

PAIN AND PLAY: BUILDING COALITIONS TOWARD DECOLONIZING PHILOSOPHY

KRIS F. SEALEY

ABSTRACT: In what follows I offer three theoretical frameworks out of which we might think through coalition building for the sake of decolonization. My claim is that, through these three frameworks, we can be attentive to the ways we, ourselves are shaped by coloniality as we collectively work to resist it. The first framework is Maria Lugones's account of playful world-travel. The second concerns the practice of unsuturing, developed George Yancy. And the third is Édouard Glissant's notion of opacity (as that conception pertains to his account of errantry). In bringing these together, I foreground opacity as the cornerstone of an encounter between self and Other, as that encounter figures both in Lugones's account of world traveling, and in Glissant's account of errantry. I use George Yancy's conception of unsuturing to show that it is more productive to think of world-travel's play as coupled with unsuturing's pain, rather than to think of these compartments as either mutually exclusive or diametrically opposed. Lugones, Glissant, and Yancy show that, out of this pain-play compartment, our collective commitments to decolonization might result in more effective coalitions against the workings of colonial power, so as to gesture toward the possibility of alternative (decolonial) worlds.

Kris F. Sealey is Associate Professor of Philosophy, and director of Black Studies Program at Fairfield University. Dr. Sealey graduated from Spelman College in 2001, with a B.Sc. in Mathematics, and received both her M.A. and PhD in philosophy from the University of Memphis. Since 2011, she has served as the book review editor of the *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*. She is also the director of *Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institute* (PIKSI), a summer immersion experience at Penn State University for underrepresented undergraduate students with an interest in pursuing a doctorate in philosophy. Dr. Sealey's areas of research include the critical philosophy of race, Caribbean philosophy, and post-colonial theory. Her published articles can be found in *Critical Philosophy of Race*, *Hypatia: A Journal for Feminist Philosophy*, *Levinas Studies*, *Research in Phenomenology*, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, and *Continental Philosophy Review*. Her book, *Moments of Disruption: Levinas, Sartre and the Question of Transcendence*, was published in December 2013 with SUNY Press. Her second book, *Creolizing the Nation*, will be published in October 2020 with Northwestern University Press.

I would like to engage the theme under which we have gathered—the question, really—with some thoughts on the possibility of building coalitions toward decolonizing practices (both in the discipline of philosophy, and more broadly). Given the plural histories and social locations from which we commit to the work of decolonization, how might we build conditions that are sufficiently attuned to the multiple ways in which our individual identities are always-already shaped in colonial power? And, perhaps most importantly, how might we foreground the ways in which these multiple identities position us as *complicit* in that colonial power? These questions acknowledge that we take our historically-constituted identities into our coalitional work toward decolonization, and ultimately ask us to think about the modes of relationality that might support that coalitional work. To be sure, these questions are not new, and I expect that they are certainly now new to any of us here. Theorists like María Lugones, Mariana Ortega, Linda Alcoff (who we're fortunate enough to have with us¹) have all grappled with the political urgencies of building effective coalitions out of which radical decolonial work might happen. These are all scholars whose work takes seriously the first premise (so to speak) that we take our historically-constituted identities with us into the coalitions we build. So for them, as it is for me, the question of coalition-building for the sake of decolonization must also take on the question of not only how we understand the production of our identities, but also how we produce relationships (the relationality, if you will) among these historically-constituted identities.

So, in what follows, I explore a possible dialogue among three theoretical frameworks out of which we might think through this relationality. The first (and this is in no particular order) is María Lugones's account of playful world-travel. The second concerns the practice of unsuturing, developed by George Yancy in his recent work on white self-criticality. And the third is Édouard Glissant's notion of opacity in his conception of errantry (as that conception plays out in his account of the composite community). In bringing these together, I hope to foreground opacity as the cornerstone of an encounter between self and Other, as that encounter figures both in Lugones's political account of playful world-traveling and in Glissant's poetic account of errantry. I then use this poetic-political of opacity to bring Lugones's account of play into dialogue with George Yancy's conception

¹ In the paper she presented at this conference, Linda Alcoff urged us to think about the difference between an imperial feminism and a decolonial feminism and emphasized the sense in which the latter finds itself on cross-cultural complex communication. To my mind, what I propose here (using Lugones, Glissant, and Yancy) is very much in this vein of cross-cultural complex communication.

of unsuturing. In so doing, I show that it is more productive to think of world-travel's play as coupled with unsuturing's pain, rather than to think of these compartments as mutually exclusive. That is to say, it is through the playful attitude's invitation to being decentered that one might encounter the pain of unsuturing, or of staying in the orbit of the exposure that decentering brings. Out of this pain-play compartment might be derived a mode of relationality that supports the idea of coalition that is sufficiently attuned to the workings of colonial power, so as to gesture toward the possibility of alternative (decolonial) worlds.

This will unfold in four sections: (1) Opacity, Errantry and World-traveling, (2) Lugones on the Attitude of Play, (3) Yancy on the Practice of Unsuturing, and (4) Coalitional Limen Work—Pain as/in Play? In my last section, I am particularly mindful of Mariana Ortega's critical assessment of the playful attitude, whereby she proposes that the world-traveling involved in building resistive coalitions ought to be critical instead of playful. My hope is that, in thinking about world-travel in terms of the "play-as-pain" relation to the Other's opacity, we are better positioned to address Ortega's important critique.

1. OPACITY, ERRANTRY AND WORLD-TRAVELING

According to Édouard Glissant's rhizomatic theory of community, relationality happens in the opaqueness of the Other. This opacity foregrounds the Other's radical difference and guards against her (epistemological and ontological) reduction to dominant structures of unity. What this means is that, configured around opacity, being in a relationship in this composite community amounts to "giving on and with the other" *as* she remains not-entirely-known (or not entirely knowable). Glissant theorizes this mode of relation in his conception of errantry—a movement of knowing, being, and existing that responds to the Other's opacity (to the absence of her full disclosure). In this sense, errant thinking is in the business of producing knowledge that does not totalize for the sake of understanding, but rather acknowledges the heterogeneity of the community as both irreducible, and as what determines that community as a dynamic and fluid condition for the possibility of plural conceptions of the human. The subject who moves in the world errantly "challenges and discards the universal—this generalizing edict that [summarizes] the world as something obvious and transparent. . . ." ² Opposed to this errant thinking, onto-thinking happens when

² Glissant 1997, 20–21.

the end game of thought is totality, the reduction of uncertainty for the sake of understanding. Through this mode of thinking, everything is fixed within the theoretical boundaries that make possible those processes of scientific definition, or, perhaps, the very being of science itself. Hence, because it is no longer an onto-thinking, the movement of errantry is able to think through and within the complex and moving relationalities that emerge among the lived differences of the composite community, differences that signify in an opacity that protects from onto-thought, and that manifests existentially in a refusal to be reducible to a calculus of sameness, unity, and purity.³

In Maria Lugones's development of world-traveling, we find a similar signifying frame for difference. I say more about the constitution of Lugones's plural subject in the following section. But for now, suffice it to say that, like Glissant's errant thinker, the plural subject's travel between multiple worlds also includes a negotiation of that which is opaque, encountered, and related to as an irreducible difference. For Lugones, more so than is explicitly the case for Glissant, this opacity of the Other—and of her world—is a difference that is ultimately grounded in historical materiality. That is to say, the opacity that underscores social heterogeneity in Lugones's account points to differences in social locations or in how subjects are differentially positioned within grids of power. However, as I will show, the opacity of these historical identities will not foreclose the possibility of communicative relationships and, by extension, the possibility of creative transformation. Rather, much like what Glissant offers, opacity in Lugones will *enact* communication across multiple social worlds as a complex communication. This account is very much motivated by Lugones's need to offer a politics of resistance that would capture the lived experience of subjects existing in between multiple cultural and discursive spaces. In other words, the stakes involved are explicitly political, and so opacity is grounded in materiality. This allows Lugones to show how oppressed subjects find inventive (new) ways around their oppression under structures of domination and how they do so from/within those very structures. In bringing this account into conversation with Glissant, I hope to make more explicit similar political implications in his work.

About her conception of ontological plurality, Lugones writes, "I think that there are many worlds, not autonomous, but intertwined semantically

³ In a previous work that brings Glissant's poetics of relation to bear on Fanon's account of the possibility of the postcolonial nation, I show that, despite this refusal, errantry and opacity nonetheless allows for the coherence needed for community. See Sealey 2018.

and materially, with a logic that is sufficiently self-coherent and sufficiently in contradiction with others to constitute an alternative construction of the social.”⁴ She names this alternative construction “heterogeneous,” and in so doing, asks her readers to understand sociality as a historically-differentiated space, consisting of multiple discursive practices and meaning productions. On this formulation, the social is constituted *in* (or as) difference. This constitution is similar to the composite nature of Glissant’s errant community, except that, unlike Glissant, Lugones is explicit in her claim that these differences acquire meaning in history. Glissant holds that to think errantly is to encounter the opaque as such, to resist all totalizing truth, lest those totalizing principles reduce the diversity of which the composite community consists.⁵ Though some readers of Glissant (like Nick Nesbitt) cite this ontology of immanence as what sacrifices the very normativity upon which any sort of Glissantian decolonial politics might emerge, I argue that the resonances between Glissant’s account and Lugones’s, which I trace here, may offer a different story.

Because Lugones’s ontological plurality points to the existence of multiple worlds, it also points to the liminal spaces between those worlds, spaces that are occupied by the kind of subject about whom Lugones theorizes—the plural subject. These are subjects who are unable to belong completely into any one community of sense, either as a consequence of marginalization by dominant structures, or because their identities are, in fact, *plurally* constituted through many communal associations. Encountering the social as heterogeneous is simply part of the concrete existence of this plural subject, since it is out of her liminality that the plurality of worlds shows up, with each world being that in which she differentially, or partially, belongs. To return, again, to the political stakes of Lugones’s development. It is out of the idea of the social as heterogeneous—consisting of multiple worlds, multiple meaning-productions, multiple options and avenues for living—that the plural subject is able to determine ways of resisting dominant structures. In other words, the story that Lugones is able to tell is one of entanglements between domination *and* liberation, between political oppression and political resistance.

Out of this frame of heterogeneous sociality, differences that are socially and politically relevant show up as plural negotiations of history. In this sense, the Other’s difference is a historical difference, a difference that

⁴ Lugones 2003, 20.

⁵ “Diversity, which is neither chaos nor sterility, means the human spirit’s striving for cross-cultural relationship, without universalist transcendence” (Glissant 1999, 98).

is a consequence of her concrete experience of navigating structures of domination and of creating modes of resisting those structures. Hence, our differences are not exterior to the totality of the world (of its history), but rather precisely *as* we have been shaped by that history, by our public and intimate navigations of that history. What this means is that reckoning with human difference already includes a deep engagement with historical locations, and with how the multiplicity of those locations constitutes the social as heterogeneous. But, as Lugones notes, these historical locations are neither monadic nor exist in absolute isolation from each other. Framing social heterogeneity in this atomistic way simply reinstates the fragmentation and calculus of purity of which Lugones is most critical. Furthermore, it replaces one socially homogenous space with *multiple* socially homogenous spaces, a move that does not yet capture the way in which her account of social heterogeneity seeks to move us beyond homogenous/pure accounts of the social, and to conceptualize difference to be *constitutive of* the social.

In Glissant's composite community, opacity similarly serves as resistance to epistemic imperialism. The Other is encountered not to be reduced to some common cultural denominator for the purpose of transparency, but rather as someone with whom I can be in community, despite being unable to fully understand her concrete historical experience. More importantly, in that relationship with an opaque Other, it is possible for my own relation to history (to *my* history) to undergo transformation. In Glissant's words, in "giving on and with" the Other, I might become Other onto myself, discover a different meaning in my material/social location. In the world-travelling of the plural subject, Lugones also recognizes the potentialities of becoming Other. She describes such potential in terms of "epistemic shifts to other worlds of sense," shifts that happen when the plural subject moves in and out of various communities (of which social multiplicity consists) in travel that is precisely not motivated by what she names "imperialist" endeavors.⁶ In other words, like Glissant's errant thinker, Lugones's world-traveler does not seek to understand for the sake of conquering (or to conquer for the sake of understanding). Rather, very much in the spirit of Marilyn Frye's account of the loving eye, Lugones conceives world-travelling as travel led by "the eye of one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination."⁷ Hence, in both the errant thinker (participating in the relationality of the composite community) and the world-traveler (moving

⁶ Lugones 2003, 18.

⁷ Frye 1983, 75.

through a heterogeneous sociality), there is a decentering of the epistemic comfort and ontological wholeness of the subject.⁸ The errant thinker is in relationship with the Other despite this absence of full disclosure, and the world-traveler moves in and out of permeable worlds despite their preservation in opacity. Indeed, without that opacity, world-traveling returns to the travel of “tourists and colonial explorers, missionaries, settlers and conquerors.”⁹

Opacity, here, conditions the kind of relational transformations that produce options for an “otherwise” within the concrete space of the community. It gives us a conception of the social as change and a conception of social heterogeneity that offers, to living subjectivities, possibilities of resistance alongside the oppression of mainstream structures. A close reading of Glissant’s descriptions of the rhizoming composite community will determine these possibilities of resistance in terms of a poetics and not a politics. But the point I want to make here is that even as a *poetics* of resistance, his understanding of opacity and dynamic relationality is very much within the same register as Lugones’s understanding of opacity and social heterogeneity. In both accounts, we find a notion of community both as historically constituted and as a moving negotiation with that historical ground.¹⁰ A framework that allows us to do this—theorize the meaning of opacity *in* history, or as constituted through social location—is important for the question of building coalitions for the sake of decolonization. As the next section details how Lugones grounds world-travel in the attitude of play, I hope to foreground these implications for coalition-building, or for what it might mean to form resistant communities across multiple forms of oppression. As an epistemic world-traveling that maintains opacity—so, not the travel of the tourist *or* the travel of the conqueror—playful world-travel is a practice out of which this coalitional multiplicity might emerge, where differences are borne witness to instead of reduced to their lowest common denominator. It is for this reason that, in playful world-travel, Lugones finds

⁸ Throughout this conference on decolonizing philosophy, the theme of decentering ran through with significance. In his account of the value of comparative philosophy, Grant Silva reminded those in the audience that we encounter cultural alterity (or epistemes different from our own) not to get in the minds of “other” ways of knowing. Rather, the value of encountering cultural and epistemic alterity is in its potential to disrupt or decenter our own ways of knowing, our own problem spaces, and our own ways of knowing-how. His paper centered this act of decentering at the center of what it might mean to decolonize philosophy.

⁹ Lugones 2003, 18.

¹⁰ In other words, both conceptions of community allow us to imagine a reckoning with history (with the historical identities for which we must be responsible) without making history an essentializing force in our politics.

conditions for collective political work toward a world in which plural conceptions of the human are possible—where there is resistance against *multiple* forms of structural violence *without* reproducing the very politics of reductive purity we aim to resist.

2. PLAYFUL WORLD-TRAVEL

As a plural subject, my proficiency with world-traveling—with the plural self-compartments I am called to develop as I move from one community of meaning to another—is often a consequence of my inability to fully belong to any one world. More than this, proficiency with world-traveling often grows out of being *marginalized* in multiple worlds. Hence, the world-traveler does not simply move from one space to another. Rather, she travels in order to generate, in very novel ways, conditions for the possibility of a free life, belonging and being fully human in one community of meaning in ways that are foreclosed in another. Hence, acts of world-traveling are very much acts of sabotage against oppressive structures, and by “sabotage” Lugones means that, as a liminal/in-between subject, I concretize resistance right alongside my oppression. I upset the architecture of a power grid out of which my only option *should* have been an experience of oppression. Instead, through conceiving the social in terms of an ontological plurality, and through conceiving the possibility of a world-traveling subject, acts of sabotage emerge not to *destroy* that power grid, but rather to “trick” it, to live alongside—and despite—its calculus.

As framed by Lugones, this world-traveler shifts from one set of knowledge productions into another, where the change in semantic and/or valuative organizations is sufficiently fundamental as to signify moving into a different community of meaning. As I discussed in the previous section, the playful world-traveler anticipates that she will encounter a certain degree of opacity in these transitions, insofar as she moves into worlds whose epistemic grids are not fully transparent, not fully (completely or coherently) understood. What, then, would it mean to travel to a world that is never fully disclosed to me, a world that I encounter as opaque? In what sense am I *in* that world, if it is the case that it remains opaque? It is about questions like these that Lugones makes the following distinction: “[Playful world-travel] is not the Western, middle-class idea of the chosen and leisured journey [nor is it] the epistemic imperialism and aggressive arrogance [of] colonial conquest.”¹¹ In other words, in traveling between worlds, I do not

¹¹ Lugones 2003, 18–19.

expect that what is encountered can be (or should be) reducible to a likeness to me, or to something that I might fully understand. Instead, playful world-travel allows for relationships with others *not* in their accessibility for us, but rather despite the deep differences that might exist between our experiences of marginalization and of structural violence.

Lugones sees “play” as central to this mode of relationality. In attending to why that’s the case, I ask that we anticipate the following section (section 3), which brings this idea of play into conversation with the unsuturing practice that George Yancy offers for effective white allyship against anti-Black racism. Included in the concept of playful world-travel is an openness to vulnerability and decentering, very similar to what Yancy locates in practices of unsuturing. At the same time, I also note the very important difference between the prominence (in Lugones) of *play* in world-travel, and what we might imagine to be the quite *unplayful* (indeed, even *painful*) process of becoming unsutured to that which is radically Other. Hence, a question that I would like us to attend to is this: Exactly how painful or playful must our efforts toward coalition-building be for it to effectively enable a collective sabotaging of coloniality? This is the question around which the analysis I offer in section four operates.

But for the moment, this: In what sense, according to Lugones, does *playful* world-travel condition this possibility of sabotaging coloniality? The description of world-travel as “playful” accounts for a navigation of ontological plurality that is able to divest itself from ossification, from reified modes of being in the world, and from static conceptions of the human. Lugones describes a playful attitude as one that allows for this *not* because it is devoid of serious stakes, but, rather, because it is one that “[stands in] an openness to uncertainty.”¹² Here, she very purposely hearkens to the attitude of children at play (who are not too hung up on rules, on how things *should* be, or on being limited to normative concepts/practices),¹³ while *explicitly* opposing playfulness to what she calls “infantile judgment.” Through infantile judgments about the world, I take up a position “in fear of hostility, and [as] hostile in my fear.”¹⁴ Such infantile judgment would be in *flight* from critique, from transformation in relationships with others,

¹² Lugones 2003, 26.

¹³ I want to thank the person in the audience for pointing out that, despite this openness to other/new rules, children at play are often quite serious about the worlds they enact. In other words, there *are* stakes involved for children at play. This is Lugones’s point at well—that the playfulness of world-travel is right alongside the high political stakes of the world-travel.

¹⁴ Lugones 2003, 48.

and from having to possibly change its view of the world. The playfulness of world-travel, on the other hand, “involves openness to surprise, openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction or reconstruction and to . . . reconstruction of the “worlds” we inhabit playfully. [Playfulness, in other words, is an attitude that is] an openness to risk the ground that constructs us as oppressors or as oppressed, or as . . . colluding with oppression.”¹⁵

Perhaps we can think of Glissant’s errant thinker as one who also participates in this playful attitude. In that movement of errantry, through which “giving on and with” an opaque Other conditions the possibility of becoming Other onto oneself, it is likely that the errant thinker is also she who “stands in an openness to uncertainty.” Indeed, on Glissant’s account, the creative emergence that constitutes rhizomatic processes is grounded in errant movements that enact teleological ruptures. That is to say, it would be difficult to imagine the errant thinker as a mode of subjectivity in the world without replacing in that imaginary the closure of the normative with an antiteleological open-endedness. On my reading, this replacement accounts for much of what Lugones offers in the playful attitude.¹⁶ Furthermore, in bringing a Glissantian errantry into the playful attitude’s *political* orbit, it is then also possible for us to see how the ground across which errant relationality spreads is *itself* deeply rooted in and through history. To that end, the composite community’s openness to transformation, to concrete relational inventions that are not precoded in mainstream structures, can be framed as a playfulness that is not detached from the depth of social location and power, but rather as being informed by an attunement with that depth (being a reckoning with history). In the unpredictability of errant relationality, much like the open-endedness of the playful traveler’s movement in and out of communicative openings and impasses, the possibility emerges to move beyond mechanisms of power and domination. But, in using Lugones as our conceptual focus, we also see that this move *beyond* these mechanisms can, should, and does happen *in* the concrete (historical) time of these mechanisms.

And so, to playfully (errantly) travel to another’s world—and to meet her in that alternative community of sense—means that you are already primed to let go of your operationally normative conceptions of what it means to be human. It means that you are already primed to transgress your position on the power grid and to entertain the possibility that you can become

¹⁵ Lugones 2003, 96.

¹⁶ In a larger, forthcoming book project, I offer a treatment of creolization in terms of Lugones’s account of playful travel.

something other than the role prescribed for you by those systems of power. This is not to say that the playful world-traveler knows no stakes in determining different—and more liberatory—political ecologies. On my reading, world-traveling is playful, but it is (or, perhaps can be) very serious business. It is positioned (in other words) to avoid an infantile attitude toward relationality. I say more about this in the following section. But, for now, I note that what the playful attitude *is* able to avoid, insofar as it is playful, is the activity of suturing. It is open to being vulnerable and to the process of becoming Other in complex communicative relationships that involve as much difficulty as they involve play. Playfulness abandons the need for absolute or clear footing in the world, and so, out of that attitude, I am able to see and stand against the oppressor in *myself* (and tarry in, and be vulnerable in the space of that discovery) as I join you in our collective efforts toward decolonization.¹⁷

3. YANCY ON THE PRACTICE OF UNSUTURING

I offer the fleshiness of Yancy's "wound" metaphor as a powerful companion to theorize "in the flesh" (as Cheri Moraga urges us), to conceptualize "resistance to intermeshed oppressions . . . not as merely symbolic but as inserted in [the] complex, tense, relational networks" of our actual world.¹⁸ George Yancy's (2015) edited volume gathers essays from scholars of the critical philosophy of race, all of whom identify as white. And their contributions to the volume ground the possibility of a coalition around antiracist work on the following premises: (1) whiteness is the name of a specific power apparatus, which does not exist (because it cannot exist) without the disempowerment of Black people; (2) to be white-identified in much of the globe in the twenty-first century is to be a vehicle for and perpetuator of this power apparatus, *unless* one actively and consistently resists; and (3) it is possible (and, one might add, necessary) to account for how one is personally implicated in this power apparatus.

In all, Yancy's volume does two things. It offers the name "white self-criticality" to describe what happens when white persons problematize the ways in which their individual bodies position them to be complicit in/be vehicles for the power apparatus of whiteness. And secondly, it develops the notion of "unsuturing" as the practice that animates that self-critique. In other words, unsuturing names the practice through which a white-identified

¹⁷ Lugones 2003, 77.

¹⁸ Lugones 2003, 25.

antiracist might denaturalize (and therefore complicate) her position within structures of anti-Black violence, so that she might be a more effective ally in her antiracist work. It is important to note that unsuturing does not give the white antiracist any promise of *no longer* being positioned as a vehicle for anti-Black racial violence. Instead, unsuturing denotes an *ongoing* mode of problematizing one's position—as a white-identified person—within the power relations from which one is meant to enjoy racial privilege.

To understand this metaphor of unsuturing, we should start with the opposite image of suturing. According to Yancy, suturing “[involves] an effort . . . to be “invulnerable” . . . and “closed off.”¹⁹ To suture is to encase in a projective shell, and it requires the actual work of closing up, covering over, creating impenetrability. Brought to the work of white self-criticality, the image of the sutured individual is one of a person protected from what might expose her to the vulnerability of having her conceptual grid called into question, or of having her relationship to the world being called into question.²⁰ All to say, the act of suturing would facilitate/sustain the position of bad faith I would need to remain shielded from information, life experiences, perhaps even evidence that might disrupt my sense of how the world works (or how it should work). (My use of bad faith, here, comes from Lewis Gordon's account of anti-Black racism as a form of bad faith.²¹)

White self-criticality, Yancy tells us, begins when this work of suturing ends. If to suture is to keep closed, to keep that which is Other walled out, then to unsuture is to open up, and to expose myself to what (or who) is radically Other, so that, through this exposure, I am vulnerable in ways that my “suturing work” helped me avoid. In rendering myself unsutured, it becomes possible for me to be touched by epistemologies, sensibilities, and attitudes that counter my sense of the world, so that I might become critical of things that (to borrow María Lugones's words) appeared as simply “the furniture of the universe.”²² Letting go of the activity of suturing, so that we might live *in* unsuturing, then, makes it particularly difficult to naturalize our ways of being in the world simply because they are our *known* ways of being in the world. In other words, in generating opportunities for exposure and for the unpredictability of being in relation, the white person is able to call into question the normativity of systematic skews in racial power (to

¹⁹ Yancy 2015, xv.

²⁰ In his paper, Grant Silva describes the goal of decolonizing philosophy as one that positions the white/Eurocentric, male, heteronormative perspective to justify or give an account of itself.

²¹ See Gordon 1999.

²² Lugones 2003, 221.

trouble those learned assumptions that white overprivilege is perfectly normal, and so not really “overprivilege” at all).

In framing the comportment of white self-criticality in this way—in terms of suturing and unsuturing, I think that Yancy is quite intentional in conjuring in us thoughts of wounds—wounds that are open and fragile, susceptible to infection, and in need of constant care. Much like the legacies of colonial violence (racial violence, gender violence, settler colonial violence), wounds are corporeal matters, *body* matters, locating us as blood-and-flesh subjects in a world where pain and anguish is just part of what it means to be. And so, in conceptualizing the white self-criticality of antiracist allyship as an unsuturing, coalition-building (in this case, around antiracist work) becomes unavoidably about our bodies’ historical locations, about their materiality. And as such, these coalitions would emerge out of a reckoning with our embodiment as historically located, with our skins as a racial integument that we can disavow only in bad faith. Bridget M. Newell, one of the contributors to Yancy’s volume, likens the experience of unsuturing to the experiencing of being disrupted by the Socratic gadfly, always around to either call you out on the groundlessness of your claims, or to trouble your answer with all the vital questions hiding behind them. Or, to use Robin James’s analogy of experiencing musical dissonance—to tarry in unsuturing complicates the “privilege [of] aesthetic orientation” in the white listener, precisely so that she no longer finds a home in herself, and in the world.²³

In these reflections, the starting point—ground zero, if you will—seems to be “being at home,” finding orientation in the world, enjoying familiarity with and in the epistemic/conceptual grid in which one moves easily, without disruption. Moving from a sutured to an unsutured way of being presupposes that the *luxury* of being sutured is actually one that is available. On the other hand, the starting point of María Lugones’s conception of playful world-travel—the marginalized subject, living in between words, living *in the limen* that is in between communities of sense, and so never finding belonging in those communities of sense—is one that precisely *forecloses* this luxury. Is the vigilant self-criticality of unsuturing available only to those who find a home in dominant structures? Is the marginal subject, living in the limen, above the noncritical slumber of the sutured life? Is the comfort of that slumber a luxury to which she is not privy, given her in-betweenness? These sorts of questions seem to presuppose a neat division between the subject at home in the mainstream and the subject who is marginalized by it. They seem to presuppose a sociality of clearly separated grids that

²³ James 2015, 221.

entirely bifurcate, on the one hand, subjects for whom an openness to vulnerability is painful, and on the other, subjects for whom an openness to vulnerability is playful. On my reading, it is precisely this neat division that Lugones cautions us against, and against which the complexity of her account of a coalitional limen guards.

4. COALITIONAL LIMEN WORK—PAIN AS/IN PLAY?

This caution is apparent in Lugones's conception of "coalitional limen work,"²⁴ which she uses to theorize the work of building coalitions against multiple forms of oppression. Coalitional limen work, according to Lugones, calls us to collectively "stand against all oppression, not just the oppressor outside of us but also the oppressor *in ourselves*."²⁵ She also notes that this coalitional work in the limen is something to be achieved, "a direction to be struggled for," not presupposed as a given "conceptual move" simply because we come with our individual experiences of being marginalized.²⁶ This is because, in addition to bringing the experience of being marginalized with us into a coalitional limen, we also bring what Lugones names our "dominator identities"—our power-coded bodies that, without vigilance, reproduce/augment oppressive conditions for the others who are with us in that coalitional limen. These in-between worlds are not empty of the effects of historical materiality. And so, in these spaces, too, we occupy a power grid in ways that position us to potentially enact or be vehicles for various forms of oppression against the full humanity of someone else. This is because I can be marginalized by one set of dominant structures right alongside my being relatively empowered by another. I bring this intermeshed "mainstream-marginalized" identity construction with me into the work of a coalitional limen and into a collective project of decolonization.

On this account, perhaps effective coalitional limen work calls for us to think about the pain and play of becoming-Other conjointly. In so doing, we prepare ourselves to engage with Mariana Ortega's criticism that the playfulness of world-travel is not a sufficiently critical mode of travel. On Ortega's reading, because the world-traveler's movement in and out of worlds is playful, she is unable to engage in the double move of seeing

²⁴ See Lugones 2006.

²⁵ Lugones 2006, 77–78.

²⁶ Lugones 2006, 77.

history in order to then risk its hold on her world.²⁷ Said otherwise, according to Ortega's criticism, world-travel that takes place in play runs the risk of losing sight of the kind of vigilance needed to not only understand the workings of oppression, but to also see how deeply implicated our subjectivities are in those networks of power. So, in place of *playful* world-travel, she calls for a practice of *critical* world-travel, which "requires that the world-traveler be engaged in an ongoing process of evaluation and interpretation of not only what is learned through traveling but also of the very practices of traveling across worlds."²⁸ In this reframing, Ortega attempts to arm the playful attitude's readiness to imagine the world differently with an ongoing attentiveness to how our embodiments are situated as that reimagining of power unfolds. In other words, on her account, *critical* world-travel (and not playful world-travel) would be "the type of travel in which one is aware of the baggage that one is bringing along."²⁹

To be sure, there are worlds in which I am always already aware of my baggage, insofar as those worlds afford me no home, and so I am perpetually living out of a suitcase (if you will). Then, there are other worlds in which my baggage is invisible to me, normalized through my complicity in power structures that work to my advantage, given my particular embodiment. All of this to say—Ortega's evaluation is right. World-travel fails to facilitate the kind of coalitional limen work Lugones develops if it is not, before all else, critical. Vigilance and self-criticality are key. I would like to propose that critical world-traveling into a coalitional limen can be as playful as it is painful, precisely because (as Lugones cautions) it is always "to be achieved," an aspiration toward which we enact difficult and complex communications and relationship-building. It can be playful to the degree that we have already let go of the "our way or the highway" judgments about what resistance and decolonial praxis should look like. It can be painful to the degree that we have to tarry in the very fresh wound of seeing that these, our stubborn normativities, have made it impossible for our fellow travelers to be full human beings in the world with us. Playfulness prepares me to let go of investments that undermine our collective work

²⁷ Ortega also notes her concern that a proposed everydayness of world-traveling might rob the practice of its vigilant eye to the degree that the plural subject grows accustomed to the dominant structures that produce her as a liminal subject (see Ortega 2016, 119–31). Ortega's Heideggerian interpretation of the everydayness of the practice of world-traveling is clear, since, on Heidegger's account, the everydayness of my comportment in the world undermines the possibility of my being able to adopt a more authentic mode of being.

²⁸ Ortega 2016, 131.

²⁹ Ortega 2016, 137.

toward decolonization. Unsuturing reminds me of *how much* is at stake in those painful moments of disinvestment. Hence, we might envision the possibility of seeing the critical nature of world-traveling not in opposition to its playfulness, but rather as a consequence of it.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As a theory, we might be able to keep separate these two modes of being vulnerable, one pertaining to the oppressed and marginalized, the other pertaining to the oppressor who is at home in the mainstream. But we are called to the work of decolonization, and of coalition-building not in some theoretical world, but in this one—where we are many things, all at once, moving in and out of multiple worlds of sense that benefit us here and marginalize us there, all at the same time. My proposal to read both pain and play in the criticality of world-travel (and in the coalitional limen work that it supports) is an effort to ground practices of decoloniality in this kind of complexity.

As I bring things to a close, I remind us that the playfulness of world-travel (a playfulness that we can now understand as simultaneously critical/vigilant) happens across the encounter with opacity (with the Other as opaque). Through the dialogue that I have offered, between María Lugones and Édouard Glissant, the role of opacity in decolonial modes of community formation becomes clear. According to Glissant, the errant engagement that an encounter with opacity calls for means that, as one generates community (or coalitions), one must anticipate a necessary open-endedness, or unpredictability, in the direction one's coalition-building takes. In other words, errantry will let go of reductive and preemptive universals, and instead enter into relationships that, given the Other's opacity, are creative, and whose creativity conditions the promise of a world otherwise. But (and this is what, to my mind, makes the Lugones-Glissant dialogue instructive), according to Lugones, this creative movement pursues a world radically anew *as* it confronts the stakes of history. The playful encounter with opacity transcends history, opens up our world-constitutions to change and creative transformation. But it does so in a way that is immersed in the power networks of that history. That is to say, it does so in a way that is informed by the depth and shaping force of history and power.³⁰ Because of this, we

³⁰ Mariana Ortega accounts for a similar movement, when she qualifies the fluidity included Gloria Anzaldúa's new *mestiza*. "[This fluidity] is not meant to be a call for the view that the new *mestiza* may choose any identity she wishes . . . as if the new *mestiza* could choose identities like articles of clothing" (Ortega 2016, 45).

are to understand playful world-travel not as diametrically opposed to a traveling void of political urgency, but, rather, as a traveling that is attuned to the implications of historical forces, precisely so that those forces can be reckoned with in the playful attitude. Out of this playfulness, history is both rendered significant *and* stripped of its determinative force.

My hope is to have shown that, in gathering together the theoretical tools of these three thinkers—Lugones, Glissant, and Yancy—we open a way to think about building coalitions toward decolonizing philosophy. These tools position is to understand this building-toward as (1) open-ended (so that it moves toward something truly otherwise); (2) plurally-constituted (so that it takes into account our complex relationships both with each other and with our histories); and (3) grounded in relationships with others in their opacity (so as to guard against the reductionism of yet another colonial adventure). Such decolonial practices are sufficiently radical only when they are collective, and the pain-play of traveling with an opaque Other seems to provide, at the very least, one possible founding prescription for that collectivity.

REFERENCES

- Frye, Marilyn. 1983. *The Politics of Reality*. New York: Crossing Press.
- Glissant, Édouard. 1997. *Poetics of Relation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- . 1999. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, 3rd ed. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Gordon, Lewis. 1999. *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism*. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books.
- James, Robin. 2015. “Contort Yourself: Music, Whiteness, and the Politics of Disorientation.” In Yancy 2015, 211–28.
- Lugones, María. 2003. *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lugones, Maria. 2006. “On Complex Communication.” *Hypatia* 21 (3): 75–85.
- Ortega, Mariana. 2016. *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Sealey, Kris. 2018. “The Composite Community: Thinking through Fanon’s Critique of a Narrow Nationalism.” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 6 (1): 26–57.
- Yancy, George, ed. 2015. *White Self-Criticality beyond Anti-racism: How Does It Feel to Be a White Problem?* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.