

Culture, Communication, and Latina Feminist Philosophy: Toward a Critical Phenomenology of Culture

JACQUELINE M. MARTINEZ

An explication of the phenomenological sensibilities found in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and other Latina feminist philosophers offers insight into the problem of bringing philosophy into greater relevance beyond academic and scholarly worlds. This greater relevance entails clear and direct contact with the immediacy of our communicative relationships with others, both inside and outside the academy, and allows for an interrogation of the totalizing perceptions that are at work within normative processes of epistemological legitimation. As a result of this interrogation, it is possible to cultivate perceptual capacities related to culture that intervene in the normatively tacit cultural dispositions that often limit the possibilities of understanding.

Today, we are fortunate to have more than three decades of work by Latina feminists, which has contributed greatly to virtually every major scholarly debate related to cultural knowing and understanding as it is both enabled and constrained by our scholarly and research practices within the US academy. The work of Latina philosophers in particular has made important advances in our ability to recognize the significance of lived experience in ways that bring culturally incisive analyses and greater theoretical precision to our epistemological projects (Anzaldúa 1987; Lugones 1987; Anzaldúa 1990; Perez 1991; Sandoval 1991; Trujillo 1991; Alcoff 1991–1992; Schutte 1998; Trujillo 1998; Martinez 2000; Sandoval 2000; Anzaldúa 2002; Lugones 2003; Torres and Pertusa 2003; Ortega, 2001; Alcoff 2006).

The work of Latina feminist philosophers, particularly that which is phenomenological in emphasis,¹ helps us address many of the limitations and potential pitfalls of academic and scholarly work that features lived experience—especially in light of the impact Gloria Anzaldúa’s work has had in the US academy since the early 1980s. Anzaldúa’s impact highlights the theoretical significance of lived experience and

brings a focus on geographical and historical specificity in the effort to speak a personal truth that is also an incisive cultural critique. The problem is that a focus on lived experience can be made facile, into “unregulated assertion,”² or can be easily mistaken as relevant beyond the idiosyncrasies of one’s own life. This problem is much like those of “psychologism” and “naturalism” as Edmund Husserl grappled with them in his effort to establish philosophy as a rigorous science (McCormick and Elliston 1981).³ It is, however, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s work that we are finally directed toward a *radical cogito* where Husserl’s effort at a genetic phenomenology is properly located within the immediacy of communicative engagement as intersubjectively embodied. The work of Anzaldúa and Latina feminist philosophers in general engages these very problematics of the phenomenological movement and points us in the direction of Merleau-Ponty’s effort to interrogate the very conditions in which the persistent circulations of psychologism and naturalism are sustained.

The work of Latina feminists in general, and Anzaldúa in particular, allows us to chart the very prickly terrain of lived experience and lived relationships as they are concurrently generative in the dual contexts of one’s life as a person and one’s life as a thinker.⁴ Achieving this requires a full grasp of the *presence of culture in the immediacy of communication* as central to the phenomenological project. This focus on the immediacy of communication must be understood as an intersubjective condition (wherein intersubjectivity precedes subjectivity), and as such, part and parcel of the ongoing flow of cultural meanings and historical circumstances as they directly affect the lives and relationships of people communicatively engaged. This is, in short, a communicological approach wherein we recognize that “the expressive body discloses cultural codes, and cultural codes shape the perceptive body—an ongoing, dialectical, complex helix of twists and turns constituting the reflectivity, reversibility, and reflexivity of consciousness and experience” (Lanigan 2008, 855).

All philosophers are born of particular times and places, and even the most astute among us rarely sees the full scope of influences and interrelationships that constitute our time and place, even in retrospect. Phenomenological philosophy itself is a movement interrupted and altered by the tumultuous events of World War II (Spiegelberg 1982; Moran 2000). These events problematized the ethical obligations of philosophy and created a tangible urgency for authors such as Ernst Cassirer who wrote *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, for example, largely in response to what he saw as the failure of “the scholastic conception of philosophy” to make “the true connection of philosophy with the world” (Cassirer 2000, xvii-xviii).⁵ Important here is the question of the capacity of our scholastic endeavors to respond in “true connection” with the world we live within.

In the work that follows, I investigate how the phenomenological emphasis in the work of Latina feminists brings issues of *culture and communication* directly to bear in ways that allow many of the normative presumptions carried within the discourses that sustain academic and epistemological legitimation to be exposed and interrogated—pushing scholarship into a closer connection with the world we live in. I take that world to be one in which interracial, interethnic, and intercultural communication is interpersonally strained, sustaining systems of meaning in which firmly held

and unchecked prejudices remain tacitly and powerfully at work. In pursuing this project it is possible to cultivate *perceptual capacities* that aid us greatly in critiquing and undercutting racist, sexist, heterosexist presumptions, and individualistic dispositions as they are expressed (made actual) in the concrete, immediate, and embodied lives of human beings communicating.⁶ Attention to lived experience is essential, but is not in itself sufficient for this task.

In my discussion of Latina feminists, I feature the work of Anzaldúa for several reasons. First, because of the profound impact her work has had within academic feminism and the US academy since the early 1980s—the academy’s response itself often replicating the problem of “true connection” with the world we live in. Second, because of the seriousness of the challenge Anzaldúa’s work and life offers within an Anglo-American cultural context that continues to grapple with issues of race and racism at virtually every level and within virtually every domain of social and discursive practice. Third, because there is much entailed within the visceral and poetic aspects of her work that holds theoretical and practical insights that are particularly helpful in bringing the *practice of phenomenology* into the realm of cultural critique wherein culture can be addressed as a *dynamically-absent-presence* that becomes actual and materially present in direct conjunction with the immediacy of communicative engagement. Specificities of space, time, and speech can be examined in their reflective, reversible, and reflexive relationship to consciousness and experience. Finally, my own academic and scholarly life⁷ was, in many ways, inaugurated with the work of Anzaldúa, Moraga, Perez, Trujillo, and other Chicana lesbians whose discussions of their life experiences made it possible for me to imagine that an academic and scholarly life could be relevant to my own.

LIVED EXPERIENCE ACROSS PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC LIVES

Latinas and other women of color have been major forces in what has become more than two decades of demonstrable change within the US academy. These changes reflect the insight, effort, and impact of women of color and feminist scholars to address issues related to racism, sexism, heterosexism, social injustice, and scholarly bias. These efforts have played a major role in the development of departments and graduate programs specializing in women and gender studies, African and African-American studies, ethnic studies, and so on. Today we have networks of feminists across disciplines playing important roles in shaping scholarship and curriculum, and in leadership positions within disciplinary organizations. We have increases in the number of women of color entering into the ranks of professors, and although our accession up the academic hierarchy still lags those of white men and white women, there is no doubt that we have made much progress. It is difficult to imagine these changes taking place without the presence and force of women of color scholars and activists whose rootedness in communities of their time and place provided the clarity and insight upon which they have been able to assert their presence and influence upon the academy.

In recognizing this progress within the academy it is very important to remember that the impetus for these changes has come largely from *outside* of the academy, not inside it. What brings many women of color to philosophy and other disciplines are often questions and interests not typically recognized as relevant by the disciplines they enter. Women of color often bring an astute awareness and thinking that is not typically possible within the normative conditions of practice within academic institutions. The status quo of knowledge-production and legitimation could not have produced the changes we have seen within the academy over the past two decades. Whether in its modernist modality of seeking referential precision between linguistic representation and “reality,” or in its postmodernist modality of recognizing the impossibility of such referential precision, the academy itself is a context of *human interrelationships* that is rarely recognized for the significant impact it has on the content of scholarship produced therein. This is true whether we are talking about the human interrelationships that create communities through which scholarship is legitimated via graduate training and publication, or the human interrelationships that create the immediate communities through which scholars live their daily lives as persons pursuing knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.

It is often the case that within our own perception and understanding, our human interrelationships constitute for us totalities that we lack the capacity to see, much less use as a basis for furthering the very knowledge, understanding, and wisdom that we seek—in short, a natural attitude. When a discipline takes itself as a totality—as a practice that can take itself for granted and thereby ignore the immediacy of its own practice—then questions and interests that are typically not recognized within the discipline are often dismissed and sometimes taken as signs of incompetence.⁸ The sensibilities that have informed the work of many women of color in the academy are born from their own life experience, which tends to be significantly different from that of their colleagues, and experience within the academy that exposes what others have yet to see, or simply refuse to see.

The sensibilities that many women of color and Latina feminist philosophers bring to our scholarly practice entail a *perceptive capacity related to culture* that carries with it particular insight into our very relationships within the academy. This perceptive capacity brings attention to our relationships with colleagues and other scholars with whom we apparently share common interests, yet we often find significant disconnects between what we believe are shared goals and values and what we actually experience in our daily interactions.

The process that moves us from encountering these disconnects to pushing the formal content of our scholarly work evolves over time, and always exists beyond our capacity to make it fully transparent. Our attention to this process, however, provides insights that aid greatly in the effort to take as full account as possible of experience and consciousness—and the capacities carried therein—in order to accurately and adequately take account of what becomes real in a shared, dynamic, and constantly changing human world.

Thus we can benefit greatly from an examination of the sensibilities and perceptive capacities through which Latina feminists have engaged and produced work that

remains outside the purview of academic work—both in the sense of received traditions and processes of legitimation, and in the less obvious sense of a practice that takes itself as a totality. We can also see how Latina feminists' attention to specific philosophical problems advances our collective scholarly practices.

THIS BRIDGE CALLED MY BACK

The publication of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981) is significant in the way it stands as a marker and exemplar of a very specific moment of intellectual-political history in the United States. In bringing together women of color under a single moniker that refused the terms of heteronormativity, *This Bridge* inaugurated “queer” as a new signifier capable of usurping many of the taken-for-granted presumptions at work in the academic feminism of the time, and it made clear the utter inadequacy of any notion of identity as singular. In recognizing the multiple aspects and complex contexts of identification and experience, it provides a sharp critique of the interrelated dynamics of racism, sexism, and heterosexism. Even more prescient and incisive are the ways these authors detail how oppressive norms are not only perpetrated upon communities marked by these categories and their accompanying stereotypes, but more significantly, as they are integral to the common discourses that circulate perpetually among all those who live within the shared socio-spatial-temporal conditions of a common culture. For those who are objects of social and cultural oppression, the internalization of that oppression is not just something one suffers, it is also something that one inflicts upon others in ways that make it difficult to distinguish one from the other. The “remedy” for the circulation of these kinds of oppressions lies not in eradication (an impossible task in the real world of people communicating), but through an active engagement with the actualities of one's life as lived in the immediacy of communication with others across broad spectrums of interaction. It is in this way that the phenomenological effort of Latina feminist philosophers offers specific insight for how we might move forward in a twenty-first century that seems to complicate social-justice and antiracism advocacy beyond what the authors of *This Bridge* encountered.⁹

PHENOMENOLOGICAL SENSIBILITIES IN ANZALDÚA'S WORK

“Borderlands” and “*la conciencia de la mestiza*” are, perhaps, the two most important and often cited concepts to emerge from Anzaldúa's work, and for good reason. Taken alongside *la facultad*, these concepts point to specific details regarding the lived experience from which Anzaldúa's insight and incisive analysis emerge. They point us to the details of experience that, although very particular, also speak to a time and place that resonates across entire communities and generations. These concepts also allow us to see more clearly how experiences encountered in the immediate,

concrete, and embodied lives of human beings, living in the here and now situated across our social and cultural worlds, help the more formal theoretical concepts from phenomenological philosophy (concepts that take on significance only to those who study them) attain relevance. These concepts offer insight into how we can cultivate these very kinds of connections, and allow us to see the phenomenological sensibilities required in order to take account of how we come to know what we think we know.

This kind of epistemological effort, however, cannot be divorced from an epistemological agent—a person situated in time, space, and culture—who perceives something, and who, from that perception, makes sense, that is, makes perception into something other than what it was. Taking account of a person's perceptual capacity as it allows the particularity of sense-making to occur in the immediacy of experience is very much what is enabled by Anzaldúa's focus on *borderlands*, *la conciencia de la mestiza*, and *la facultad*. The phenomenological inflection of these concepts emerges as we recognize the process of identifying presuppositions and performing reductions that are fundamental to phenomenological practice.

Anzaldúa defines a borderland as “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (Anzaldúa 1987, 3).¹⁰ Consider the idea of an “unnatural boundary” in relation to phenomenology's focus on the “natural attitude.” In phenomenological philosophy, a suspension of the “natural attitude,” or the invocation of the epochē, is commonly understood as a consciously taken step. Yet, in Anzaldúa's account, borderlands are not places one chooses to “visit” or consciously attend to, but rather emerge as one finds oneself at odds within the normative and communicative conditions of one's life. Thus we are able to understand the significance of Anzaldúa's “unnatural boundary” as an *involuntary suspension* of the “natural attitude” (or, even better, the epochē *invokes us*). Typically, in our everyday lives, when we call something “unnatural”—like homosexuality, for example—that very designation announces a commitment to a “natural attitude” (in this case, a “natural attitude” rooted in heteronormativity). In Anzaldúa's formulation, however, “unnatural” does not function as a judgment that remains tacitly at work within firm and dense boundaries, but an experience of unplaced and disjointed energies that loosens the normative boundaries.

On this point it is helpful to understand “boundary” in terms offered by social-systems theory, as existing where the intensity and/or type of energy is greater on one side of a certain point than on the other (Carter 2011). To recognize oneself as a woman who desires other women sexually in a context where that is incomprehensible except as monstrous is to involuntarily encounter a border where the energies that exist on the one side of this self-recognition are very different in type and intensity from those that exist on the other side. These energies, moreover, are not mutually exclusive. Boundaries are not equivalent to barriers, and it is the varying intensity and range of exchange of energies that constitute boundaries. This helps us understand a borderland as a “vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue.” Emotion is embodied energy. What would normally pass between two consociates (in Schutz's 1967 sense) remains unnoticed and taken for granted, and as

such the embodied energies constituting our perceptive and expressive body remain tacit in our self-consciousness. To notice what is unnoticed places one neither outside nor inside, but in the relation between, often experienced as a vague and undetermined place.¹¹ This “noticing,” subtle and accumulating from encounter after encounter, takes on a density that can no longer be ignored (it becomes acute), balances are shifted and presuppositions previously held intact are suspended, bringing new things into conscious awareness.

María Lugones’s now classic essay, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Traveling, and Loving Perception” (Lugones 1987), offers a clear and penetrating example of how one comes to and moves through an involuntary suspension of the natural attitude. Communication with others is essential in this involuntary suspension of the natural attitude, as Lugones recognizes that others do not share her understanding of herself as “playful.”¹² Recognizing a serious disjunction between her self-perception and others’ perception of her leads Lugones to reflect upon the “worlds” she lives in and how it is that in some “worlds” her “playfulness” is recognized, whereas in others it is not. What follows from here is a rich and phenomenologically inflected description of a *self in a “world.”* An essential characteristic of a *self in a “world”* is that it is “inhabited at present by some flesh and blood people” (Lugones 1987, 9), which means people we are *actively in communication with*. To be actively in communication with others is to be bound to our own “mediating praxis that interprets and constructs our experience from the praxis of others” (Alcoff 1991–1992, 21). A “world,” in Lugones’s sense, may also include people of one’s imagination—those who have passed on, or those we “met in some other ‘world’ and now have in this ‘world’ in imagination” (10). We can be equally communicative with people who live in our imagination, although the basic structures of communication change when we shift from communicating with flesh and blood people to those in our imagination.¹³

The involuntary suspension of the natural attitude brings new and unanticipated things into conscious awareness. It is impossible to say, perhaps even for Lugones herself, how exactly her “profound confusion” in experiencing herself as unplayful became connected with her reflections on her life as a daughter who was taught to “perceive arrogantly.”¹⁴ It is, in other words, often difficult to know, even in retrospect, how one particular unanticipated moment of awareness leads to the discovery of more unanticipated awarenesses—even though this is one way of conceiving the result of a systematic and rigorous application of phenomenological methodology. But it is clear that in the writing of this essay Lugones has highlighted the conceptual importance of seeing how the misalignments of self-perception with others’ perception of oneself can be a powerful impetus to reflection that brings into view the ways in which one views others. When such reflections reflexively incorporate an understanding of the differing cultural dispositions at work in our own habituated practices of being-in-communication-with, and the culturally bound conceptualizations that are at work in the other’s view within this misalignment of perception, we have a *perceptive capacity related to culture* that can greatly enhance our recognition of cultural difference as it is at work in the immediacy of our communicative engagement with others.¹⁵

La conciencia de la mestiza emerges from borderlands. In phenomenological terms, we can say that when our phenomenological reflection reaches a point of recognizing its invocation of the epochē by virtue of its linkage with the immediacy of our communicative engagement with others (a phenomenological borderland), we have the emergence of a consciousness like *la conciencia de la mestiza*.¹⁶

Although I have identified ways in which encountering borderlands can be understood as an invocation of the phenomenological epochē, it is not necessarily true that borderlands can emerge from such an invocation—perhaps it can never be true if the epistemological agent herself lacks a minimum degree of perceptive capacity related to the cultural and communicative constraints present in the given context. Ofelia Schutte's discussion of cultural alterity is very helpful in describing the circumstances through which this kind of perceptive capacity related to culture and communication is often at work in encounters between Anglo-American women and Latina feminists within the US academy: "What my interlocutor recognizes is not what I would have liked—an encouragement to communicate insights I offer from a standpoint of cultural difference—but only my ability to enter a standard Anglo-American speaking position, a position that exists in negotiated tension with my culturally differentiated, reflexive sense of self" (Schutte 1998, 60).

To recognize the problem of the lack, or limits, of one's perceptive capacity is to recognize the significance of something that one cannot see, and that may or may not become seeable to oneself. Without encountering this very condition of recognizing the limits of our perceptive capacity as it is at work in the immediacy of our communication with others, we cannot enter into borderlands nor discover a consciousness like Anzaldúa's *la conciencia de la mestiza*. As Schutte puts it, "These multiple layers within the self, responding to different perceptive fields and different, not necessarily commensurable temporalities, can predispose us psychologically to appreciate both the richness and the incommensurability of cultural difference" (Schutte 1998, 57-58).

To discover or cultivate such a psychological predisposition, and the tolerance for ambiguity that it requires, takes much more than an intellectual effort.¹⁷ It requires listening and seeking to understand from borderlands and all the immediate and embodied experiences that entails. It requires, in short, *la facultad*. To listen and seek understanding from the borderlands is to do so from a state of perplexity, ambiguity, and contradiction. To listen and seek understanding from this position cultivates a very different communicative capacity than when we listen from a position of knowing or seeing in totalities wherein one can take oneself and one's social world for granted.

LA FACULTAD, MERLEAU-PONTY, AND THE ANGLO ACADEMY

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty differentiates between a "constituting consciousness" and a "perceptual consciousness." Only the latter can give us access to the *radical cogito*. Perceptual consciousness gives predisposition to constituting

consciousness. *La facultad*, enabled as it is through our engagement with borderlands, is a perceptual capacity that usurps the governing capacity of the constituting consciousness and allows for an interrogation of the very way in which the particularity of a moment of conscious awareness (a constituted consciousness) comes to be. Merleau-Ponty tells us that “behavior creates meanings, which are transcendent in relation to the anatomical apparatus, yet remains imminent to the behavior [speech and gesture]” (Merleau-Ponty 1962/1981, 185). When we fail to recognize how perceptual consciousness gives predisposition to our constituting consciousness, we are less able to develop the kind of perceptual capacities related to culture as they are detailed in the work of Anzaldúa and other Latina feminist philosophers. More important, perhaps, is the fact that so long as we remain committed to a constituting consciousness and exclude the presence of perceptual consciousness, we will have errors of *evidence* wherein we argue competing interpretations that fail to move toward and account for how we have come to give our “evidence” status as such in the first place.

To correct this error of evidence and assessment, we must, as Merleau-Ponty instructs, recognize that “the body, as a chemical structure or an agglomeration of tissues, is formed, by a process of impoverishment, from a primordial phenomenon of the body-for-us, the body of human experience or the perceived body, round which objective thought works, but without being called upon to postulate its complete analysis” (Merleau-Ponty 1962/1981, 351). What this means is that because the analysis that goes into “object thought” does not call upon “the body of human experience or the perceived body” (that is, our bodies communicatively engaged) our analyses are incomplete. As a result, our evidence is inadequate, and thus our effort to assess our judgments relies on the faulty notion of a constituting consciousness—a consciousness devoid of the body’s physical and communicative existence. In contrast, when we turn “towards perception, and pass from direct perception to thinking about perception, I reenact it, and find at work in my organs of perception a thinking older than myself of which those organs are merely the trace. *In the same way I understand the existence of other people*” (351–52; my emphasis). It is at this very intersection of perceptual organ (our body) and *trace* that we find *culture* as embodied in the human being. This moment of culture, moreover, takes concrete form in my particular recognition of the existence of other people.

Because US culture valorizes individualism and autonomy, and privileges perspectives that focus on future possibilities over historical understanding, it is easy to forget the significance of other people in one’s self-understanding. One of the reasons it is so seemingly easy for some feminists in the Anglo-American academy to overlook the contributions of Anzaldúa, Moraga, and other feminists of color is that they retain a rootedness in communities through which they retain an intersubjectively confirmed completeness, comfort, and assertiveness within their own position and all of the normative conditions carried therein. They can, in other words, take their intersubjective position for granted and thereby make their own sense of the world into a *total world*, even while making claims to the contrary.

The work produced by Latina feminist philosophers within the Anglo-American academy is much less tied to the norms and presumptions of US American culture

than is that of those born and raised in circumstances that allow them to take much of their everyday understanding of the social world for granted. To be Latina in this circumstance means that “[i]n order to receive recognition as a cultural agent, I must show that I can be both a Latina and a North American; that I can alternate between these identities, so much so that in extremely ‘tight’ cultural situations, I can perform, in my North American voice, a public erasure of my Latina voice, if need be. My white Anglo-American counterpart is not called on to perform such a feat with respect to her own cultural background” (Schutte 1998, 59).

LATINA FEMINISTS AND WOMEN OF COLOR

The communicative dynamics through which it becomes possible to move beyond the totalizing effects of a constituting consciousness and toward the particularities of a perceptual consciousness as detailed by Merleau-Ponty remains a latent possibility in all human communication. The existence of a boundary or “borderland” within the immediacy of communication is the key circumstance through which this latent possibility can become actual as a perceptive capacity related to culture.

In the present work, I have tried to show how the work of three particular Latina feminist philosophers emphasizing a phenomenological approach illustrates these very dynamics of communication and perceptual capacity related to culture. The boundaries encountered by Schutte, Lugones, and Anzaldúa share a common feature in that each of them is a first-language Spanish speaker. In noting this fact, however, we must be careful not to reduce the significance of these Latinas’ experience to the formal constraints of linguistic structure, but instead understand the relationship between the French “*langage*,” “*langue*,” and “*parole*” as encountered in the immediacy of our communicative engagements with others. “Knowing” a language is one thing, but speaking in the immediacy of being with others is something different. It is important to remember, in other words, that whereas all language is communication, not all communication is language.

Schutte’s work, in particular, shows us how her existence within an Anglo (English-speaking) context sometimes requires an erasure of her “Latina voice.” The commitment to communicate always requires adjustments on the part of the persons involved—sometimes even a choice to erase aspects of one’s own “voice.” A teacher in a classroom, for example, will often “erase” aspects of her own “voice” in order to serve her pedagogical objectives. But in a context where we are actively seeking knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, our ability to engage our “voices” is a significant human resource through which our perceptive capacities related to culture pivot. This pivot becomes more significant as our “commitment” to cultural understanding increases, and that is one reason why many Latina feminists and other women of color can be particularly affected when colleagues who explicitly present themselves as “culturally sensitive” or interested in “diverse perspectives” fail to recognize the very erasures that their own communicative engagement requires of those who are culturally different.

Lugones's work focuses more directly on the consequence of one's "voice" being unrecognized within communicative engagements. Consider what it is like to listen to one's voice as recorded on a recording device. Upon recognizing one's own voice, an entire context of associations emerges related to the time, place, and circumstances in which we spoke those words. As we become re-immersed in that context we recognize subtleties of our own "style" and "presence" that we were not aware of in the actual moments of our speaking (and this is why we often don't like to hear our own voice recorded!). The circumstance in which Lugones encounters a serious disjunction between her self-perception and others' perception of her marks a point where linguistic understanding may be entirely adequate, but communicative understanding is not. This alerts us to the fact that even when interlocutors speak the same language, and are more or less effective communicators within a specialized language (for example, philosophical discourse), the capacity to understand one another can be highly limited.

This is the point at which the analysis I have presented here applies to many, perhaps even most, women of color working within the academy in general. Many women of color scholars have come into the academy from communities where an academic career is not a common life trajectory. And, as I have argued, it is, in many cases, women of color's rootedness in communities outside of the academy that has allowed us to move beyond the status quo of knowledge-production within the academy. As a general claim, however, this point achieves nothing (and, in fact, perpetuates oppressions) if it is used as an abstract point aimed at garnering status and recognition by the mere fact that one is a woman of color.

It is at this point, then, that Anzaldúa's work aids us greatly by engaging the specificities of time, place, speech, and experience that can bring abstract assertion into more active engagement with the immediacy of our communication with others as it is fundamentally interrelated with history and culture. Anzaldúa's chapter in *Borderlands* entitled "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," for example, identifies eight languages spoken by Chicanos/as, "people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English" (Anzaldúa 1987, 55). These eight spoken languages are not exhaustive, but the categorization itself allows us to see the relationship among speech, place, and culture in a way that our normal categorizations of languages do not. Anzaldúa's categories are 1) standard English, 2) working-class and slang English, 3) standard Spanish, 4) standard Mexican Spanish, 5) north Mexican Spanish dialect, 6) Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California have regional variations), 7) Tex-Mex, and 8) *Pachuco* (called *caló*).

The significance of these eight categories of spoken language lies not in the fact of their categorization, but in what they allow us to come to see within the immediacy of our communicative engagement with others. As I listen to my interlocutor speak, I can become aware that despite our apparent linguistic and speech commonalities, there remain aspects of linguistic and bodily expression that are quite different from my own. Until I recognize this possibility of difference, my capacity to recognize

the particular insights related to culture that my interlocutor may offer will remain irrelevant in my thinking, feeling, and understanding. Thus, it is not only the fact that each of the Latina philosophers I have engaged in the present work are first-language Spanish speakers that makes their contributions significant. It is, rather, the way in which they have each cultivated their own perceptual capacities related to culture that reveals for us the challenges of pursuing cross-cultural understanding absent the kind of phenomenological sensibilities that reveal what is at work in the immediacy of our communicative engagement with others.

As philosophers and people dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom related to the actuality of human being, it benefits us greatly to make this pursuit in conjunction with the phenomenological and communicative sensibilities gleaned from the work of the Latina feminist philosophers I have considered here.

NOTES

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1. For work considering the relationship between feminism and phenomenology, see Fisher and Embree 2000.

2. A tendency, as noted by Dermot Moran, that also occurs in “some of the more baroque elements present in current Continental theorizing” (Moran 2000, 14).

3. Qualitative research methodology in particular is susceptible to accepting experience as mere *data* (that which is given as evidence, Q.E.D.) and fails to undertake the more demanding task of differentiating between it and *capta* (that which is taken as evidence, Q.E.I.) and *acta* (that which is done, or created as evidence, Q.E.F.) (Lanigan 1992, 215). Unfortunately, the status accorded texts like Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* fuels a naïve, naturalistic belief because it is valorized simplistically as bringing “voice” into research (see, for example, Gamson 2000; see Martinez 2003 for a full analysis of this point). I have observed a tendency within some “ethnographic” and “performative” research to assume all of the normative features of *naturalism*, so much so that “self-reflexivity” is treated as direct self-awareness, as a given datum, and therefore *de facto* epistemologically significant (for example, Gergen and Gergen 2000). In this way, qualitative research easily replicates all of the presumptions of positivism, yet is often used as if it is an antidote for “disembodied knowledge.” See Kaplan 1964/1998 for a thorough treatment of these methodological problems.

4. I do not mean to suggest that our lives as “persons” and “thinkers” are easily separable, or entirely distinct. Nevertheless, the distinction is that as thinkers we can come very close to making our thinking fully transparent to ourselves, and our language in close and direct correspondence with our thinking. As persons, however, we are never fully

transparent to ourselves, nor are we ever capable of seeing ourselves as others see us. To presume that any language is adequate to our own “personhood” is to tend toward an evasion of the fact that the very possibility of “personhood” itself is always relational, situated, contingent, and an ongoing achievement.

5. Although I do not take up Cassirer’s work here, it resonates greatly with Merleau-Ponty in the effort to detail terms and conditions through which we come to assert what we take as real; both authors bring a semiotic focus on signs and sign-systems directly to bear on the problematics of perception and science (Martinez 2006).

6. It is worth noting that the emphasis on communication is clearly featured in the opening lines of Husserl’s 1922 London Lectures on “Phenomenological Method and Phenomenological Philosophy,” when he announces his thesis to explicate a “transcendental phenomenological phenomenology having reference to a *manifest multiplicity of conscious subjects communicating with one another*” (quoted in Lanigan 1988, 203; my emphasis).

7. I distinguish between “academic” and “scholarly” to denote that one’s scholarly effort—to study and write—can be very distinct from, and even at odds with, the effort to sustain an academic career.

8. This circumstance is also explained as the decaying of thought through “disciplinary decadence.” See Gordon 2006 and Martinez 2010.

9. Linda Martín Alcoff offers an extensive and incisive analysis of the political implications of our notions of racial identity as they circulate within contemporary academic, social, and political discourse (Alcoff 2006). An overarching concern in Alcoff’s work is how racial identities become real, tangibly present, and immediately consequential in the everyday lives of people. Although issues of racism and its effects today are not distinct from those issues as they were dealt with by the authors in *This Bridge*, it is true that our attention to issues of race and racism over the past few decades—prompted to a significant degree by *This Bridge* and texts like it—has created ever-swelling fields of contention across our social and cultural milieu. Alcoff’s work offers an incisive analysis of these contentious fields as they are engaged, critiqued, and shaped in philosophical and political discourse.

10. I want to be clear that in the discussion that follows, I am not suggesting that Anzaldúa intended any of the meanings I am offering here; my point is, rather, that her work can shed light on these concepts from phenomenological philosophy and help move it into a fully engaged practice that moves in “truer connection” with the world we live in.

11. For a discussion of the semiotic and discursive function of a boundary condition, see Lanigan 1992, 102–06.

12. See Ortega 2001 for an analysis of the ontological issues at work in considering the “self” as a “different” “self” when “traveling” to different “worlds,” or as a “multiplicitous self” understood in light of Anzaldúa’s account of *la conciencia de la mestiza* and Heidegger’s account of *Dasein*. For further discussion of Anzaldúa’s *la conciencia de la mestizo*, see Alarcón 1990.

13. This point raises many important and complex issues related to communication, particularly in light of the radical shifts in communication enabled by computer technology and social media. For the present purpose, however, the point is simply that the people who constitute our “worlds” live within us via our communication with them. Some of those people can answer back. How they answer back “animates,” whether intentionally

or not, their notions of who we are and our notions of ourselves, notions that rarely correspond. The degree to which those notions are based in stereotypes and/or ignorance of cultural difference is often the degree to which “world-traveling” is initiated or compelled for those farther removed from the normative terms of communication (that is, have a different body, speak in a different way, and so on).

14. Lugones’s discussion of “arrogant perception” provides an important explication that has, over the past two decades, become thematic among the work of feminists of color in addressing racism and its many residues in feminist scholarship and academic practice.

15. See Martinez 2000 for an explication of “being-in-communication-with.”

16. I say “like” *la conciencia de la mestiza* because the “mestiza” in Anzaldúa’s work is critical in announcing the particularities of historical and cultural place—for Anzaldúa that is what is today the southwestern United States and Mexico. The specificities of historical and cultural place become critical in moving from the particularities of individual experience to making claims related to experience typified across a social milieu, and from the immediacy of this moment, across temporalities of culture and generation. In other words, this is a critical link in developing a postcolonial phenomenology.

17. Chela Sandoval’s work on “differential consciousness,” for example, makes important contributions to understanding how the discursive movements of a particular era of scholarly work reflects different kinds of predispositions toward our theoretical efforts. These dispositions, in turn, may be held singularly, or be recognized as multiple—negotiated between and among. Our negotiations among these theoretical efforts, functioning as dispositions in our experiencing, cultivate what Sandoval calls a “differential consciousness.” Such a “differential consciousness” remains, however, within the realm of academic theory and does not expand its linkages to the fact of our immediate and embodied communication with others—although there is nothing in Sandoval’s work that prevents these linkages from being made. Similarly, Anzaldúa’s essay, “Now Let Us Shift...The Path of Conocimiento... Inner Work, Public Acts” (2002), remains so attentive to internal processing through conscious experience that it is as if the process detailed in this work never involves other people.

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