing' of the possible impossibility of existence" (Heidegger, 310).

II.

Merleau-Ponty's conception of understanding is heavily influenced by Husserl, and to a lesser extent, by Heidegger: "In Husserl's language, beneath 'act intentionality'...we must acknowledge an 'operative' intentionality, which makes the former one possible and is what Heidegger calls 'transcendence'" (Merleau-Ponty, 441). Merleau-Ponty endorses something like Husserl's operative intentionality, believing that an inexplicit background knowledge is needed in order to account for higher order, schematic thinking. The idea is that things have to already be meaningful and relevant before any such schematic thinking can get a hold on them.

For Merleau-Ponty, on the most basic level at which one is oriented toward the world, the things one encounters within the world come whole and meaning-laden: “My perceptual act, taken in its naivete, does not itself accomplish this synthesis; it benefits from work already completed, from a general synthesis constituted once and for all” (Merleau-Ponty, 247). Merleau-Ponty’s specific version of this intentionality emphasizes the role of the body: “This is what I express by saying that I perceive with my body or with my senses, my body and my senses being precisely this habitual knowledge of the world, this implicit or sedimented science” (Merleau-Ponty, 247). For example, I find my hand already engaged in scratching some area of my body before I notice the area scratched in the first place. Sometimes I realize I have scratched something long after the act’s completion.

Thus, the body is already implicated in experience before any explicit thought takes place: “By saying that this intentionality is not a thought, we mean that it is not accomplished in the transparency of a consciousness, and that it takes up as acquired all of the latent knowledge that my body has of itself” (Merleau-Ponty, 241). It is important to point out, here, that “latent knowledge” does not imply anything cognitive or reflective. Rather, it is something closer to “skillful coping”, how Dreyfus describes Heidegger’s understanding (Dreyfus, 185). “Consciousness,” Merleau-Ponty tells us, “is originally not an ‘I think that,’ but rather an ‘I can’” (Merleau-Ponty, 139).

In order for the body to operate outside of explicit awareness, it has to be part of how one is in the world prior to thematic thought: “Bodily movement can only play a role in the perception of the world if it is itself an original intentionality, a manner of being related to the object that is distinct from knowledge” (Merleau-Ponty, 407). Note that here we get Merleau-Ponty’s explicit term for his embodied, prereflective version of understanding: “original intentionality”. For Merleau-Ponty, original intentionality is what makes it possible for one to function before the operation of anything like schematic thought. Because of original intentionality, things we encounter are already meaningful, ready for our engagement: “The

world must not exist around us as a system of objects whose synthesis we perform, but rather as an open ensemble of things toward which we project ourselves” (Merleau-Ponty, 407).

Merleau-Ponty understands the goal of philosophy to be looking into the original intentionality that gives sense to the world, and realizing how it makes this inquiry possible: “The task of a radical reflection...consists paradoxically in recovering the unreflective experience of the world in order to import the attitude of verification and reflective operations back into this experience, and in order to reveal reflection as one of the possibilities of my being” (Merleau-Ponty, 251). He is advocating something deeply phenomenological: describing experience how it actually shows up. Merleau-Ponty's innovation is showing that human experience is always already engaged in a meaningful world *through the body*: “True reflection presents me to myself, not as an idle and inaccessible subjectivity, but as identical to my presence in the world and to others, such as I currently bring it into being: I am everything that I see and I am an intersubjective field, not in spite of my body and my historical situation, but rather by being this body and this situation and by being, through them, everything else” (Merleau-Ponty, 478).

Merleau-Ponty describes embodied experience as animated by a number of different “fields”, e.g., vision, sexuality, morality, and class. These fields come together in experience, with a single “intentional arc” guaranteeing the possibility of each and thereby guaranteeing their unity and copresence: “the life of consciousness...is underpinned by an ‘intentional arc’ that projects around us our past, our future, our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation, or rather, that ensures that we are situated within all of these relationships” (Merleau-Ponty, 137). In typical phenomenological experience, these ostensibly different spheres of existence are always already unified: “Synesthetic perception is the rule and, if we do not notice it, this is because scientific knowledge displaces experience and we have unlearned seeing, hearing, and sensing in general in order to deduce what we ought to see, hear, or sense from our bodily organization and from the world as it is conceived by the

physicist” (Merleau-Ponty, 238). Only under special circumstances, e.g. scientific inquiry, does it make sense to think of the various fields comprising our experience as separate.

Two particular sections of *Phenomenology of Perception* where Merleau-Ponty discusses fields are relevant for purposes of phenomenology of intersectional identity. First, consider Merleau-Ponty’s famous discussion of sexuality. Merleau-Ponty is clear that sexuality rides on the intentional arc: “We will, all at once, discover sexual life as an original intentionality...by grounding all of these ‘processes’ upon an intentional arc” (Merleau-Ponty, 160). For Merleau-Ponty, sexuality falls into the same enmeshed schema of fields discussed in the above paragraph: “Sexuality...is not an autonomous cycle. It is internally linked to the whole thinking and acting being” (Merleau-Ponty, 160). For Merleau-Ponty, sexuality is not, e.g., the abstract description of one’s sexual preferences, but instead is the way the world solicits one’s action sexually: “the visible body is underpinned by a strictly individual sexual schema that accentuates erogenous zones, sketches out a sexual physiognomy, and calls forth the gestures of the masculine body, which is itself integrated into this affective totality” (Merleau-Ponty, 158). Merleau-Ponty’s discussion here is important because it acknowledges the significance of sexuality to one’s most basic embodied identity.

Second, consider a footnote in *Phenomenology of Perception* that is less frequently emphasized but particularly revelatory. Here, Merleau-Ponty argues that just as sexuality pervades the experience of people with sexuality, “so too [do] the economic and social drama offers each consciousness a certain background” (Merleau-Ponty, 177). Here, Merleau-Ponty also identifies social and economic factors as embodied fields, in addition to sexuality. Thus, Merleau-Ponty’s framework is (at least partially) set up to talk about multiple aspects of identity. Merleau-Ponty reaffirms the copresent, experience-saturating nature of various fields with, “[no] thought will be completely detached from the historical context in which [one] lives, and, in particular, from [one’s] economic situation... all motivations intersect at the center of history, and no part of our existence can ever be wholly transcended” (Merleau-Ponty, 177). Hence,

class and sexuality are always present but varyingly salient in the experiences of sexual people in a classed society. My social class and sexuality always condition my experience, but to different extents depending on the situation in which I find myself. Sexuality still conditions my experience even when the more relevant part of my identity is my social class. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology here coheres with the intersectional desideratum that each aspect of identity is always at play, just to greater or lesser degree of salience. Note, however, that Merleau-Ponty never gets close to the level of specificity in analyses produced by theorists of intersectionality, and he does not address the mutually constructing nature of identity categories. Nonetheless, Merleau-Ponty here aligns with the intersectional desideratum to avoid reduction or subordination of identity categories—specifically regarding subordination of identity categories, as no one identity category has primacy or priority over the others.

Merleau-Ponty directly confronts the reduction of identity categories: “Every cultural phenomenon has (among others) an economic significance and, no more than can history be reduced to economics, history in principle never transcends ethics, either” (Merleau-Ponty, 177). Merleau-Ponty is concerned to avoid a reductivist approach that would resemble the earlier Marxist standpoint theorists. This helps satisfy the intersectional desideratum to avoid reduction or subordination of identity categories—specifically regarding reduction between identity categories. For Merleau-Ponty, no one particular governing social dynamic is more fundamental than another—sexuality will never reduce to social class.

In a section making a similar anti-reductive point, Merleau-Ponty clarifies that, depending on circumstance, a particular field or set of fields can momentarily be prioritized:

It is impossible to reduce inter-human life either to economic relations or to juridical and moral relations conceived of by men, just as it is impossible to reduce the individual life either to bodily functions or to the knowledge that we have of that life. But one of the orders of signification can be considered dominant in each case, one gesture can be considered “sexual,” another one “loving,” and still another “warlike,” and even within coexistence, some period of history can be considered as above all cultural, or primarily political or economic. (Merleau-Ponty, 178)

Thus, Merleau-Ponty argues that some parts of our identity can come to matter more, while others withdraw from importance. This continues to address the intersectional desideratum for an explanation of identity salience, or how one aspect of identity can come to matter more than another.

Merleau-Ponty's reflections on breakdown are rather unique among existential phenomenologists. He does not describe breakdown from a first-person point of view, say as a result of anxiety or equipmental breakdown as in Heidegger. Rather, Merleau-Ponty talks about psychological patients with various pathologies that disrupt certain aspects of the patients' manners of Being-in-the-world, to use Heidegger's phrase. Merleau-Ponty's work here tells us a few ways we learn from observing breakdown in others. This is helpful in realizing the standpoint desideratum of avoiding exclusive formulations of standpoint privilege, inasmuch as it suggests that the knowledge gained from breakdown need not come from one's own experience.

One of Merleau-Ponty's most cited examples, the patient Schneider, is no longer able to project in ways that were previously available to him after "an injury isolated to the occipital region" (Merleau-Ponty, 158). Schneider has a hard time with projections involving a non-habitual use of his body. For example, Merleau-Ponty tells us, when Schneider closes his eyes, he loses the ability to project abstractly (Merleau-Ponty, 105). Eyes closed, Schneider is incapable of "movements that are not directed at any actual situation, such as moving his arms or legs upon command, or extending and flexing a finger" (Merleau-Ponty, 105). Further, under such circumstances Schneider is unaware of "the position of his body" and "at what point his body was touched" (Merleau-Ponty, 105). He can accomplish these tasks with his eyes open, or sometimes through "preparatory movements involving his whole body" (Merleau-Ponty, 105).

Schneider retains the ability to do habitual motions, motions that are caught up in a meaningful context: "the patient executes the movements that are necessary for life with extraordinary speed and confidence, provided they are habitual movements: he takes his

handkerchief from his pocket and blows his nose, or takes a match from a matchbox and lights a lamp” (Merleau-Ponty, 105). Merleau-Ponty argues that Schneider’s condition prevents him from successfully completing abstract movements, while he can still complete his habitual, originary intentional movements: “the same subject who is incapable of pointing to a part of his body on command quickly reaches with his hand for the point at which a mosquito is biting him” (Merleau-Ponty, 106).

Hence, there seems to be a separation between the deep originary intentionality that guarantees Schneider’s habitual movements and the higher order thought involved in abstract bodily motion. Merleau-Ponty then draws the conclusion, “It must thus be admitted that ‘grasping’ and ‘touching’ are different from ‘pointing,’ even for the body” (Merleau-Ponty, 106). In other words, apparently similar arrangements of the body (e.g., hand responding to itchy knee, hand grasping knee, hand pointing to knee) are gotten to through entirely different modes of projecting into the world, and being unable to see his body stops Schneider categorically from some of those actions while not from others: “The patient is conscious of bodily space as the envelope of his habitual action, but not as an objective milieu” (Merleau-Ponty, 107).

For Schneider, this is so dramatic that he cannot do any of these motions “half-heartedly”, which is to say, without taking up the entire embodied positions appropriate to the motions: “Along with the military salute come other external marks of respect. Along with the gesture of the right hand that pretends to comb his hair comes the gesture of the left hand that pretends to hold the mirror. Along with the gesture of the right hand that hammers the nail comes the gesture of the left hand that pretends to hold the nail” (Merleau-Ponty, 107). Schneider cannot just perform one part of the embodied movement because he can only take up these movements by projecting the entire context. So, when he feigns swinging a hammer with his right hand, he needs also to include his left hand as holding the nail, because holding the nail is part of projecting the context: “the patient only succeeds in carrying out concrete movements on command on condition of placing himself into the spirit of the actual situation to

which they correspond" (Merleau-Ponty, 107). Control subjects are able to "pretend" the movements, to vary them or do them half-heartedly, which, Merleau-Ponty says, "is what our patient can no longer do" (Merleau-Ponty, 107).

Schneider no longer can project into a number of situations: "He would like to be able to think about politics or religion, but he never even tries. He knows that these regions are no longer accessible to him" (Merleau-Ponty, 160). In particular, sexuality is a "region" that is mostly off-limits to Schneider. Schneider does not really have any turn-ons (Merleau-Ponty, 157). He only becomes aroused in a strictly physiological sense, and even then it seems a matter of response: "Reactions are strictly local and never begin without contact" (Merleau-Ponty, 157). Schneider is easily distracted from sex and has no strong drive or integration into the sexual situation. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "If foreplay is interrupted...the sexual cycle does not seek to be continued... If his partner reaches orgasm first and moves away, the nascent desire fades away. Things happen at each moment as if the subject did not know what to do. There are no active movements, except for a few instants prior to orgasm, which is itself quite brief" (Merleau-Ponty, 157).

Merleau-Ponty here sees a breakdown occurring in Schneider's sexuality at the level of projection: "The patient has lost the power of projecting before himself a sexual world, of putting himself into an erotic situation" (Merleau-Ponty, 158). In Merleau-Ponty's terminology, the originary intentionality that animated Schneider's sexuality no longer functions. Things that used to elicit sexuality from Schneider "have, so to speak, ceased speaking to his body, ceased situating it within the relation of sexuality" (Merleau-Ponty, 159). Schneider simply is not in, and cannot get himself into, a sexual world: "the patient has ceased posing to his surroundings that silent and permanent question that defines normal sexuality... if the subject perceives the situation indifferently, this is first of all because he does not live it and because he is not committed to it" (Merleau-Ponty, 159).

Merleau-Ponty argues that Schneider's case shows that, for people with sexuality, sexuality occurs at the level of ordinary intentionality: "We will, all at once, discover sexual life as an original intentionality...by grounding all of these 'processes' upon an 'intentional arc' that weakens for the patient and that for the normal subject gives experience its degree of vitality and fecundity" (Merleau-Ponty, 160). Merleau-Ponty here deploys the notion of an "intentional arc" to explain the projection of original intentionality, in particular sexual projection. While pathologies such as Schneider's reveal that specific parts of the intentional arc can be blocked off, for patients without such pathologies, an intentional arc "projects around us our past, our future, our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation, or rather, that ensures that we are situated within all of these relationships" (Merleau-Ponty, 137).

Through these observations, Merleau-Ponty shows that the intentional arc "holds it all together", so to speak. It "creates the unity of the senses, the unity of the senses with intelligence, and the unity of sensitivity and motricity" (Merleau-Ponty, 137). Sexuality, too, is included in this: "Sexuality, then, is not an autonomous cycle. It is internally linked to the whole thinking and acting being" (Merleau-Ponty, 160). However, due to his injury, there are severe disturbances in the way Schneider's intentional arc projects. Merleau-Ponty argues that the intentional arc "is what 'goes limp' in the disorder" (Merleau-Ponty, 137).

III.

Gadamer tells us that understanding is the main focus of *Truth and Method*. The book is devoted to the question, "how is understanding possible?" (Gadamer, xxvii). Gadamer explicitly adopts much of Heidegger's program, including the view of understanding as undergirding all human experience: "Heidegger's temporal analytics of Dasein has, I think, shown convincingly that understanding is not just one of the various possible behaviors of the subject but the mode of being of Dasein itself" (Gadamer, xxvii). However, while Heidegger focused on "the very

projectiveness of understanding—i.e., the futurity of Dasein”, Gadamer “emphasized the assimilation of what is past and of tradition” (Gadamer, xxxiv).

Of course, for Gadamer, understanding is still a matter of projection: “understanding is Dasein’s mode of being, insofar as it is potentiality-for-being and ‘possibility’” (Gadamer, 250). That said, Gadamer thinks one of Heidegger’s greatest contributions to the formulation of understanding is “[deriving] the circular structure of understanding from the temporality of Dasein” (Gadamer, 268). Gadamer is referring to a section of *Being and Time*, about five pages long, in which Heidegger explicates how interpretation operates as a possibility of understanding (Heidegger, 191-95). While a full treatment of this is beyond the scope and needs of this project, one important upshot is the following: by construing understanding itself in terms of ecstatic temporality, Heidegger opens the way for Gadamer’s focus on the way our facticity influences our understanding.

Facticity is at work in understanding, because any projection is done on the basis of a world that already shows up as meaningful: “Dasein that projects itself on its own potentiality-for-being has always already ‘been.’ This is the meaning of the existential of ‘thrownness’” (Gadamer, 254). On Gadamer’s reading, Heidegger’s innovation is to realize that no matter what, just by being what it is, Dasein projects on the basis of a pre-given background of meaning: “no freely chosen relation toward one’s own being can get behind the facticity of this being. Everything that makes possible and limits Dasein’s projection ineluctably precedes it” (Gadamer, 254). Since transcendence requires an already sensible world for projection, projection without such a context is impossible.

Gadamer develops a view of understanding that partly grasps its commonsense use. He says, “We begin with this proposition: ‘to understand means to come to an understanding with each other’. Understanding is, primarily, agreement. Thus, people usually understand each other immediately, or they make themselves understood with a view toward reaching agreement” (Gadamer, 180). Understanding, as Gadamer explains it, is always something that

happens between interlocutors (e.g., authors, conversation partners, communities), and is in a sense directed toward agreement about something.

Thus, there is something like an “object” of understanding: “Coming to an understanding, then, is always coming to an understanding about something. Understanding each other [*sich verstehen*] is always understanding each other with respect to something” (Gadamer, 180). However, it would be wrong to construe this “object” according to the Cartesian subject/object tradition that Gadamer is trying to subvert. In order to avoid subjectivism, Gadamer has to construe the “object” of understanding rather as the living, historical meaning of the object, not some private relationship to it: “understanding is never a subjective relation to a given ‘object’ but to the history of its effect” (Gadamer, xxviii). Gadamer gets around subjectivism by formulating understanding such that Dasein is already caught up and participating in what is understood: “understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood” (Gadamer, xxviii).

Gadamer clarifies how understanding unfolds by discussing the cycle of projecting meaning. When encountering anything to be understood, Dasein from the start projects, at least vaguely: one “projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text” (Gadamer, 269). Realistically, members of literate societies are projecting a great deal already before seeing the actual text. They would project that it is a text and as such, it is to be read, and even probably to be opened in a particular way. In the past, I have projected the expectation that a text is in a language I can read, only to be confronted with an alphabet completely foreign to me.

As Gadamer points out, we frequently come to texts already anticipating quite a bit about them. If I pick up a Heidegger text with which I am unfamiliar, I expect to encounter themes I already know, maybe specific themes depending on the work’s title. Thus, Dasein projects at least a vague preliminary understanding of a text because Dasein already carries “particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning” (Gadamer, 269). This preliminary understanding is gradually articulated and changed as Dasein digs into the text: “Working out this fore-projection,

which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there” (Gadamer, 269). On Gadamer’s view, understanding is this cycle in which Dasein gradually revises the meaning it projects: “interpretation begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones. This constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation” (Gadamer, 269).

This being the case, Dasein’s goal in understanding should be to foreground its preliminary projections as best as possible and to approach them critically. Dasein must “explicitly...examine the legitimacy—i.e., the origin and validity—of the fore-meanings dwelling within” it (Gadamer, 270). The hope here is that Dasein can achieve a critical stance facing its basic tendencies for interpreting things, allowing it to gradually develop a robust interpretation: “understanding realizes its full potential only when the fore-meanings that it begins with are not arbitrary” (Gadamer, 270). The idea that there is such a thing as a “full potential” of understanding may be problematic, but Gadamer’s point is persuasive. A robust interpretation that nonetheless accords with the text is easier to get to if one is aware of one’s difference from the author: “this kind of sensitivity involves neither ‘neutrality’ with respect to content nor the extinction of one’s self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one’s own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings” (Gadamer, 272).

Ultimately, Gadamer says, the past dimension of understanding that Dasein receives comes to Dasein in the form of “prejudices”, any revisions of which still operate in understanding as prejudices. However, prejudices for Gadamer are not necessarily bad: “‘prejudice’ certainly does not necessarily mean a false judgment, but part of the idea is that it can have either a positive or a negative value” (Gadamer, 273). The point is to recognize that Dasein operates on the basis of tacit assumptions of which it is frequently unaware, not all of which are problematic: “There are such things as *prejuges legitimes*” (Gadamer, 273)

Gadamer's analysis of prejudices subverts modern philosophy's pretension to presuppositionless beginnings. Gadamer says, "the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power" (Gadamer, 273). In Gadamer's program, there is no such thing as a neutral standpoint: "The recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust" (Gadamer, 272). In claiming to rid the world of prejudices, modern philosophers covered over the very real and necessary influence of the past.

Our past gives us our prejudices, and our prejudices in turn condition what is available to our awareness: "a hermeneutical situation is determined by the prejudices that we bring with us. They constitute, then, the horizon of a particular present, for they represent that beyond which it is impossible to see" (Gadamer, 304-05). Understanding reaches its pinnacle in Gadamer when Dasein is able to sufficiently able to foreground its present horizon's prejudices and those of the interlocutor such that a "fusion of horizons" may occur: "understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves" (Gadamer, 305).

Gadamer takes pains to emphasize the situational character of understanding, and how considering the interlocutor's situation factors into the process. "We do not try to transpose ourselves into the author's mind," Gadamer says, "but...we try to transpose ourselves into the perspective within which he has formed his views" (Gadamer, 292). To explain this, Gadamer introduces the concepts situation, standpoint (*Standort*), and horizon (*Horizont*). We see the connection between *Standort* and *Horizont* first in a commonly quoted passage from *Truth and Method*: "We define the concept of 'situation' by saying that it represents a standpoint [*Standort*] that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential to the concept of situation is the concept of 'horizon.' [*Horizont*] The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer 2004, 301).³⁰ Here, we see that a *Standort* in some

³⁰ Cf. (Martín Alcoff, 95), (Vessey 2009 526-27, 532), (Warnke 2012, 14).

sense conditions the *Horizont*. Because you stand where you stand (your *Standort*), you see what you see (your *Horizont*).

This quote occurs in a paragraph specifically addressing limits—its first sentence reads, “Every finite present has its limitations [*Schranken*]” (Gadamer 2004, 301)—and the *Standort* is that which limits the situation. David Vessey agrees with this way of parsing the concepts, though he does not comment on translation issues with “*Standort*”: “A standpoint limits what we can see, but it is not the horizon that is presented as the limit. Rather the horizon is ‘everything that can be seen’” (Vessey 2009, 532). This characterization of the connection between *Standort* and *Horizont* in the section translated above comes out better in German, “*Zum Begriff der Situation gehört daher wesentlich der Begriff des Horizontes*” (Gadamer 1960, 307), which, drawing out this distinction, reads closer to, “The concept of the horizon is thus constitutive of the concept of the situation”. On Gadamer’s reasoning, it is because [“*daher*”/“thus”] of unavoidable limitations [*Schranken*] that we define the situation in terms of a *Standort* that limits [*beschränkt*] the attendant *Horizont*.

The connection between *Standort* and *Horizont* comes up a page later in a section where Gadamer is discussing an intuitive but problematic conception of hermeneutic engagement: “a conversation that we have with someone simply in order to get to know him—i.e., to discover where he is coming from [*seinen Standort*] and his horizon [*Horizont*]” (Gadamer 2004, 302). This does not fit Gadamer’s robust conception of conversation, as Gadamer has in mind conversation directed at agreement over a subject matter, not a “getting to know you” conversation. That said, Gadamer still indicates that what is epistemically relevant in a particular conversation partner is their *Standort* and *Horizont*. This happens again later in the paragraph, with Gadamer pointing out that this naive conception of conversation leaves out the cooperative nature of interpersonal understanding: “In a conversation, when we have discovered the other person’s standpoint [*Standort*] and horizon [*Horizont*], his ideas become intelligible without our necessarily having to agree with him” (Gadamer 2004, 302).

As the discussion of horizons advances, Gadamer continues to deploy the *Standort/Horizont* distinction: “*Es macht die geschichtliche Bewegtheit des menschlichen Daseins aus, daß es keine schlechthinnige Standortgebundenheit besitzt und daher auch niemals einen wahrhaft geschlossenen Horizont. Der Horizont ist vielmehr etwas, in das wir hineinwandern und das mit uns mitwandert. Dem Beweglichen verschieben sich die Horizonte*” (Gadamer 1960, 309). The standard English translation renders this, “The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving” (Gadamer 2004, 303). However, the German reinforces the connection between *Standort* and *Horizont* a bit more, making a jargon-focused English translation closer to, “[Dasein] possesses no absolute standpoint-boundedness [*Standortgebundenheit*] and thus also never a truly closed horizon [*Horizont*]”). We see here that Gadamer starts *from* Dasein having no absolute boundedness [*gebundenheit*] to a *Standort*, and argues *toward* Dasein having no closed *Horizont*. Gadamer’s *Standort/Horizont* distinction here coheres with the insight from standpoint theory that one’s position conditions what one is able to know.

With respect to breakdown, Gadamer traces his lineage through Schleiermacher: “Unintelligibility...has for Schleiermacher a completely different, universal significance” (Gadamer, 184). On Gadamer’s reading, Schleiermacher was the first to claim that this sort of breakdown pervades hermeneutic experience: “Schleiermacher’s idea of a universal hermeneutics starts from this: that the experience of the alien and the possibility of misunderstanding is universal” (Gadamer, 179). Gadamer sees in Schleiermacher the beginnings of a philosophy in which breakdown is productive for understanding.

One tends to notice things when they become problematic in experience: “Understanding becomes a special task only when natural life...is disturbed” (Gadamer, 181). For Gadamer, this is a general rule in all understanding, including the understanding of

interlocutors. Gadamer claims that only heavy breakdown in normal conversation makes Dasein “aware of the individuality of the Thou and take account of his uniqueness” (Gadamer, 181). Such disruptions are needed to point out that disagreeing interlocutors are not just confused about each other’s views, but that they disagree because their prejudices disagree. This amount to saying they disagree because of their different situations.

Owing to Schleiermacher's influence, Gadamer’s account of breakdown is a matter of being “pulled up short” while trying to understand one’s interlocutor. In reading or in conversation, Dasein becomes aware that it and its interlocutor understand things differently when the interlocutor’s words do not make sense according to Dasein’s projection of those words: “How do we discover that there is a difference between our own customary usage and that of the text? ...generally we do so in the experience of being pulled up short by the text. Either it does not yield any meaning at all or its meaning is not compatible with what we had expected. This is what brings us up short and alerts us to a possible difference in usage” (Gadamer, 270).

For example, I had an experience of being pulled up short by a topic in Gadamer that I am guessing is common because my students express it...and so does Gadamer. Gadamer’s use of the word prejudice, by his admission, “seems a long way from our current use of the word” (Gadamer, 273). When I first encountered "prejudice" in *Truth and Method*, I suddenly realized that Gadamer was using the word in a way that I was not prepared to find meaningful. I could not fit it in my horizon. However, I worked through the text and got to the parts where Gadamer clarifies his use of the term, which helped me understand the earlier passages that caused the breakdown.

For this reason, Gadamer argues, breakdown helps with foregrounding prejudices for the sake of understanding. After discussing the importance of dredging up one’s prejudices for the sake of understanding, Gadamer notes a difficulty: how does one willfully uncover prejudices of which one is unaware? He says, “It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a

prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed” (Gadamer, 298). Rather, prejudices need to be “provoked” (Gadamer, 298). Gadamer then says, “The encounter with a traditionary text can provide this provocation” (Gadamer, 298). Of course, though, one should reasonably be able to encounter such breakdown regardless of if the interlocutor is a text or a friend, so long as the interlocutor’s situation is sufficiently different to produce such breakdown in the context of the conversation. This account of breakdown works toward the standpoint desideratum of avoiding exclusive formulations of standpoint privilege, though differently than that of Merleau-Ponty. Whereas Merleau-Ponty focuses on psychopathological phenomenology and what it reveals about the phenomenology of otherwise healthy people, Gadamer focuses on how disruptions in conversation allow us to see from the perspectives of others. As with Merleau-Ponty, knowledge gained from breakdown need not come from one’s own experience, but Gadamer’s approach is directed more at interpersonal understanding.

IV.

Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer each develop unique formulations of breakdown. Heidegger’s formulations of breakdown happen to a particular person. That is, the various versions of equipmental breakdown, along with anxiety and death, are disruptive for an individual. When a tool fails, it becomes un-ready-to-hand or present-at-hand for the person trying to use it. Anxiety and death also happen to a particular person: one becomes anxious over the bare fact of having to choose one’s own project, and death occurs when one’s particular project is no longer possible. Further, Heidegger’s formulations of breakdown can illuminate a variety of structures. Equipmental breakdown can draw attention to the equipment that fails to serve its purpose, as well as to the entire equipmental context into which the failing equipment fits. Anxiety and death, on the other hand, illuminate the entire phenomenon of worldhood, along with the unavoidability of choosing a particular project that makes the particular world meaningful.

Merleau-Ponty's formulations of breakdown happen to a particular person, as in Heidegger. However, Merleau-Ponty's breakdown is different from Heidegger's in important respects. While Heidegger focuses on the way a particular person experiences breakdown, revealing things to that particular person, Merleau-Ponty observes breakdown in others. That said, Merleau-Ponty's observations of breakdown in others reflect back on his own experience. In Merleau-Ponty, psychopathological breakdown is the occasion for understanding both the phenomenology of people with those pathologies and the phenomenology of people without those afflictions. For example, Merleau-Ponty discusses how Schneider's condition alienates Schneider from his previous experience of sexuality and politics, illuminating a failure in how sexuality and political engagement were previously unified with the rest of his experience through their connection to the intentional arc. This third-person observation, for Merleau-Ponty, in turn reflects back on the phenomenology of others without such disorders: most people have sexuality, many people are politically engaged, and these parts of our identity permeate experience because the intentional arc unifies them. Merleau-Ponty articulates Schneider's experience, and then articulates his own experience by comparison. However, there are serious problems with Merleau-Ponty's presentation. First, he ignores the existence of healthy asexual people, and second, he describes sexuality only in terms of masculine embodiment. We can deal with these problems by acknowledging first, that many people who are not pathological cases do not have sexuality, and second, that sexuality is not limited to "the gestures of the masculine body" (Merleau-Ponty, 158).

Gadamer's formulation of breakdown is significantly different from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's formulations, even if Gadamer presupposes a mostly Heideggerian framework. This is because Gadamer's formulation of breakdown comes from Schleiermacher's hermeneutic program, rather than from Husserl or Heidegger's phenomenological programs. Unlike both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's formulations of breakdown in the individual, Gadamer's breakdown occurs because of a disruption of communication between conversation

partners. As noted above, Gadamer says we are "pulled up short" when we realize that our sense of meaning diverges from that of our conversation partner. This breakdown then becomes the occasion for understanding the divergence between one's views and the views of one's conversational partners. While breakdown in Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty delivers personal insights, Gadamer's breakdown delivers interpersonal insights.

Of the figures detailed in this chapter, Merleau-Ponty is the most useful for addressing the desiderata for theory of identity and knowledge laid out in the previous chapter. As argued above, his work helps us begin addressing the intersectional desiderata, first, that each aspect of identity is always at play, just to greater or lesser degree of salience, and second, that we should avoid reduction or subordination of identity categories. Merleau-Ponty also helps us begin addressing the standpoint desideratum of avoiding exclusive formulations of standpoint privilege. While Gadamer is less helpful than Merleau-Ponty here, his work also helps us begin addressing this same standpoint desideratum of avoiding exclusive formulations of standpoint privilege. Further, Gadamer's *Standort/Horizont* distinction helps us formulate the connection between our position and what we are able to know, which is one of the most basic insights of standpoint theory.

CHAPTER 3: THE PREREFLECTIVE AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF PRIVILEGE: TOWARDS A STANDPOINT THEORY

In this chapter, I discuss the role of prereflective comportment in phenomenology as part of my attempt to formulate a standpoint theory that accommodates the insights of feminist work on intersectionality. First, I discuss Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's use of the prereflective. Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty both construe ordinary experience as prereflective, meaning both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty think that, in general, we tend to move through the world without much explicit, reflective attention. On this view, our habitual prereflective behaviors are disrupted only under unusual circumstances. For Heidegger, the prereflective breaks down when something goes wrong with a tool while trying to achieve a particular task. For example, I never think about the screen of my smartphone unless something goes poorly. If the screen cracked or gets covered in peanut butter, I have to engage in reflective, explicit thought in order to get the screen back in working condition. Further, for Heidegger, the prereflective breaks down under conditions of anxiety and death. For example, the day I realized I would never make my mother rich left me with a profound sense of anxiety at the death of a project I had not even known mattered to me. The experience forced me to directly, reflectively confront the fact that I am the sort of being who engages in finite projects, and that all of my projects have an inevitable terminus. For Merleau-Ponty, the prereflective breaks down in psychopathological cases. Merleau-Ponty's example is the case of Schneider, a man with a number of psychological difficulties caused by a piece of shrapnel in his occipital lobe (Merleau-Ponty, 158). Schneider's injury disrupts his ability to behave in a number of ways that were not problematic before his injury, including, for example, his ability to have sex (Merleau-Ponty, 157).

Second, I discuss Ortega's criticism of phenomenologies that maintain the view that "ordinary experience" is prereflective. Ortega is influenced by Heidegger, but she does not think that Heidegger's portrayal of prereflective ordinary experience fits the experiences described by Latina feminists like Anzaldúa and Lugones. In order to set up Ortega's criticism, I explain Anzaldúa's *Coatlícué* state, along with Lugones' 'world'-traveling and being at ease. To the extent that there is such a thing as "ordinary experience" for marginalized multiplicitous people, that experience is not one of prereflective smooth absorption into tasks. Rather, Anzaldúa and Lugones describe forms of experience with frequent disruptions requiring explicit reflection. Ortega holds up the experiences described by Latina feminists in comparison to experiences described by Heidegger in order to show that the experiences of marginalized people frequently depart from Heidegger's characterization of ordinary experience as primarily prereflective. Ortega discusses how world-travelling can help one familiarize oneself with horizons one would otherwise not have available, helping us address the standpoint desideratum of avoiding exclusive formulations of standpoint privilege.

Third, I discuss how Martín Alcoff and Ortega fuse Gadamer's concept of a horizon with Merleau-Ponty's formulation of embodiment. Martín Alcoff likes what Gadamer does with horizons, as it provides a way of talking about the interplay of the self, society, and knowledge (Martín Alcoff, 102). As horizons can be shared among people inhabiting similar situations, horizons offer an explanation for how it is that people sharing identity categories frequently come to similar interpretations of their environment. However, Martín Alcoff criticizes Gadamer for not taking the body seriously, as an account of the body is crucial for discussing identity categories structured around literally visible embodied traits (Martín Alcoff, 102). Ortega likes Martín Alcoff's innovation, here, but she is concerned that Martín Alcoff does not make use of the strengths of the hybrid Gadamerian/Merleau-Pontyan account insofar as it can help explain the experience of multiplicity (Ortega 2016, 152). Ortega focuses on the role of horizons in the hybrid account, arguing that we can use multiple interpretive horizons to explain the variety of

interpretations available to marginalized multiplicitous selves (Ortega 2016, 152-55). Ortega argues here that identities become more or less relevant depending on context, helping us address the intersectional desideratum of explaining the varying salience of different identity categories

I then turn back to the discussion of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty in Chapter 2 to in an attempt to show how Gadamer's *Standort/Horizont* distinction can be used to clarify the relationship between our social position and the horizon available to us. This may enable us to see the similarities between Martín Alcoff and Ortega's phenomenologies, one the one hand, and the basic insights of standpoint theory, on the other, and in so doing, help achieve Martín Alcoff's goal of articulating the relationship between social position and knowledge (Martín Alcoff, 88). I then attempt to show how Merleau-Ponty's pluralistic notion of "fields" can bring greater attention to the multiplicity in Martín Alcoff's account called for by Ortega. As Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that fields are multiple and varying in salience, fields form an effective construct for discussing embodied multiplicity. I then turn to how Martín Alcoff addresses concerns about relativism in judgments made from particular social situations in accordance with the standpoint desideratum of avoiding relativism with respect to standpoint privilege. Martín Alcoff argues that Gadamer's formulation of horizons explains the relationship between a social position and the knowledge attendant to that position in such a way as to avoid relativism (Martín Alcoff, 96). I argue that her account avoids charges of relativism best once it integrates the body, as literally visible embodied characteristics play a crucial role in how we are separated into groups and how those groups are related to the production of knowledge.

I conclude this chapter by connecting Harding's discussion of the Monster from Chapter 1 with Lugones' concept of "animation". For Harding, "the Monster" refers to the mythical maximally privileged person: an able, straight, white, masculine, male, cisgender citizen of means. For Lugones, "animation" refers to how we appear to others according to stereotypes that often do not resemble our own experiences or self-understandings. While we can

sometimes influence how we animate a particular stereotype, it is often out of our control. I discuss my experiences of animating the Monster: how it is that I often show up to people as having privileged identity categories that I do not actually occupy. I argue that animating the Monster sets me up for a particular breakdown experience in the mode of Gadamer's being "pulled up short". As I find myself in a lot of apparently homogeneous environments where people know little to nothing about the ways I am marginalized, I end up hearing the disturbing things people say about how people like me should be dealt with. This pulls me up short in the sense that I suddenly realize my conversation partner's understanding is different from mine, as they have no clue that they are talking to a member of the group they are maligning. I then argue that this discloses information to me about their Gadamerian *Standort/Horizont* structure. I know that my conversation partner's horizon is flawed in that they are unable to appropriately interpret my identity and I know that my conversation partner's *Standort* is not set up in such a way as to have an appropriate horizon, which is to say my conversation partner is not in a position to know much about me.

I.

At work in both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty is the idea that understanding consists in smooth, prereflective absorption into tasks. When this absorption is disrupted, we are often forced into reflective engagement with the problematic situation at hand. We thus use the language of "breakdown" because something *breaks down* that smooth, prereflective absorption and forces us into a more reflective orientation. I leave Gadamer out of this discussion because, on my reading, Gadamer devotes comparatively little attention to the prereflective. That said, Gadamer presupposes much of Heidegger's framework, and the prereflective does make its way into *Truth and Method*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Gadamer's version of breakdown presupposes prereflective ordinary experience: "Understanding becomes a special task only when natural life...is disturbed" (Gadamer, 181).

There are a number of important functions of the prereflective in Heidegger. One place where Heidegger appeals to a prereflective philosophical mechanism is in the discussion of equipment. Heidegger's examples are a hammer (Heidegger, 98), as well as the entire equipmental context of his writing room: "ink-stand, pen, ink, paper, blotting pad, table, lamp, furniture, windows, doors, room" (Heidegger, 97). On Heidegger's view, when equipment is in use and directed toward an appropriate task, the sort of knowledge Dasein manifests in so using equipment is not at all explicit. Heidegger thinks we need not consciously appeal to the physical mechanics describing the object's motion, or even the equipment's being as equipment: "in such dealings an entity of this kind is not grasped thematically as an occurring Thing, nor is the equipment-structure known as such even in the using" (Heidegger, 98). For example, I never really think about my office chair unless something is wrong with it. Usually, I just work my way in front of my computer, and I find myself in my chair without conceiving of the chair in any explicit way at all, thematically or equipmentally.

Part of why Dasein is able to behave on this prereflective, inexplicit level is because in so using equipment, Dasein is oriented towards equipment in terms of the goal currently being accomplished. Dasein is not interested in dissecting and interrogating the equipment, but rather is interested in using it: "In dealings such as this, where something is put to use, our concern subordinates itself to the 'in-order-to' which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time" (Heidegger, 98). I use my chair "in-order-to" read and type, and that goes well most of the time without explicitly thinking about it. On Heidegger's view, Dasein's "knowledge" of equipment is most manifest in the using of it: "the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is—as equipment" (Heidegger, 98).

The sort of being equipment has (i.e., the way equipment *is*), Heidegger calls "readiness-to-hand". Dreyfus translates this term as "availableness" (Dreyfus, xi). Conceiving of readiness-to-hand as availableness helps draw out Heidegger's technical sense: we say that

something is available without further ado, available immediately, available for use, available in the sense of being around if needed. Something is available in the sense of readiness-to-hand is not discoverable through abstract reasoning: “No matter how sharply we just look at the ‘outward appearance’ of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand” (Heidegger, 98). The entire time I have owned this chair, I have never had to consider the physics governing its use, and such knowledge could never tell me how to sit in it.

This is not to say using equipment is not deliberate or directed: “when we deal with [equipment] by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight, by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific Thingly character” (Heidegger, 98). The prereflective coping by which we effectively use equipment makes it possible to accomplish tasks without being distracted by the irrelevant features discovered in reflection, thereby saving us from a lot of grief, perhaps including broken thumbs in the case of poor hammer use. Heidegger calls this prereflective knowledge of equipment “circumspection” (Heidegger, 98)

Heidegger further clarifies the prereflective operation of circumspection through one of the characteristics of the ready-to-hand. He says that good equipment “withdraws” from awareness: “The peculiarity of what is proximally ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdraw in order to be ready-to-hand quite authentically” (Heidegger, 99). If my chair is serving its purpose well, I should not even notice it. It “withdraws” from my explicit attention. When I am using my office chair, just as when I am also using my keyboard, computer, monitor, desk, and books, what I find myself most absorbed in while using them is the actual task. When writing goes well, I do not think about the equipment I use for it. My focus is rather on the project at hand: in this case, writing a dissertation.

Another place we see the prereflective at work in Heidegger is in his concept, “Being-in-the-world”: “Being-in-the-world...amounts to a non-thematic circumspective absorption in references or assignments constitutive for the readiness-to-hand of a totality of equipment. Any

concern is already as it is, because of some familiarity with the world” (Heidegger, 107). By “references and assignments”, Heidegger is referring to the interrelations in his holistic understanding of equipmental contexts: as mentioned in the previous chapter, equipment is always “in-order-to” accomplish some task, the tasks’ goals are that “towards-which” using equipment strives, and the “for-the-sake-of-which” ends up as the master concept—something like an identity-defining role Dasein projects—“towards-which” all other towards-whiches contribute (Heidegger, 97, 99, 116). Being-in-the-world, according to Heidegger, is thus guided by circumspection in such a way that it is immediately integrated into these structures when it performs most tasks—again, without explicit, reflective attention. In Heidegger’s language, Dasein is “absorbed” into its world in the performance of any task.

The prereflective here operates on another level. While he has not yet introduced the idea of a for-the-sake-of-which, Heidegger already is giving us the sense that we project such possibilities for ourselves always, though frequently not reflectively: “Dasein always understands itself...in terms of a possibility of itself... Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them, or grown up in them already. Only the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting” (Heidegger, 33). Dasein, so long as it is Dasein, interprets itself by projecting a for-the-sake-of-which. We typically do so through neglecting, not taking hold.

This reason is that Dasein’s nature encourages “falling” unthinkingly into the roles given to it as possibilities: “Dasein prepares for itself a constant temptation towards falling. Being-in-the-world is in itself tempting” (Heidegger, 221). This relates back to Heidegger’s concept of the “they”, an “inconspicuous domination by Others which has already been taken over unawares from Dasein” (Heidegger, 164). Heidegger thinks this force of “inconspicuous domination” is inconspicuous because, for the most part, its operation goes unnoticed, and it dominates because it forms the public frame of reference that sets standards and purposes for people in general.

Dasein gets its initial sense of meaningfulness and purpose from the they: “We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back; we find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking” (Heidegger, 164). This is because the they sets the initial public standards of meaningfulness for all Dasein (Heidegger, 167). For Heidegger, this enables Dasein to get on well in society (Heidegger says Dasein is “*disburdened* by the they” (Heidegger, 165)), but it also encourages Dasein to avoid owning up to things: “because the ‘they’ presents every judgment and decision as its own, it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability” (Heidegger, 165).³¹ Dasein frequently avoids responsibility by proxying its justifications to the they.

This helps explain the “temptation” of falling Heidegger talks about above (Heidegger, 221). Falling is about unreflectively interpreting things the easy way, which is to say interpreting things as Dasein has been instructed to do so by its surrounding culture: falling “has mostly the character of Being-lost in the publicness of the ‘they’” (Heidegger, 220). This typical state is what Heidegger meant by projecting for-the-sake-of-whiches “by neglecting” (Heidegger, 33). Hence, even the defining roles Dasein takes up, Dasein takes those up on the basis of the they without thinking. It is only in rare cases of authenticity that Dasein chooses its for-the-sake-of-which, willfully and soberly bringing meaning to its world.

The prereflective plays important roles in Merleau-Ponty’s system, accounting for both the unity and the plurality of experience. Merleau-Ponty’s formulates the intentional arc (discussed in the previous chapter) as functioning prereflectively. As such, the intentional arc is

³¹ Ask a neoliberal capitalist why they bankrupted their company at the expense of their employees toward personal gain—you might get a response like, “that’s just what one does—one pursues rational self-interest”. Cf. Donald Trump’s interruption in the first 2016 presidential debate: “CLINTON: ...maybe he doesn’t want the American people, all of you watching tonight, to know that he’s paid nothing in federal taxes, because the only years that anybody’s ever seen were a couple of years when he had to turn them over to state authorities when he was trying to get a casino license, and they showed he didn’t pay any federal income tax. TRUMP: That makes me smart” (“Full transcript: First 2016 presidential debate”).

the guarantor of meaning, always already projecting the basic sense of the world that allows one to get a grip on things. The intentional arc is responsible for animating things often relegated to higher order thinking, such as ideology and morality.

Merleau-Ponty says the intentional arc operates prereflectively: “By saying that this intentionality is not a thought, we mean that it is not accomplished in the transparency of a consciousness, and that it takes up as acquired all of the latent knowledge that my body has of itself” (Merleau-Ponty, 241). Merleau-Ponty here shows how his version of intentionality functions as an inexplicit background coping through the body. For example, the path from my bed to the bathroom has one particular corner with obstacles that are easy to kick accidentally if no lights are on. I have noticed that when I walk to the bathroom at night, as I turn that corner, my toes curl under, and my feet swipe across the floor rather stiffly in a fan shape around the corner. Sometimes I am vaguely conscious of a sense of trepidation and a desire to withdraw into myself—sometimes I feel the muscles in my shoulders hunch together as part of the process. But I never noticed any of this until I was already incredibly proficient at it.

Merleau-Ponty puts this in a way that directly confronts the Cartesian tradition he is trying to escape: “Consciousness is originally not an ‘I think that,’ but rather an ‘I can’” (Merleau-Ponty, 139). The “thinking thing”, to the extent that there is such a thing, operates on the basis of pre-given meanings and functions that form in and through the body without necessarily becoming explicit: “Consciousness is being toward the thing through the intermediary of the body” (Merleau-Ponty, 140). I awkwardly but successfully walk around the dangerous corner in the dark because my body has, without my deliberate direction, “learned” how to get by in that situation: “A movement is learned when the body has understood it, that is, when it has incorporated it into its ‘world’” (Merleau-Ponty, 140). The fact that my shoulders pull together as part of the movement despite the fact that they are in no danger suggests that, even in my borderline somnambulance, my entire body is drawn into a mood of carefulness as it avoids obstacles that remain mostly below the ankle.

For people with sexuality, on Merleau-Ponty's view, the intentional arc also animates the sexual world prereflectively. That is to say, not just bodies, but also places and situations automatically appear to us as laden with sexual significance: "the visible body is underpinned by a strictly individual sexual schema that accentuates erogenous zones, sketches out a sexual physiognomy, and calls forth the gestures of the masculine body, which is itself integrated into this affective totality" (Merleau-Ponty, 158). Sexual bodies already know how to send hands to back, lips to neck, without anything resembling explicit reasoning and conscious goal-direction. These things called *primal* are *primary*—they *prime* the world with the structures of meaning in which our projection plays. Again, Merleau-Ponty develops this such that sexuality comes with all these other spheres of the world (from vision to morality and ideology), as he says "by grounding all of these 'processes' upon an 'intentional arc' that...gives experience its degree of vitality and fecundity" (Merleau-Ponty, 160). Thus, Merleau-Ponty constructs a phenomenology where "sexuality...is not an autonomous cycle," but instead "is internally linked to the whole thinking and acting being", meaningful all at once via the prereflective intentional arc (Merleau-Ponty, 160).

The prereflective's innovation in phenomenology usually involves solving problems inherited largely from modern philosophy. Frequent targets are the subject/object and self/other divides, other modern dualisms among them. Berkeley school Heideggerians often point to overcoming Cartesianism as a primary goal (cf. Dreyfus 1991; Guignon 1983). Their basic argument is as follows: first, the most basic comportment towards reality operates prereflectively; then, this prereflective comportment solves/dissolves some dualistic divide, or shows the experience of such divides to be an abnormal experience resulting from some sort of breakdown in ordinary experience.

For Heidegger, the prereflective bridges the subject/object divide in the cases of equipment (Heidegger, 98) and Being-in-the-world in general (Heidegger, 107). Heidegger also uses prereflective mechanisms to explain the ways we first come to project an identity

(Heidegger, 33). Merleau-Ponty's use of the prereflective stands out for dealing with the multiplicity of domains of projection (Merleau-Ponty, 160), as well as for giving a compelling account of the body that dissolves the subject/object divide (Merleau-Ponty, 140)

Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's accounts are compelling, but for different reasons. Dreyfus is surely correct in his claim that Heidegger successfully breaks from the problems of intentionality in the early Husserl (Dreyfus, 2-3). Merleau-Ponty, however, speaks of the body's "latent knowledge" (Merleau-Ponty, 241) and "habitual knowledge of the world, this implicit or sedimented science" (Merleau-Ponty, 247), and it is not clear whether he is presupposing a latent representationalism. That said, the most that Heidegger says about the body occurs in *Being and Time*: "'bodily nature' hides a whole problematic of its own, though we shall not treat it here" (Heidegger, 143). Merleau-Ponty spends far more time on the body. *Phenomenology of Perception* is more deeply invested in pluralism than *Being and Time*, which constitutes an advantage over Heidegger, at least for our purposes.

II.

Feminist criticism of male existential phenomenologists on the issue of prereflective-coping comes at least as early as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*: "The world does not appear to the woman as a 'set of tools' halfway between her will and her goals, as Heidegger defines it: on the contrary, it is a stubborn, indomitable resistance; it is dominated by fate and run through by mysterious caprices" (de Beauvoir, 639). In a world animated by relations of domination, smooth absorption is a phenomenon of privilege. Such power-dynamics allow multiply-privileged people to achieve much with comparatively low effort. In other words, it makes sense that the first round of existential phenomenologists and their fore bearers, who were mostly straight white men of privilege, conceived of experience as usually unproblematic.³²

³² Dorothy Leland criticizes Charles Guignon for endorsing a concept of authenticity that ignores the way our culture divvies up who can pursue which possibilities on the basis of privilege (Leland 123, 124). In step with de Beauvoir, Leland says, "For [assimilator and conquering groups], the state of 'just drifting along' of Heidegger's inauthentic Dasein is easily achieved precisely because these groups are 'at home'"

The conditions of the production of this document attest to this process, both its ease and its resistance as circumstances change. The example above about the smooth use of my office chair no longer fits my experience. I wrote that example originally during comprehensive exams. Shortly after (and partially as a result of) my comps, my body began to break down. One injury turned into a series of cascading injuries and reinjuries, and I can no longer use a chair without reflective thought. Sitting down, even momentarily, usually hurts. Sitting for more than a few minutes at a time always hurts. As I write this, I find myself distracted by pain in my hips from sitting long enough for breakfast today, which was a small plate of scrambled eggs. In order to *only* hurt this much, I need to carefully position a seat cushion designed to take some (not all) pressure off of the chronic nerve damage in my tailbone, gotten as a result of graduate conference work. This cushion exacerbates muscle damage and chronic nerve pain in my lower back. My other options are standing or laying down. To produce some of the material later in this chapter, I stood to write, and gave myself plantar fasciitis in both feet. I now occasionally stand to write and eat, but I have to mark time to put off the intense pain for as long as possible, which is never very long. I presently find myself laying down to write on my phone, which is already exacerbating my mid-spine injury, and will probably soon excite my neck injury. At the time of writing, I genuinely do not know if I can physically handle finishing the dissertation process. Once I cannot stand the pain from writing while laying down, I will probably try sitting, which will aggravate my tailbone, lower back and lower spine injuries. My body echoes Søren Kierkegaard's A: sit or do not sit—you'll regret it either way.³³ If I manage to lose myself in my writing, to "fall" into the writing process in Heidegger's sense, the consequences will be worse. This is also not helpful for my anxiety and mood disorders. And there is no way for me to

in the public world of the dominant culture in a way in which assimilated populations are not" (Leland, 120). It is not clear to me that Leland's criticism of Guignon land. Leland is citing Guignon's explication of Heidegger. Guignon's characterization of Heidegger here is correct. That said, Leland's criticisms are effective against Heidegger.

³³ Cf. "Marry, and you will regret it. Do not marry, and you will also regret it. Marry or do not marry, you will regret it either way" (Kierkegaard, 38).

present this material without making these problems worse, though I will have to in order to get a job, which is to say, in order to survive.

Ortega is helpful in pursuing this line of criticism. Ortega is influenced by Heidegger, but she thinks Heidegger is unable to describe the experiences of people who are marginalized across a variety of different worlds: “multiplicitous selves in the margins are constantly experiencing disruptions in their everyday being-in-worlds or instances of what I describe as not-being-at-ease” (Ortega 2016, 12). Ortega demonstrates Heidegger’s shortcomings by putting him in dialogue with Anzaldúa and Lugones. Unlike phenomenologists in the tradition of Heidegger, Anzaldúa and Lugones describe selves that persistently undergo breakdown: “the self in the borderlands, or the self that world-travels, constantly experiences ruptures in her everyday experiences that lead to a more thematic or reflective orientation toward activities” (Ortega 2016, 50). To the extent that there is such a thing as ordinary experience, the ordinary experience of the selves Anzaldúa and Lugones describe is not pervasively unproblematic. Hence, Ortega argues, those selves are far more likely to engage the world reflectively and thematically. Contra Heidegger, Latina feminists advance theories of the self that “might not find themselves primarily nonreflectively and practically oriented toward objects in the way that Heidegger describes. His understanding of Being-in does not fully capture their experience, an experience of recurrent thin and thick senses of not being-at-ease due to constant ruptures of everydayness” (Ortega 2016, 70). The persistently disruptive experiences of marginalized multiplicitous selves can make “nonreflective” or prereflective engagement in the world an *unordinary* experience.

Note that Ortega uses words like “rupture” and “disruption” to describe breakdown experiences. This is related to how she begins her discussion of breakdown: namely, by analyzing the different theories of self proposed by Anzaldúa. Ortega puts a special emphasis on what Anzaldúa calls the “*Coatlicue* state”, which Anzaldúa describes specifically as a “rupture in our everyday world” (Anzaldúa, 68). For Anzaldúa, the *Coatlicue* state refers to a

breakdown experience involving both “Seeing and being seen” (Anzaldúa, 64). “Being seen” here refers to something that happens from the outside, specifically to do with being vulnerable as a result of others’ access to your secrets: “I was afraid it was in plain sight for all to see. The secret I tried to conceal was that I was not normal, that I was not like the others. I felt alien, I knew I was alien” (Anzaldúa, 65). This sense of vulnerability in the eyes of others, like unwelcome lights creeping into our darkest hiding spaces, can freeze us in place and make us feel captured and essentialized by those others: “One’s attention cannot be captured by something else, one does not ‘see’ and awareness does not happen. One remains ignorant of the fact that one is afraid, and that it is fear that holds one petrified, frozen in stone” (Anzaldúa, 67).

However, while being seen can have power over us, its flipside can empower us: “A glance can freeze us in place; it can ‘possess’ us. It can erect a barrier against the world. But in a glance also lies awareness, knowledge. These seemingly contradictory aspects—the act of being seen, held immobilized by a glance, and ‘seeing through’ an experience—are symbolized...in what I call the *Coatlícue* state” (Anzaldúa, 64). Being caught in the gaze of the other can push us into the *Coatlícue* state, leading to our absorption into a variety of “defense strategies” as means for retreating and regrouping. According to Anzaldúa, this freezing in the breakdown experience of the *Coatlícue* state provides the opportunity to pause and gain new, productive awareness: “This stopping is a survival mechanism, but one which must vanish when it’s no longer needed if growth is to occur... We need *Coatlícue* to slow us up so that the psyche can assimilate previous experiences and process the changes” (Anzaldúa, 68). The petrified state brought on by being seen *can* become an opportunity to rethink and reimagine oneself and one’s way of moving forward. This is the sense in which we “see through” the *Coatlícue* state.

As Ortega summarizes, *Coatlícue* states are “ruptures in the everyday world that include a double movement, including moments of fear and inability to move but also moments of creativity and transformation, of crossing and acquiring a new identity” (Ortega 2016, 27). This

allows Ortega to talk about breakdown experience with the multiplicitous self. The specifics of Ortega's construction of breakdown invoke Lugones' concepts of a "'world'-traveler" and of "Being at ease".³⁴ For Lugones, a "'world'-traveler" is someone who regularly spends time in different spaces (or 'worlds') constructed so differently that the 'world'-traveler must rapidly change between different cultures' versions of acceptable comportment and systems of meaning. In Heideggerian language, a 'world'-traveler alternates between or simultaneously inhabits different cultures with profoundly different ontic constructions of the "they".³⁵ This is accompanied by a change in one's sense of self: "the experience is of being a different person in different 'worlds'" (Lugones, 89). For someone who regularly 'world'-travels, what counts as acceptable behavior at work may be profoundly different than what counts as acceptable behavior at home. One might have different characteristics in different worlds: "I have been thought a person without humor by whites/Anglos inside the U.S. academy, a space where struggles against which race/gender and sexual oppression require an articulation of the issues. I have been found playful by my companions in struggles against white/Anglo control of land and water in the U.S. Southwest" (Lugones, 99).

Lugones feels playful in some 'worlds' and not in other 'worlds' (Lugones, 86). She was able to confirm her playfulness by calling "friends, faraway people who knew [her] well" (Lugones, 86). In addition, she was able to confirm her lack of playfulness through "those people who were around [her]", away from the context in which she was found playful (Lugones, 86). This allowed Lugones to realize that her self-perception as both playful and not playful was in some way produced by the different 'worlds' in which she variously was or was not playful. This had to do with the degree to which she was "at ease" in the different worlds: "So I said to myself, 'Okay, maybe what's happening here is that there is an attribute that I do have but there are certain 'worlds' in which I am not at ease and it is because I'm not at ease in those 'worlds'

³⁴ Lugones uses scare quotes with 'world'. I follow her convention so long as I am discussing her.

³⁵ Note, however, that Lugones has a broader conception of what constitutes a world (Lugones, 87-88).

that I don't have that attribute in those 'worlds'" (Lugones, 87). When one inhabits a world that is constructed to be hostile or unfamiliar, one is less likely to be at ease in that world. This of course extends to 'worlds' that exhibit specific, systematic manners of discrimination: "All people who have been subordinated, exploited, and enslaved have been forced to travel to 'worlds' in which they animate subordinate beings" (Lugones, 17). However, Lugones thinks that relatively few people uniformly experience being at ease. So long as a world is caught up in multiple systems of privilege and oppression, being at ease is a luxury experience: "It is only men of a certain class and race who are in a position to exercise their mobility without restriction" (Lugones, 17). Not a lot of people have a 'world'-traveling experience so privileged and smooth that they reliably are at ease.

As Ortega summarizes it, "'ease' is the term that Lugones uses to explain the sense of familiarity the self has when fluent in the language, norms, and practices of her culture. This ease is a result of a shared history with others" (Ortega 2016, 60). Ortega applies this conception of ease back to Heidegger's description of Dasein's smooth, prereflective coping: "In my view, then, being-at-ease is a function of one's ability to be nonreflective about everyday norms in the sense that Heidegger indicates and of having familiarity with the language, as well as sharing a history with people in the sense that Lugones describes" (Ortega 2016, 60-61). Ortega's statement is helpful, because thinking of ease specifically as "a function of one's ability to be nonreflective" cuts to the heart of the matter. Anzaldúa and Lugones detail everyday experiences that are persistently disruptive, in which they have little "ability to be nonreflective".

This is not to say that people of privilege do not experience breakdowns in being-at-ease. Ortega distinguishes between "thin" and "thick" experiences of not being-at-ease, where "thin not being-at-ease" refers to breakdown experiences like those described by Heidegger: "what I regard a *thin* sense of not being-at-ease, the experience of minimal ruptures of everyday practices" (Ortega 2016, 61). By thin not being-at-ease, Ortega refers to the observation that everyone undergoes breakdowns in being-at-ease at least on occasion. However, Ortega, in

step with Anzaldúa and Lugones, describes the experiences of marginalized multiplicitous selves as undergoing a much deeper, more pervasive "thick not being-at-ease", characterized by not just a breakdown in cultural fluency but also breakdown in the sense of self: "...a *thick* sense of not being-at-ease, the experience of a deeper sense of not being familiar with norms, practices, and the resulting contradictory feelings about who we are given our experience in the different worlds we inhabit and whether those worlds are welcoming or threatening" (Ortega 2016, 61).

Ortega argues that while being-at-ease is a phenomenon that may be experienced by privileged, monocultural people, being-at-ease is not typical of the 'world'-traveler's experience: "Being-at-ease in the 'world,' however, is not a feature of the 'world'-traveler self. It is not the feature of the individual who is considered the 'alien,' the 'stranger,' by the dominant group, and who is no longer fully at ease in his or her own culture and is now in the midst of another culture" (Ortega 2001, 9). On Ortega's reading, Anzaldúa and Lugones describe experiences of the self that defy the descriptions of "existential phenomenologists such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty", as Anzaldúa and Lugones testify to the existence of people whose ordinary experience decidedly is not typically unproblematic: "the selves described by Latina feminist phenomenologists do not find themselves 'in-the-world' with the ease that traditional existential phenomenologists describe" (Ortega 2016, 59). Moving smoothly through the world is a luxury experience. Marginalized multiplicitous selves whose daily lives regularly lead them to things like Anzaldúa's "*Coatlicue* state" and Lugones' "'world'-traveling" do not enjoy this unreflective efficacy and freedom of movement. Rather, they live "a life of not being-at-ease", where persistent breakdown situations "prompt her to become more reflective of her activities and her locations" (Ortega 2016, 60).

III.

My suggestion is that phenomenology and breakdown can providing the theoretical frameworks and explanatory mechanisms for standpoint privilege that have been called for by

Hekman and others. Having discussed a variety of forms of breakdown in classical phenomenology, I argue that, under conditions of oppression, different versions of breakdown (e.g., Gadamerian versus Merleau-Pontyean) can explain different types of types of standpoint privilege (e.g., learning from breakdown in our own experience versus learning from breakdown in others, respectively). If we adopt the phenomenological view that we usually explicitly notice things because they break down in our experience, then people for whom oppressive systems are problematic (the oppressed) are more likely to have the occasion for breakdown experiences.

To demonstrate the viability of a phenomenological standpoint theory, it is helpful to look at Martín Alcoff and Ortega's fusion of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty. Martín Alcoff and Ortega's fusion of these ideas allows us to talk about how race and gender are tied to both history and the body. Avoiding either history or the body leaves out an essential aspect of how race and gender come to exist, as racism and sexism are tied to historical traditions about the relative values of some bodies over others. By drawing out Gadamer's distinction between *Standort* and *Horizont*, it becomes clear how Martín Alcoff and Ortega's accounts cohere with the project of post-Marxist standpoint theory. *Standort* and *Horizont* allow us to talk about the connection between a standpoint (*Standort*) and what is disclosed (*Horizont*) by virtue of having that particular standpoint. When systems of oppression shape the standpoints of individuals and groups, breakdown related to those systems of oppression should also contribute to what those individuals know. An account rooted in such existential phenomenologies makes possible theoretical frameworks and explanatory mechanisms for standpoint privilege that satisfy a number of the desiderata for epistemologies and theories of identities we spoke of above.

Martín Alcoff and Ortega's synthesis of Merleau-Ponty's account of the body and Gadamer's account of horizon allows us to talk about how race and gender are tied to both history and the body. This is important because failing to account for either history or the body

leaves out an essential aspect of how identity categories like race and gender come to exist as we currently understand them.

Gadamer's influence on Martín Alcoff has largely to do with the centrality of horizon in Martín Alcoff's account, while Merleau-Ponty's influence on Martín Alcoff is more to do with accounting for the embodied experience of race and gender:

I make use of the concept of a hermeneutic horizon to suggest a way to visualize the epistemic effects of differences in social location. But hermeneutics tends to underplay the embodied features of subjective experience, and to correct this I use phenomenological accounts to flesh out more fully the ways in which raced and gendered identities are materially manifested. (Martín Alcoff, 9)

Martín Alcoff thinks Gadamer's concept of a horizon is especially useful because it helps make sense of the interplay between the self, society, and knowledge: "I consider the concept of interpretive horizon as discussed by Gadamer and Charles Taylor as a way to understand the effect of social location on the self, what is visible from this location, and thus what the self can know" (Martín Alcoff, 88). Providing this connection between one's position and one's knowledge, the hermeneutic horizon does a lot of the epistemological work Martín Alcoff wants for a phenomenology of visible identities. The main thing horizon fails to do, however, is literally account for the visible aspects of these identities: "While important, the sphere of visibility operates only metaphorically in the hermeneutic account" (Martín Alcoff, 88). Thus, the hermeneutic account of horizon needs to be supplemented in such a way as to take seriously how the visibility of identity categories is relevant to the interplay of the self, society, and knowledge. This is where the phenomenology of embodiment comes into play: "what is seriously lacking is a sustained attention to the body, and thus...I supplement the hermeneutic approaches with a phenomenological account, attending especially to the role of vision and visibility" (Martín Alcoff, 88).

Martín Alcoff finds Gadamer's concept of a horizon compelling because it allows us to explain how background assumptions end up shaping the way we interpret the world and the

specific people we encounter: "the concept of horizon helps to capture the background, framing assumptions we bring with us to perception and understanding, the congealed experiences that become premises by which we strive to make sense of the world, the range of concepts and categories of description that we have at our disposal" (Martín Alcoff, 95). As horizons consist of cultural norms for interpretation, horizons provide an inroad for discussing how we come to understand things like roles and cultural differences. Martín Alcoff thus thinks that Gadamer's concept of horizon is "useful in elucidating cultural, or group-related, and personal differences that affect interpretation" (Martín Alcoff, 95-96). This gets us closer to talking about the way we interpret identity categories like race and gender.

As Martín Alcoff is interested specifically in how these identities are connected to society and knowing, she finds this account helpful. Of course, no particular group-membership is clearly the best for knowledge production under all circumstances. The point for Martín Alcoff is that using horizons for talking about identity helps explain why identity matters when a particular identity category is *relevant* to knowledge in a particular context: "The significance of the group-related aspects of a horizon will vary depending on the subject matter at hand; they will not be all-determining, but they may become very significant in some contexts. Thus, their significance is historically variable and contextual" (Martín Alcoff, 102). That said, Gadamer does not take visibility seriously outside of its metaphorical importance in his account of horizon. Gadamer's articulation of horizon provides a good epistemic framework for understanding the interrelation between the self, society, and knowing, but it is overly formal and has little concrete content when it comes to the visible identity categories that actually impact our lives: "We need to understand the situatedness of horizons as a material and embodied situatedness, and not simply mentally perspectival or ideological. The hermeneutic concept of horizon signifies a locatedness that in reality is a metaphor for the body, but it is often conceptualized as an abstract body without attribute other than its location in a specific time and place" (Martín Alcoff, 102). This is why Martín Alcoff turns to Merleau-Ponty to fill in details on the body and provide a

more robust treatment of visibility: “I will try to correct the abstraction by supplementing the hermeneutic concept of horizon with a phenomenological account of the link between embodiment and rationality” (Martín Alcoff, 102).

The importance of identity categories in daily life is largely a matter of social norms, and to that extent our understanding of them is well captured by Gadamer's horizon. Martín Alcoff is concerned, though, that we might take this insight as a cue that the physical aspects of the body are not significant: “Both race and sex are social kinds of entities in the sense that their meaning is constructed through culturally available concepts, values, and experiences. But to say that they are social is not to say that they are some kind of linguistic rather than physical thing or to imply that meanings are conceptual items pasted over physical items” (Martín Alcoff, 102). Martín Alcoff's concern is that if we focus too much on how deeply and ineluctably identity categories are socially constructed, we will deny their brute physicality by contrast. This would be absurd, though, as identity categories like race and gender rely on basic physical traits as ways of demarcating which bodies fall under which constructions of race and gender. Therefore, the Gadamerian account of horizon needs to be supplemented with an account of embodiment that takes seriously the physical things that play into our constructions of identity categories: “[Race and sex] are most definitely physical, marked on and through the body, lived as a material experience, visible as surface phenomena, and determinant of economic and political status. Social identities cannot be adequately analyzed without an attentiveness to the role of the body and of the body's visible identity” (Martín Alcoff, 102).

Martín Alcoff finds Merleau-Ponty's account of the body compelling because it can explain how a given identity category such as race can have corresponding cultural interpretations that feed back into how an individual interprets herself: “Merleau-Ponty's account of subjectivity allows us to understand how it is constituted by and through historically specific cultural practices and institutions” (Martín Alcoff, 110). This coheres well with Gadamer's historical emphasis, and also makes sense of the fact that our bodies have a huge

impact on the lives we are allowed to lead and the people we are allowed to become. That said, our bodies do not decide everything for us, and Merleau-Ponty's formulations of embodiment explains how bodies can matter so much while still not having a deterministic impact: "We are embodied, yet not reduced to physical determinations imagined as existing outside of our place in culture and history. This account helps to capture the dialectics of social identities, in which we are both interpellated into existing categories as well as making them our own" (Martín Alcoff, 111).

Martín Alcoff refers to Merleau-Ponty's prereflective characterization of the body as a starting point for understanding how brute facts about our bodies develop into the dispositions and styles of comportment that our culture dictates: "Merleau-Ponty's concept of the habitual body is also useful here. The habitual body he describes is the default position the body assumes when performing various commonly experienced circumstances that require integrated and unified movements, such as driving a car" (Martín Alcoff, 108). The habitual body is Merleau-Ponty's explanation for things like how I am able to find my way to the bathroom at night in the dark, or how I am able to manipulate a computer without really thinking about the keyboard and mouse. Martín Alcoff argues that this habitual body can also account for our raced and gendered behaviors as well: "race and gender consciousness produces habitual bodily mannerisms that feel natural and become unconscious after long use" (Martín Alcoff, 108). In this way, Martín Alcoff brings Merleau-Ponty's body into Gadamer's horizon, as the literal physical embodiment of traditions of interpretation that include valuing and having expectations for different bodies in different ways: "the interpretive horizon we each bring with us should be understood not simply as a set of beliefs but as a complex (meaning internally heterogeneous) set of presuppositions and perceptual orientations, some of which are manifest as a kind of tacit presence in the body" (Martín Alcoff, 113).

Ortega largely follows Martín Alcoff here, saying the hybrid Gadamerian/Merleau-Pontyean account "allows Martín Alcoff to provide an account of horizon that includes

embodied, tacit presuppositions and perceptions of visible identities such as race and gender” (Ortega 2016, 151). That said, Ortega critiques Martín Alcoff for not fully engaging issues of multiplicitous identity: “Martín Alcoff does not engage with the question of the multiplicity of the self and consequently does not bring to light the constructive possibilities that such multiplicity offers” (Ortega 2016, 152). While Martín Alcoff could address multiple-identity more directly, her phenomenology still sets us up to discuss how different systems of oppression combine to create different social positions with different access to knowledge. Ortega thinks she can add to Martín Alcoff’s account in a way that will better deal with her concerns about multiplicity.

For Ortega and Martín Alcoff, shared horizons of interpretation account for the similar epistemic situations of people who share relevant identity categories. This works well for Ortega’s goal of drawing out the multiplicity in Martín Alcoff’s account, as identity-based horizons can account for multiple overlapping systems of oppression and the ways of interpreting the world that develop from various situations of oppression: “The multiple interpretive horizons constitute openings to worlds in that they inform the way in which those worlds are experienced and understood” (Ortega 2016, 152). On Ortega’s reading, the salience of different identity categories comes and goes, though race and gender play an especially prominent role in modern society and therefore are usually part of someone’s interpretation: “Some of these social identities, for example, those connected to race and gender that Martín Alcoff highlights, are fundamental to the way in which the multiplicitous self understands her experiences and the worlds she inhabits or travels. The extent to which the self’s other identities help or influence meaning-making varies in each case” (Ortega 2016, 152). As these identities are interpretive horizons on this view, the salience of different horizons waxes and wanes according to the situation. Therefore, the way someone comes to understand a particular circumstance is relative to the identity categories that happen to matter in that circumstance. This helps address the intersectional desideratum that we need to explain the varying salience of different identity categories.

Ortega uses personal examples, such as her academic Latina identity: “I share a horizon with Latinas and academic Latinas, a site that allows me to understand my experiences in my primarily white institution in very specific ways” (Ortega 2016, 152). Because of her identity, Ortega has a horizon of interpretation that makes sense out of things in the university setting in ways shared with many other academic Latinas. As a result, Ortega is far more attuned to discriminatory practices and is more invested in challenging discrimination than her white academic counterparts: “I am deeply bothered by the way the few students and faculty of color are treated, how they are undermined, devalued, classified. This is not to say that others are not interested in these issues, but rather that, in my experience, these issues are crucial, whereas they are not or they don't seem to be for many of my white colleagues” (Ortega 2016, 152). While Ortega interprets the world from an academic Latina horizon, other aspect of her identity also factor into her experience: “my gender and sexual orientation help shape my experiences further; through them, I understand and navigate possible unwelcoming spaces” (Ortega 2016, 153). Since the world is hostile to folks with these identities, Ortega shares in several interpretive horizons that can produce ruptures in being-at-ease (Ortega 2016, 153).

The bare fact that someone is culturally situated in a particular horizon because of their history and body does not mean that they will never become familiar with the horizons of people different from them. Familiarity with another culture as a result of frequent world-travelling can generate some level of understanding of the other culture's interpretive horizon. This helps address the standpoint desideratum of avoiding exclusive formulations of standpoint privilege. Ortega refers back to her position in a mostly-white academic setting. She acknowledges that, as a Latina, she will not come to share the horizon of white people, at least not in the same way that white people understand the world from their horizon: “I am in the US white world, but I do not share a US white identity, and thus I do not share the interpretative horizon that some US whites in my school might have. That is, I do not share this horizon in the same way that US whites might share it” (Ortega 2016, 153). While white people are able to fall into a world

predominately governed by white norms and values, Ortega is disrupted by the experience, which leads to her more frequently having a reflective orientation towards the white academic world.

Since Ortega has familiarity with the rules and norms governed predominantly white academic institutions, she has some understanding of the views of academic white people: “I can interpret my experience and this particular world from the perspective of being a Latina, but I can also partly understand the perspective of US whites in that world. I might have an understanding of the perspective of a white individual given my experience of continuously having to travel to that world” (Ortega 2016, 153). Having to live in a world that is not constructed to suit one’s needs nevertheless gives one a perspective on that world, even if it is not an “insider perspective”. This creates a distance that allows Ortega to interpret the institution from her perspective as a Latina as well as, to a degree, from the perspective from which the white world interprets the world: “It is this ability to see various perspectives from various worlds that is especially important for multiplicitous selves because it allows for the possibility of critical reflection and resistance” (Ortega 2016, 153).

When one is at home in a culture, by which I mean to say, when one resides primarily in a cultural that is suited to one’s needs and values, one does not have much awareness of those values themselves. To become aware of one’s interpretive horizons requires that one come to see from different horizons. Acquiring this sort of perspective is more common for people who are forced to live in multiple, contradictory worlds with multiple, contradictory norms. This is part of the epistemic advantage that multiplicitous selves acquire by virtue of their experience with multiple interpretive horizons: “Given my multiplicitous consciousness, I thus have access to multiple horizons that allow for multiple interpretations. I can use such interpretations not only to understand my self and different worlds but also to attain critical, resistant perspectives” (Ortega 2016, 154). Thus, Ortega expands on Martín Alcoff’s account by appealing to the way Martín Alcoff’s use of horizons can be expanded to accommodate for marginalized multiplicitous

selves: “incorporating multiple horizons into the view of multiplicitous selfhood allows us to understand more specifically the way in which the multiplicitous self has multiple shared social meanings and is always connected to multiple others” (Ortega 2016, 154-55).

In our discussion of Gadamer's *Standort/Horizont* above, “*Horizont*” was translated as “horizon”, referring to the horizons of interpretation later picked up by Martín Alcoff and Ortega. Translating “*Standort*” is less straightforward, as the English “standpoint” is used in translation for both “*Standort*” and “*Standpunkt*”. In particular, “*Standort*” means something like “position”, and in Gadamer it refers to the position one occupies that gives one access to the corresponding horizon. However, Martín Alcoff talks about horizon in terms that, in the text of *Truth and Method*, are predicated to *Standort*. For example, she says that “The horizon is just the individual or particular substantive perspective that each person has, that makes up who that person is, consisting of his or her background assumptions, form of life, and social location or position within the social structure and hierarchy” (Martín Alcoff, 96) and earlier in her discussion, “The horizon is a substantive perspectival location from which the interpreter looks out at the world, a perspective that is always present but that is open and dynamic, with a temporal as well as physical dimension, moving into the future and into new spaces as the subject moves” (Martín Alcoff, 95).

However, on Gadamer’s scheme, horizon is not location. *Standort* is location and horizon is what one sees from that location and within its limits. Attending to this distinction clarifies the difference between where we stand and what we see in Martín Alcoff’s account, which is one of her express goals as stated above. Martín Alcoff turns to Gadamer for “a way to visualize the epistemic effects of differences in social location” (Martín Alcoff, 9). Paying careful attention to Gadamer’s *Standort/Horizont* distinction amplifies our ability to talk about social location and the “epistemic effects” of inhabiting particular social locations. Gadamer’s *Standort/Horizont* distinction also draws out the similarity between her account and some

formulations of standpoint theory, as both standpoint theory and Martín Alcoff's phenomenology want to be able to talk about the connection between our social position and our knowledge.

Attending to the multiplicity in Merleau-Ponty's account can add to Martín Alcoff's account of identity, and further address Ortega's concern that Martín Alcoff does not sufficiently develop an account of multiplicity (Ortega 2016, 152). Recall that Merleau-Ponty uses the term "fields" to discuss the way we embody such things as sexuality and social class. Much like Ortega makes use of a plurality of interpretive horizons to bring greater multiplicity to Martín Alcoff's account, we can do something similar with fields. A "field" is a relatively open concept that already describes a variety of different identity categories in Merleau-Ponty. As Merleau-Ponty describes them, fields are specific layers of embodiment that determine how things like sexuality govern perception and behavior, from the way certain people strike one as attractive to the way one's body reaches out in sexual comportment. Merleau-Ponty similarly identifies social class as a field.

I suggest that we can extend this construct to other identity categories like race, gender, and ability. I know, because I have been told and because I have witnessed similar behavior in others, that I carry my body with classical markers of whiteness. My skin tone and morphology fall within the phenotypic range we expect of white people in America, but more importantly, the way I use my voice and how I take up space are characteristically white and masculine. This is because I grew up in a white family in a white neighborhood in a white town, because I was expected to be masculine, and because the world offered me a range of rewards for white behavior and a plethora of punishment for failing to be masculine. I now habitually walk through most spaces with the characteristic abandon and lack of attention that typifies people of privilege, never really consider my body's position or fit until I accidentally run into someone. On a sidewalk, women and people of color regularly move out of my way before I even notice we are on a collision course.

In addition, different contexts motivate me to embody social class in different ways. That is, whether I speak and behave like a middle-class American or like a blue-collar American depends on the situation in which I find myself. As a child, I did not know why I identified with the poor kids in my classes, but I knew my accent changed around them. I still remember my father's instructions for speaking to police explicitly involved "talk like your mother's family", because my mother's family spoke "proper English", even if too loudly. I never needed to be told how to talk to teachers, because it was perfectly clear that I would be rewarded for speaking in a middle-class accent while sitting up with politely straight posture. This all testifies to Merleau-Ponty's view that the salience of fields varies according to what is relevant in a given context, and it brings more multiplicity to our understanding of embodiment.

Martín Alcoff, motivated in similar ways as are standpoint theorists, makes a point to address concerns about relativism with respect to identity and epistemic privilege. The discussion comes in her section on horizons, in which she is describing the epistemic upshot of identity categories involving shared horizons. Martín Alcoff says, "We are not left with a dysfunctional relativism by acknowledging such perspectival knowledges: we can note the limitations of each, the different ways in which each is positioned epistemically, and then argue that one or the other has the epistemic advantage depending on what our project is. For emancipatory and egalitarian projects, clearly the servant's horizon will be the most valuable" (Martín Alcoff, 96). I am not fully confident that, at this point in her argument, Martín Alcoff has fully answered the relativism charge. For the same reason Martín Alcoff thinks that Gadamer's concept of horizon cannot describe visible identities without adding a phenomenology of embodiment, I argue that we cannot respond to the relativism charge without considering the body. Horizons are too abstract to account for the visible aspects of historically marginalized identities, and that visibility is a fundamental marker of how people are divided into raced and gendered categories.

That said, Martín Alcoff in fact does combine horizon with embodiment. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty explains how different aspects of our identity change salience depending on the situation in which we find ourselves. On the other hand, Gadamer explains that, given the purposes of inquiry, some standpoints are better than others. Martín Alcoff's combination of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty can explain historical embodiment, including how and why different parts of our identities become more or less relevant to our experiences in a particular context. Once we acknowledge that oppression on multiple fronts (race, class, gender, etc.) work on us in different ways in different situations, a natural conclusion is that, given a situation in which some particular set of marginalized identities are relevant, marginalized people within that situation will be more prone to breakdown. Hence, we can predict that certain bodies—women of color, disabled Appalachians, transwomen with psychological disorders—for specific historical reasons, will be more likely to experience breakdown (when those identities are relevant), and therefore those groups will come to know more about systems of oppression. This explains why some particular identities can be better than others when it comes to identifying and correcting bigoted influences on the production of knowledge. Thus, Martín Alcoff can justify distinguishing better from worse standpoints given the goals of inquiry and the particular context.

IV.

I conclude this chapter by discussing breakdowns in my personal experience. To do so, I bring together two concepts: Harding's "the Monster", familiar from Chapter 1, and Lugones' "animation". Recall that for Harding, "the Monster" refers to the person of maximum privilege: the white, male, heterosexual, masculine, able-bodied, sound-minded citizen of class. "Animation", for Lugones, refers to how someone shows up in a particular 'world'. We appear differently in different 'worlds', as different 'worlds' have different rules and different expectations for behavior. The same behavior may be acceptable or ideal in one environment but prohibited in another environment, and that can reflect back on how the author of the behavior is

perceived. As a lot of these cultural norms are tied to one's identity categories, animation relates to how we think about stereotypes. For example, almost everywhere I have ever traveled, asking a restaurant if they serve alcohol is a straightforward question. I have rarely been taken for a stereotypical American partier, but even when I have been taken as such, this has almost never put me in any danger. However, on a night accidentally spent in Doha, Qatar, I asked a waiter about the booze situation and immediately had the sense of being sized up. I animated the American partier stereotype, and, more specifically, that I was down for some shady, questionably-legal stuff. Qatar has stricter rules governing the acquisition and consumption of alcohol, and the waiter was preparing to tell me about the underground clubs where I could drink without going through the proper channels. Had I known better, I never would have asked, but in that moment, I definitely animated the American partier stereotype more vividly and involuntarily than at any other time.

As my example suggests, Lugones thinks we often have little influence over the particular personality we animate in a given 'world'. Lugones directly addresses the person who constructs her stereotypically:

We can't shake the selves that we are in your eyes or in your worlds; we do not just animate them *in spite* of ourselves. We are them, too: beings with a peculiar lack of substance or lack of credibility, or too frightening and intimidating, too dramatic, too predictable, with too much or too little authority: all out of proportion, not fully real. I can't will not to animate that being. That's not up to me. (Lugones, 74)

Under many circumstances, depending on the particular 'worlds', certain people will have no choice about how they show up. Certain 'worlds' constructs some people so rigidly that those people almost always show up according to stereotypical expectations. In fact, Lugones thinks, it does not even matter if the person animating a particular stereotype understands how they are being perceived in a given 'world': "In a 'world,' some of the inhabitants may not understand or hold the particular construction of them that constructs them in that 'world.' So, there may be 'worlds' that construct me in ways that I do not even understand" (Lugones, 88). In the event

that someone does understand how they are perceived in a particular 'world' but they reject the stereotypical animation, they nonetheless still do animate that particular stereotype: "it may be that I understand the construction, but do not hold it of myself. I may not accept it as an account of myself, a construction of myself. And yet, I may be *animating* such a construction" (Lugones, 88). Lugones is helpful here because she articulates how we can have little or no control over how we show up in a particular context. Maybe sometimes we do, but not always.

For the most part, especially if I want to be seen as such, I animate the Monster. That is, I almost always come across as a white, able-bodied, sound-minded, cisgender, heterosexual, masculine man of privilege. I am in fact white, and I am able to perform class privilege and often get its benefits, but none of these other things are true. The fact that I am really a femme-ish tomboy is easily covered over by my thick beard, deep voice, and masculine body—all of which were exaggerated after 10 years' treatment for bipolar disorder aggravated by hypotestosteronism. Being attracted to women helps too, as it plays into the masculine stereotype. With all of this together, nobody ever guesses that I am trans. Further, people cannot look at me and see that I have lost my mind—so lost that it might have never returned—and that I will almost certainly have another full-blown psychotic episode if I do not die first, especially as I wean off of my testosterone injections. Between the testosterone and my genetics, I also look fairly powerful. But I have been in and out of physical therapy for four years, I have chronic pain and injuries in both feet and four locations along my spine, and I wrote most of this document laying in bed in futile convalescence. Usually, nothing that is marginalized about me is visible if I do not want it to be. As long as I am not particularly sick or caught off guard, I can hide behind the image of consummate privilege. You only see what makes me socially vulnerable if I let you.

Having marginalized identities while appearing uniformly well-off and powerful puts me into an odd situation. On the one hand, I am usually extended the perks that go along with unearned social power. On the other hand, I get to be in the room when people—colleagues,

friends, and family—opine on exactly “what we should do with all of them bipolars: round ‘em up; get rid of ‘em” (that is an exact quote). I have argued face to face with colleagues who question the sanity, the safety, and even the existence of transgender people, without them having the faintest idea that they were talking to a sane, safe, existing trans woman. Animating the Monster guarantees my physical security, so long as I go along with it. It also put me into an interesting epistemic predicament.

When animating the Monster, I often find myself in a breakdown circumstance in the fashion of Gadamer’s being pulled up short. When someone gives me a knowing look and rubs elbows before letting loose about some violent action ‘we’ need to take against some marginalized group that I am a part of, this pulls me up short and discloses important information about their Gadamerian *Standort/Horizont* structure. First, I know that person’s horizon is not sufficiently comprehensive to see me as marginalized. In practical terms, this means they do not know I am trans, they do not catch my cues, and I am successfully hiding. Second, I know that person’s *Standort* is not constructed in such a way as to have the correct horizon. If they were in a position to know—i.e., if they had the relevant *Standort*—they would not have a mistaken horizon and they would not have said what they said.

CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters investigated phenomenology and breakdown as alternative frameworks and explanatory mechanisms for standpoint theory. I have tried to show how existential phenomenology can be used to describe situations of privilege and oppression in such a way as to 1) withstand the criticisms of intersectionality and standpoint theory, 2) provide a coherent ontological framework for standpoint theory, and 3) provide a mechanism that explains why it is that oppressed people can develop the privileged epistemic situation standpoint theorists claim. My approach has been to articulate a number of theoretical concerns from both standpoint theory and intersectionality, formulated as desiderata for a theory of identity and a theory of knowledge. Then, I looked to various phenomenologies to see what they had to offer to this project. I drew attention to structures like embodied fields, which help articulate our multiple overlapping identities. I drew attention to the standpoint/horizon structure, which both articulates the relationship between our social position and what we know, and includes a historical account of those standpoints and horizons. I have focused on phenomenological programs involving history and the body because systems of oppression rely on, and operate according to, historical narratives and values about certain kinds of bodies. I submit that a phenomenology that deals with racism and sexism should have an account of racial and gendered embodiment, and an account of the historical mechanisms that perpetuate treating people differently because of their differently raced and gendered bodies.

The early phenomenologists I discussed describe a variety of forms of breakdown experience: breakdown in the first person, breakdown observed in others, and breakdown between conversation partners. I hope to have shown that we do not just learn from disruptions in our own personal interaction with our environment. We can also learn from witnessing the disruptions other people go through, and from having disruptions in conversation, as well.

Breakdown can happen in a lot of ways for a lot of reasons. Further, these different forms of breakdown illuminated a variety of things: use objects, the world, the self, embodiment, sexuality, and differences in understanding. This is important, as it points to the fact that breakdown can illuminate a broad range of phenomena. Breakdown can disclose an entity immediately before us; it can draw attention to our own identity; it can disrupt our sexuality; and it can light up an entire relational context. These early phenomenologists were helpful in the sense that they offered a variety of phenomenological structures and breakdown mechanisms for understanding how we come to notice things when something goes wrong.

Where I believe that these early phenomenologists went wrong was in describing ordinary experience as typically unproblematic, with breakdown as an exceptional state. This is one reason I discussed newer developments in Latina Feminism and phenomenology. These theorists describe everyday experiences of persistent disruption, and they credit to this frequently disruptive experience the epistemic privilege the oppressed often develop just to get by. My main point has been to show that, while early phenomenologists have some resources for beginning to think through multiple identity's relationship to history and the body, their phenomenologies are phenomenologies of privilege. That is, to the extent that early phenomenologists describe experience in general in terms of smooth coping, they only described the experiences of people privileged enough to live a life without much disruption. Once we acknowledge that the experiences of oppressed people can be pervasively disruptive, we open up the possibility for a standpoint theory grounded in phenomenology. Starting from a phenomenology that is attentive to the relationship between history and the body, and then taking the insight that oppressed people will experience more breakdowns related to systems of oppression, we should predict the basic insight of standpoint theory: oppressed people will have more opportunities to become attuned to the complex workings of systems of oppression.

I.

In Chapter 1, we enumerated a number of desiderata for theory of identity and knowledge present in intersectionality and standpoint theory. In Chapters 2 and 3, we mentioned a number of points at which various phenomenological ideas could help address these desiderata. I submit that this effort has been largely successful at several points: First, we indicated that we could begin addressing the intersectional desideratum for multiple, nonreductive identity categories by looking at Merleau-Ponty's conception of "fields" and Ortega's use of multiple interpretive horizons. Merleau-Ponty describes sexuality, morality, and class consciousness as embodied fields that saturate our experience. These fields shape how the world shows up as meaningful, with specific behaviors appropriate to specific situations. For example, in relevant settings, someone's social class will impact whether they are welcome in certain environments, how comfortable they are speaking, and the appropriate way to use their body. I never feel comfortable at conferences because they seem like rich-people events. I become self-conscious about how to dress, how to talk and to stand at registration, how to sit and behave during talks, and how to order and act during meals. I have never gone to a formal conference mixer or after-party because it just sounds like the sort of space in which I do not belong. I can tell the students from better schools fit well, and that they know they fit well and that I do not, on the basis of their fluidity in these settings and the differences in our conversational etiquette. Conferences show up to me as unwelcoming because they involve a lot of classed social situations that I am not prepared for and that make me overthink what I am doing with my speech and body. This is because, as Merleau-Ponty teaches us, social class is among the fields that govern appropriate behavior in a given context, and my body is habituated into specific class behaviors inconsistent with the dominant academic setting.

Further, none of these fields are derivative from or reducible to other fields. Apart from the demands of a special context, no one of my identity categories has greater priority or importance than the others. The significance of my race or my gender expression cannot be

reduced to my class experience. Being white opens a lot of doors for me, and makes it easier for me to navigate a lot of circumstances that are hostile to my class standing. The fact that I usually come across as masculine and dominant also gives me a lot of power. Depending on the circumstances, my apparent masculinity and maleness usually combine with my whiteness to cover over what people might recognize as my poor negotiation of middle- and upper-class norms. White male bodies are allowed to violate upper-class norms in many environments, but sometimes not for different, subtle reasons. For example, my ex-girlfriend's father went to the same school as my father's (working class) family. Upon meeting me, he recognized my last name, and waited until I left to tell his daughter, "You know, you can never marry Zac". My race and apparent gender are usually my largest immediate sources of social power, but the knowledge of what my last name meant (or did not mean) locally overrode that power. The relationship between identity categories like race and class is too complex and too situationally dependent to be captured by reduction or prioritization.

Ortega describes our different identity categories as interpretive horizons that put us in similar epistemic situations with members of the groups in which we find ourselves. Because of my complicated social class background, I am able to see from both a blue-collar horizon and a middle-class horizon. Both of these horizons are at play when I am navigating the academic environment. At school, I deliberately foreground the middle-class horizons, so that I know what to expect from my (usually) middle-class colleagues and superiors. I have to consciously control those parts of me that operate according to the blue-collar horizon, because they make me stand out as inappropriate: too vulgar, too loud, too poorly dressed. Through the blue-collar horizon I see a large amount of academia's hallowed rites and ceremonies as hazing rituals and vacuous hoop-jumping. From the blue-collar horizon, very little of the university setting makes sense to me except as a mechanism for preserving the power structure and calcified institutions that do not serve any tangible purpose. This makes it difficult to take many of the rules and institutions seriously, and so I deliberately maintain the middle-class horizon that values—or at

least tolerates—pomp and ceremony. If I could not do this, I would not fit in, and I would not have been able to care enough about the degree to complete it. Appealing to a multiplicity of interpretive horizons tied to different identity categories explains both the multiplicity of identities and the way those identities impact what we are able to know.

Second, we indicated that we could begin addressing the intersectional desideratum for explaining the variation in salience of identity categories by looking at Merleau-Ponty's conception of "fields" and Ortega's discussion of multiple interpretive horizons. When it comes to fields, we always experience the world according to this plurality of systems of sensibility. These fields never disappear entirely or become the single relevant focus of our experience. My race, my gender identity, my class background, and my disabilities always condition the way the world shows up to me, just to different extents under different circumstances. That said, the salience of different fields varies in such a way that does allow one particular field to come to the fore of our experience. If I am wearing makeup and a skirt alone at night on an Ybor City side street, and I hear transphobic insults behind me, being trans is the only thing on my mind. This does not mean that my race or my class are gone in that moment, just that their relevance is so far in the background that they are not playing an obvious role. The multiple overlapping fields that permeate our experience come and go in varying salience, and this salience variation is flexible enough to explain certain circumstances where some single category momentarily has primary importance.

With horizons, our various identity categories become more or less salient to the degree that they are relevant to understanding the present situation. Sometimes my complicated class identity is not terribly complicated. In a blue-collar environment, I can temporarily abandon the middle-class horizon. When the higher-class standards of academia are really wearing on me, I occasionally seek out lower-class venues and social groups where I do not have to pay so much attention to my speech and habits. My choice to enter blue-collar environments and to operate according to a blue-collar horizon can make the whiteness horizon salient in different ways.

When I am in a white blue-collar environment, the white horizon becomes deeply relevant to my experience as it secures my safety among frequently racist people. Moreover, the casual racism keeps me aware of the local dominance of the white horizon. When I am in a non-white blue-collar environment, my race makes me stand out. The white horizon is salient because my race becomes an object for jokes and hazing, and because of its failures in explaining my local environment. In both blue-collar environments, my gender identity makes me vulnerable, and the trans horizon is extremely salient insofar as it tells me how to police my behavior and speech so I do not out myself. Interpreting identity categories as horizons addresses the way these variously salient identities play into how the world is significant.

Third, we indicated that we could begin addressing the standpoint desideratum of avoiding exclusive or universal formulations of standpoint privilege by looking at Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer's formulations of breakdown, as well as Ortega's discussion of world-traveling. Recall that what makes Merleau-Ponty's formulation of breakdown unique is the fact that he is observing breakdowns from a third-person perspective and learning about his own phenomenology by contrast. For example, the patient Schneider has lost the ability to smoothly and sensibly move within a sexual situation. This contrasts with the experience of people with sexuality. People with sexuality project in such a way that the world shows up sexually, which is to say, they live in a sexual world. Schneider cannot do this. In this case, we can make third-person observations of breakdown in others and thereby better understand both their experiences and our own.

Recall that what makes Gadamer's formulation of breakdown unique is the fact that he is talking about a breakdown between interlocutors. On this scheme, we have a breakdown in understanding when we are "pulled up short" by the realization that we understand some ideas or word differently than does the text's author (Gadamer, 270). In face to face human encounters, this means that we are struck by something our conversation partner says, because whatever they said indicated that their understanding—of a word, a situation, etc.—is different

from our understanding. This gives us a way of talking about forms of breakdown that occur between interlocutors that tell us about differences between their horizons. Through this form of breakdown, we can come to have a better understanding of our conversation partner's horizon.

In a similar vein, for Ortega, a potential upshot of world-traveling is developing some sense of the horizons of the worlds into which one travels. For example, I have a deep understanding of the cisgender world. Almost all of my human interactions take place in a cisgender world in which I am successfully pretending to cisgender. I am only in a transgender world every other week at my support group. Moreover, because of the circumstances of my gender dysphoria, I was successfully able to believe myself to be a member of the cisgender world for over 25 years. As a result, I am very well-versed in the dynamics governing the cisgender world, even if it is not a world to which I belong. We can thus use world-traveling as an opportunity to develop an understanding of a world other than our own. World-traveling will not necessarily produce this result, but it is a frequently productive approach. Hence, I argue that Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, and Ortega all put forward reasons for believing that we can come to understand others' worlds. This partially addresses the standpoint desideratum of avoiding exclusive or universal formulations of standpoint privilege. However, note that these observations only pertain to avoiding exclusive formulations of standpoint privilege, and they do not touch on avoiding universal formulations of standpoint privilege. I shall return to this later.

Fourth, we indicated that we could begin addressing the standpoint desideratum of avoiding relativism with respect to standpoint privilege by looking to Martín Alcoff and her fusion of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty. Martín Alcoff herself addresses relativism by appealing solely to her Gadamerian inheritance, relying on the connection between one's social position and the epistemic upshot of inhabiting that particular social position. However, I have argued that addressing the problem of relativism in standpoint theory requires not just articulating the connection between knowledge and social position, but also bringing in the role of the body. This, of course, is Martín Alcoff's move, but she does not bring in the body until after her section

on Gadamer and the relativism concern. I submit that, in order to address the problem of relativism for standpoint theory, we need an account that takes the body seriously, for basically the same reasons Martín Alcoff eventually includes the body in her account. Without attention to how race and gender are embodied, any discussion of how identity categories impact the relationship between social position and knowledge is too abstract. Having marginalized identity categories often contributes to a privileged epistemic situation because those identity categories are about demarcating different types of bodies and treating some of those bodies better at the expense of other bodies. Tying interpretive horizons to the body then shows how one's social position is heavily determined by one's embodied identity categories. Further, interpretive horizons also provide a way of talking about the historical reasons for valuing different bodies differently. Since having certain kinds of bodies can put people at risk of joblessness, homelessness, and violence, the everyday experience of people with marginalized bodies is likely to involve pervasive breakdown experiences. This, I submit, is why groups sharing marginalized identities are better socially positioned to become aware of how systems of oppression operate. When it comes to rooting out bigoted results in science, some bodies are better than others.

II.

I have not directly addressed a number of my desiderata that I raised above, e.g., explaining the mutual construction of identity categories, avoiding essentialist and universal constructions of identity categories, and denying the automatic ascription of standpoint privilege to group members.³⁶

I believe that the present project makes clear how these might be addressed in future research. The worry that standpoint theory might automatically ascribe epistemic privilege to

³⁶ Ortega addresses much of this. She uses intersectionality as a heuristic, and at different points in her book addresses concerns over issues like essentialism in early standpoint theory, not automatically ascribing epistemic advantage to members of oppressed groups, and the mutual construction of identity categories (Ortega 2016, 34, 73).

members of a group just because they are members is countered by a standpoint theory that explains epistemic privilege by appeal to phenomenological breakdown, and requires that someone actually have breakdown experiences in order to learn from them. There is nothing that guarantees any given problematic scenario should generate a breakdown situation that is productive for knowledge. It might be the case that we need to experience a breakdown repeatedly or to experience a variety of different forms of breakdown in order to develop a privileged epistemic position with respect to systems of oppression. But it is clear that, on my view, one must go through breakdown in order to acquire standpoint privilege; that breakdown is a necessary condition of gaining epistemic privilege. Standpoint privilege is not something that one acquires by virtue of being a member of an oppressed group, but as a consequence of a breakdown (or breakdowns) of the experience(s) of oppression.

The worry that standpoint theory might ascribe epistemic privilege universally to all members of a group just because they are members can be handled in a similar vein, for in a phenomenological standpoint theory focused on breakdown, epistemic privilege is something that requires experience, as well as reflection on this experience. The people who come from marginalized groups are, after all, marginalized, and are often in such oppressive circumstances that they do not have time to reflect on their experiences and learn from breakdown. Inevitably, and tragically, too many marginalized people die before they are able to attain any epistemic privilege. Further, there are extreme cases of people of color who deny the existence of racism, of women who deny the existence of sexism, and of trans people who deny the existence of transphobia. As long as oppressed groups have members that deny their oppression as a group, standpoint privilege cannot be universal. Some members of the group just might not endure the relevant breakdowns, and even if they did, nothing guarantees that they will learn from any given breakdown experience. Thus, I argue that a phenomenological standpoint theory would not construe epistemic privilege universally throughout members of the group.

The remaining desiderata concerned with avoiding essentialism in standpoint theory and explaining the mutual construction of identity categories may require a more complex strategy. Since we have established a way of talking about multiple identity categories and how those identity categories vary in salience, it is tempting to suggest that multiplicity taken together with salience could explain mutual construction. I do not find this approach particularly productive, at least not by itself. For example, if both race and gender are salient, or if race is extremely salient and gender is moderately salient, none of this tells me anything about the interactions between race and gender or how they construct each other. I suggest that an approach to explaining the mutual construction of identity categories from within the confines of the present project would do well to focus on Merleau-Ponty's characterization of fields as synesthetic. Instead of focusing only on having multiple identity categories and an explanation of how their salience changes, if we talk about the synesthetic way race bleeds over into gender and vice versa, we are getting closer to a phenomenology of identity categories that can explain the categories' mutual construction. Once we acknowledge that identity categories are mutually constructed, it seems like we must then reject essentialism with respect to group construction. That is, since what it is for one to be a woman changes depending on one's other identities like race and ability, it does not make sense to flatten the meaning of "woman" to any essentialistic understanding. Finally, the construction of group identities and the construction of multiple identities at the intersection of these groups is done—and undone—through the transmission and revision of historical narratives, that is, through the interpretation of texts and the give and take of face-to-face conversations that Gadamer takes to be occasions of understanding. These forms of interpretation deny the possibility of essential categories that remain immune from revision. If, in conversations such as this one our pre-judgments become the object of examination, and if our understanding of ourselves and other changes as a result of these conversations, then we will still have sufficient justification for talking about who we are.

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