Meta-Lucidity, “Epistemic Heroes,” and the Everyday Struggle Toward Epistemic Justice

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter analyzes a kind of lucidity characteristic of oppressed subjectivities: a *meta-lucidity* produced by epistemic friction. I address the issue of how to promote this kind of meta-lucidity for differently situated subjects, including those in a position of privilege. I discuss the phenomenon of *epistemic heroes*—extraordinary subjects who under conditions of epistemic oppression are able to develop epistemic virtues. I argue that *epistemic heroes* should be understood as *emblems*: figures who become emblematic because they come to epitomize the daily struggles of resistance of ordinary people. I argue that the transformative impact of performance that we consider *heroic* is crucially dependent on social networks and daily practices of resistance in which the performance in question is taken up or reenacted (the phenomenon of *echoing*).

I offer two examples of cultural icons of resistance who appear to be “epistemic heroines”: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Rosa Parks.

*Keywords:* lucidity, epistemic heroes, epistemic courage, activism, performativity, counter-performativity, echoing, social networks, Latina feminism, civil rights movement

Just as at the center of my account of vitiated epistemic subjectivities appeared a particular kind of insensitivity, a *meta-blindness* produced by lack of epistemic friction, in this chapter at the center of my account of virtuous epistemic
subjectivities will appear a particular kind of lucidity, a *meta-lucidity* produced by epistemic friction. For this elucidation I will draw on feminist standpoint theory and on critical race theory, the two main bodies of literature that have examined how the epistemic disadvantages of the oppressed can at the same time involve significant epistemic advantages. I will argue that among these advantages we can find a special kind of lucidity that functions as a corrective of the meta-blindness underlying oppression that I have discussed in the previous chapters. But I will also address the issue of how to achieve (at least some degrees of) meta-lucidity for differently situated subjects, including those in a position of privilege whose life experiences may not have put them in the best position to become lucid about insensitivity. Although in the next section I will start with the special kind of lucidity that can be found among oppressed subjects by virtue of their experiences of oppression and the kinds of epistemic friction they have endured, I will go on to discuss, in section 5.2, how the social blindness of privileged subjects can be repaired so that they too can achieve some degrees of lucidity. For example, in the case of racial oppression and racial ignorance, I discuss how “white ignorance” can be corrected so that racially privileged subjects can also become lucid with respect to race and improve both their self-knowledge and their knowledge of racial others. In section 5.3 I connect these issues with the larger and more challenging issue of how to remove epistemic obstacles and achieve cognitive melioration not only for particular individuals and groups, but for the entire social fabric and in a durable way that will affect future generations. I discuss the phenomenon of what I call *epistemic heroes*, that is, extraordinary subjects who under conditions of epistemic oppression are able to develop epistemic virtues with a tremendous transformative potential. Although *epistemic heroes* (like *epistemic villains*) may exist in some sense (if only as dramatic exaggerations of exceptional individuals), I will argue that they should be understood as *emblems*, that is, figures that become emblematic because—given certain social processes and communicative dynamics—they come to epitomize the daily struggles of resistance of ordinary people within a social movement or network. But, according to my interactive social contextualism, the transformative impact of performance that we consider *heroic* is crucially dependent on social networks and daily practices that echo that performance. Detaching the contributions that epistemic heroes make toward justice from the social support that precedes and follows their action, I will suggest, is a dangerous trap that the dominant individualism in Western cultures sets up for social movements of resistance. I offer two examples of cultural icons of resistance who appear to be “epistemic heroines,” one from the history of Latina feminism (Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz) and the other from the history of the civil rights movement (Rosa Parks), emphasizing in both cases how the removal of epistemic obstacles and planting the seed of social change are part of ongoing daily practices of resistance. I connect this everyday struggle of epistemic resistance and epistemic melioration...
with the transformation of the social imaginary, which will be the central theme of the final chapter.

5.1. Living Up to One’s Epistemic Responsibilities under Conditions of Oppression: “Meta-Lucidity”

My contextualist argument in this chapter will try to show that, despite their being mistreated and disadvantaged epistemically, oppressed subjects tend to develop particular epistemic virtues and particular forms of lucidity, which enable them to be more properly responsive to epistemic injustices. I will contend that, under conditions of oppression, the most responsible epistemic subjects tend to be precisely those who are most disadvantaged by the oppression in question. Drawing on the contextualist view of epistemic responsibility articulated in the previous chapter, my argument goes as follows. On the one hand, while oppressed subjects have fewer or more mitigated epistemic obligations given their lack of epistemic opportunities and resources and the negative impact of epistemic injustices on them qua knowers, nonetheless they (collectively, if not as individuals) tend to exceed their epistemic duties and make epistemic contributions that (can) transform deeply the social knowledge available, providing new conduits through which knowledge can travel and blocking or destabilizing the circuits and pathways of bodies of ignorance. On the other hand, while privileged subjects have more or stronger epistemic obligations given the epistemic advantages they enjoy, nonetheless they (as a group, if not as individuals) tend to fail their epistemic responsibilities in particular respects and precisely as they pertain to the systematic injustices that they do not suffer and contribute little to overcome. In the case of racial oppression and racial ignorance we can begin to explain the paradigmatic epistemic irresponsibility (p.188) of privileged subjects and, by contrast, the epistemic virtues that oppressed subjects can develop through an application of Elizabeth Spelman’s celebrated notion of boomerang perception, briefly discussed in the previous chapter. The racist/colonialist gaze toward racial/ethnic others has been internalized by most white subjects in the West. The narcissistic perception of the white gaze, as we saw, has a boomerang structure because it projects itself and comes back to itself, producing only the perception of its own images. Let’s briefly examine the epistemic consequences of boomerang perception both on the perceive and on the (mis)perceived (or only half-seen).
As argued in the previous chapter, the subjects who look at racialized others through the white gaze and see only the reflections of the white imaginary cannot embark on the journey of getting to know these racialized others responsibly, for ultimately, they look only at themselves and the images that their own imaginary has produced without realizing that they are doing so. Their epistemic irresponsibility with respect to others is grounded in a meta-blindness (an insensitivity to insensitivity) which, as argued above, does not see the obstacles that stand in the way of getting to know others in their differences (blindness to differences) and in the way of appreciating the social relevance of the real lives of others—their experiences, problems, interests, aspirations, and so on (blindness to social relationality). Combining Spelman’s analysis and Said’s account of orientalism, Maria Lugones (2003) argues that the Western/white gaze only allows the perceiver to see a racialized other as a mere image: “image both in the sense of imagined and in the sense of a reflection, an imitation” (p. 158). And, as Lugones goes on to explain, the mere images to which racialized others are reduced in the white gaze are distorted self-images: how the white perceiver imagines non-whites to be by comparison with white subjectivity. Racial others are perceived as “lacking independent history because lacking an independent subjectivity,” as “the ‘same’ and monstrously different” (Ibid.).

Following Said, Lugones argues that the West’s creation of the Orient and the development of the “imaginative geography” of the West are exercises in boomerang perception: “The West acquires a sense of itself negatively through the setting of the ‘us’/’them’ dichotomy [and] it acquires a sense of its own value by constituting itself as the original which the Orient repeats, mimics monstrously, grotesquely” (p. 157). Thus Oriental cultures are conceived as deformed repetitions or monstrous reflections of the Western culture. Following Lugones’ suggestion, I want to add that this interracial and cross-cultural blindness involves also a lot of self-ignorance, for the blind spot of the Western/white gaze is not only the racialized others, but also itself: the Western white subject. The social blindness in question affects not only one’s perception of racialized others, but also one’s perception of oneself and of one’s racial group. Ultimately, as I suggested in the previous chapter, the subjects of this arrogant and narcissistic boomerang perception lack knowledge not only about others, but also about themselves: being blind to differences, they cannot know themselves fully (p.189) because they are unequipped to distinguish themselves from others properly; and being blind to social relationality, they ignore how their own life, culture, and history are bound up with that of others. Their epistemic irresponsibility consists in the simultaneous violation of the interrelated cognitive minimums of social knowledge of others and self-knowledge. Seeing in white, in this sense, involves a lot of blindness. It is seeing in the dark. It is being cognitively and affectively numbed. But what about those who are the objects of boomerang perception?
The racialized subjects who are looked at through boomerang perception are not seen other than as a screen on which the distorted images of the white gaze and the white imaginary are projected. For the subjects who endure it, what epistemic consequences may result from not being seen, being only half-seen, or being distortedly seen? The effects can, of course, be widely diverse, multifaceted and heterogeneous. But, following a long tradition in race theory dating back to Du Bois, I want to focus on the positive epistemic consequences that can follow from the experience of internalizing a social gaze that does not see you or sees you only distortedly. The experience of social invisibility or distortively social visibility is an experience shared by different oppressed groups: for example, traditionally, women have been rendered invisible in many social spaces, and distorted images of femininity have also circulated widely in other spaces; traditionally, the very existence of queer people has been denied or relegated to the margins, and very often their existence has been acknowledged only as a problem (a religious problem, a medical problem, a psychiatric problem, an educational problem, etc.). But it is the social invisibility or distortively social visibility of racialized others—and in particular, African Americans—that has received special attention in the philosophical literature on oppression; and the epistemic consequences of these problematic forms of visibility have been more fully explored in the philosophical literature on race. In this literature, social invisibility and distortively social visibility are typically not distinguished, being often addressed simultaneously and even treated as synonymous. And indeed not being seen and being distortedly seen typically go together, both in the case of racial seeing and in other areas of social perception: very frequently one is not seen as a homosexual person, for example, because one is improperly seen as a heterosexual person. But no matter how close and intimately connected social invisibility and distortively social visibility may be, they are conceptually distinct and can happen separately. I will start by discussing certain features and implications of social invisibility to then move to the analysis of distortively seeing and its epistemic consequences for oppressed subjectivities.

Charles Mills is one of the contemporary philosophers of race who has developed the most elaborate analyses of the social invisibility of racial minorities in the white gaze. In Blackness Visible (1998) Mills sketches a very suggestive epistemic analysis of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man (1952). Mills emphasizes that the central epistemic problem of Ellison’s black narrator is

(p.190) his “invisibility,” the fact that whites do not see him, take no notice of him, not because of physiological deficiency but because of the psychological “construction of their inner eyes,” which conceptually erase his existence. He is not a full person in their eyes, and so he either is not taken into account in all their moral calculations or is accorded only diminished standing. (pp. 8–9).
This is how the narrator of the novel summarizes his predicament toward the end: “Well, I was and yet I was invisible, that was the fundamental contradiction. I was and yet I was unseen” (p. 383). But at this point the narrator is in a position to exploit this contradiction, to use his invisibility for his own benefit and as a weapon of resistance, as a weapon of attack against blind white men: “They were blind, bat blind, moving only by the echoed sounds of their own voices. And because they were blind they would destroy themselves and I’d help them” (pp. 383–4). The self-conscious lucidity is achieved precisely by coming to terms with his complete lack of visibility as a man in the white world: “I now recognize my invisibility” (p. 384). He recognizes that all of those who looked at him through the white gaze “were very much the same, each attempting to force his picture of reality upon me and neither giving a hoot in hell for how things looked to me. I was simply a material, a natural resource to be used” (Ibid.). The narrator comes to the conclusion that whites are utterly blind to “the reality of our lives” and incapable of seeing blacks “as more than convenient tools for shaping their own desires” (p. 386).
In “White Ignorance” (2007) Mills generalizes some of the remarks of Ellison’s narrator and talks about the centrality of the experience of invisibility for people of color in a white world. He writes, “What people of color quickly come to see—in a sense, the primary epistemic principle of the racialized social epistemology of which they are the object—is that they are not seen at all” (Mills: 2007, p. 18; my emphasis). This experience of not being seen can have far-reaching consequences in one’s epistemic life. On the one hand, it may handicap one’s cognitive abilities: it may inhibit one’s voice and capacity to actively participate in epistemic interactions. But, at the same time, it can also have positive consequences and afford epistemic advantages: one can also comfortably and strategically occupy one’s invisibility, exploiting the benefits of being unperceived while having access to bodies of evidence one is not assumed to know, of being able to use channels of communication that go undetected, of being able to exercise forms of reasoning that are not recognized, and so on. These advantages of the cognitive standpoint of marginalized subjects who have been rendered invisible have been analyzed in detail by feminist standpoint theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins (1990/2000) and Alison Wylie (2003). Collins (1990/2000) has examined the cognitive perspectives of black women as “outsiders within,” that is, as subjects who are fully cognizant of the social order in which they live but nonetheless are perceived and treated (p.191) as strangers to that order. Combining the insights of race theory on invisibility with feminist standpoint theory, Alison Wylie (2003) has also examined the cognitive advantages of “insider outsiders,” that is, of those who are inside of a practice but nonetheless are not considered to be part of it—or even present in it. As Wylie explains, this peculiar situation of being inside and outside a social context can give invisibilized subjects both individual and collective advantages: for example, the opportunity to collect information while unperceived, to look and hear as if one were not there; the opportunity to create a network for sharing information among those subjects whose dealings with the world and with each other go unnoticed; and the possibility of developing ways of communicating that go undetected. But as Wylie emphatically warns us, assessing the current state of standpoint theory, we cannot assume that all those who occupy marginalized locations that render them invisible automatically enjoy these epistemic advantages.¹ In chapter 11 too, following Wylie, rejected the so-called thesis of automatic epistemic privilege while preserving the insights of standpoint theory.
But besides the strategic advantages that not being seen can afford, we also have to look at the structural benefits that social invisibility can bring to those who suffer it, that is, at the epistemic ramifications of this invisibility for those subjects qua epistemic agents. What is it in the cognitive structures of these subjects that can be different as a result of experiencing not being seen? Living one’s life as if one did not exist, having one’s presence and agency unrecognized, immediately affects one’s personal and interpersonal dispositions. On the one hand, one must develop self-regarding attitudes that accommodate this invisibility: one must look at oneself as someone who is not seen by others in certain respects and in certain contexts. And, on the other hand, one must also develop other-regarding attitudes that accommodate this invisibility: one must look at others as being selectively blind to one’s presence, as acting and talking as if one did not exist under certain conditions. I want to call attention to one particular aspect of this lived invisibility: the acute (and typically painful) awareness that there is an epistemic lacuna permeating the social context, a lacuna that the subject (and others like her or him) experiences but that others do not. This painful experience of cognitive failure and dissonance—of a fractured map of social perceptions with gaps that only those who fall into them are aware of—can have positive epistemic consequences; it can be a learning opportunity, one could say. Being an imperceptible object—that is, the object that occupies the blind spot of the visual field of other people’s perceptions—can be characterized as an experience of cognitive excess, in this case, of perceptual excess: the realization of one’s invisibility entails (p.192) that one becomes to oneself—painfully, sometimes even traumatically—the living proof that there is more to be seen than what others (some others) see. And this insight can have beneficial epistemic consequences when it is consolidated into a particular cognitive meta-attitude (that is, an attitude about one’s cognitive attitudes): this is the meta-attitude of being always on the lookout for more, forever more, which is based on the experience that there can be more than what is seen. This is the meta-attitude that grounds the epistemic virtue of open-mindedness that we discussed in chapter 2, and it is a crucial aspect of what I call meta-lucidity. Meta-lucidity constitutes a crucial cognitive achievement that can become indispensable for retaining the status of a responsible epistemic agent living under conditions of oppression. Meta-lucid subjects are those who are aware of the effects of oppression in our cognitive structures and of the limitations in the epistemic practices (of seeing, talking, hearing, reasoning, etc.) grounded in relations of oppression: for example, the invisibilization of certain phenomena, experiences, problems, and even entire subjectivities. Oppressed subjects are in a better position to achieve these insights because they are the very embodiment of those cognitive limitations and suffer directly the cognitive biases and vitiated cognitive structures that support the relations of oppression.
Meta-lucidity can be achieved through the epistemic friction of two conflicting perspectives: the experience of not being seen can produce the painful experience of cognitive conflict between two ways of seeing—the subject’s own gaze and the social gaze that does not see him. When it has this particular sociogenesis, meta-lucidity is triggered by what has been called double consciousness in the philosophical literature on race. Double consciousness involves the capacity to entertain two perspectives, two ways of thinking, and two ways of looking at the world. Indeed, the experience of being invisible typically involves the experience of conflict between two ways of seeing. Typically, not being seen is part of being hidden under distorted images that the perceiver projects; that is, it is not a matter of not being seen at all, but rather, of not being properly perceived in crucial respects because an illusory perception is blocking the view. What the subject who is not properly seen, or not seen in certain respects (qua X or Y), encounters is typically not simply the mere absence of sight, but rather a distorted way of seeing that has made itself blind to certain things. And since being unseen is thus typically accompanied by distorted perceptions, we have to shift the focus of our analysis from mere invisibility to distorted social visibility: a complex way of seeing with lots of visual contents that hide certain aspects or elements in the visual field, hiding or erasing even entire objects of perception. This fits with the way in which the white gaze has been defined in the literature on race: as the projector of images under which oppressed subjectivities and uncomfortable realities are hidden. It is this thick notion of distorted seeing that is involved in the powerful phenomenon of double consciousness, which is produced through the internalization of an authoritative way of seeing in which one (p.193) does not recognize oneself. This is indeed true of W. E. B. Du Bois, the African American philosopher who created the concept of “double consciousness.” I will briefly discuss how meta-lucidity appears in double consciousness, as explained by Du Bois and the subsequent literature on oppressed subjectivities.
The expression “double consciousness” first appeared in an article that Du Bois published in 1897 in *Atlantic Monthly* under the title “Of Our Spiritual Strivings.” This paper was edited and republished as the opening chapter of Du Bois’s celebrated collection of essays *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903/1996). There Du Bois defines “double consciousness” as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p. 5). As a result, Du Bois explains, the consciousness of the American Negro has been split: he “feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Ibid.). Du Bois remarks that the history of the American Negro is the history of the internal struggle of this two-ness. The goal of this struggle, according to Du Bois, should not be to eliminate the two-ness—the multi-dimensionality of the Negro consciousness—but rather, to learn to live with it and to learn from each of the component parts in tension. Du Bois talks about “merging” (“to merge his double self into a better and truer self”[Ibid.]), but he quickly points out that this is not a unification that betrays the differences and distinctiveness of each component part. He insists that American Negroes should not allow any of the component parts of their two-ness to win the struggle and to become dominant: the path to the resolution of the internal struggle of the American Negro will not be to “bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism” or to “Africanize America” (Ibid.). The challenge is *balance*: to achieve the harmonious mutual coexistence of two perspectives, to maintain a healthy bifurcated consciousness in which the two component parts are in communication and they enrich each other.
In his discussion of double consciousness Du Bois also uses a visual metaphor and talks about the cognitive and perceptual capacities that go along with double consciousness. He claims that the American Negro is “born with a veil and gifted with second sight in this American world” (p. 5). The Negro is painfully aware of his veiled existence and he looks at himself as veiled, as white Americans do. But he can also pierce the veil of ignorance of the white world and develop an alternative way of seeing, a resistant perception alongside the dominant perception he has internalized. As Lugones (2003) explains it, double vision involves “seeing oneself and one’s company at once in the racist and the resistant construction,” being “able to hold two incompatible and parallel perceptions at once” (p. 156). Patricia Hill Collins (1990/2000) has drawn precisely on this aspect of the Du Boisian concept of double consciousness to develop an epistemology of resistance for black women. Thanks to a bifurcated consciousness, she argues, black women can generate self-representations that enable them to resist the demeaning racist and sexist images of black femininity in the white world. Collins finds the critical payoff and subversive potential of double consciousness in allowing the subject to take critical distance from the dominant perspective, for once you have two cognitive perspectives available to you—that of mainstream culture and that of the oppressed—you can comparatively evaluate them and look at one from the perspective of the other. Indeed, double consciousness brings with it the opportunity to develop the ability to shift back and forth between two ways of seeing and, hence, the ability to make comparisons and contrasts between visual perspectives. But notice that this is only a possibility; there is no guarantee that every double consciousness will have this flexibility and dynamic inner structure. For those with double consciousness there is also the possibility of a systematic cognitive dissonance in which each of the cognitive perspectives are systematically isolated from the other. But even with the most radical form of mental isolationism, a bifurcated consciousness retains the potential of cognitive benefits, for even while living in cognitive dissonance a double consciousness gives the subject an incipient kind of lucidity—even if shallow—that others do not have: namely, the awareness that there are two alternative ways of seeing. But here we have only the potential of cognitive benefits, for it is often the case that “seeing in black and white” does not supply much better social perceptions than seeing “only in white” or “only in black.”
Indeed, the double consciousness that embodies epistemic virtues and can afford the most cognitive advantages is the one that has its internal component parts in good communication. The mere coexistence of epistemic perspectives is not sufficient for the lucidity and epistemic virtues of which oppressed subjectivities are capable; there must be epistemic friction between the alternative standpoints available. Concurring with Collins and other race theorists, the epistemology of resistance I have articulated also identifies the ability to shift back and forth between epistemic perspectives and to establish instructive comparisons and contrasts between them as the special source of critical power and lucidity available to oppressed subjects.

In my view, epistemically virtuous double consciousness is the consciousness that has epistemic counterpoints inside it and, therefore, internal epistemic friction. If a double consciousness brings with it not only the awareness of two (p.195) ways of seeing, but also the ability to connect these perceptual perspectives, the first principle of epistemic friction—the principle of acknowledgment and engagement—is automatically satisfied: different cognitive perspectives are being acknowledged and critically engaged. But note that satisfying the second principle, the principle of epistemic equilibrium, takes more work, for indeed the danger of one perspective overpowering the other—or of there being some imbalance between them—is always there. As mentioned above, Du Bois himself saw that striving toward balance should guide the journey of the Negro’s double consciousness. But he was fully aware of how difficult harmonizing the images of a privileged and a subordinate perspective could be for a marginalized subjectivity, given the tremendous denigrating power that the dejected images internalized from the dominant white gaze could have on the Negro: “the facing of so vast a prejudice could not but bring the inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals which ever accompany repression and breed in an atmosphere of contempt and hate” (1903/1996, p. 10). In her discussion of double consciousness, Lugones (2003) also talks about this difficulty when she emphasizes that it is “unhealthy for oppressed peoples to obsess over the oppressor’s perception of their subjectivity” and yet “one becomes both fascinated by it and overwhelmed by its power” (p. 156). Lugones warns us that unraveling the logic of the oppressor’s gaze does not guarantee liberation; we cannot confidently think that we are on our way to a resistant subjectivity just because we understand the ideology that oppresses us and the extent to which we have internalized it, for this understanding typically has a paralyzing effect on us. How can we escape the radical imbalance of a dominant ideology (or way of seeing) overpowering any other perspective and paralyzing the subjects who hold them?
Let’s remind ourselves that the principle of epistemic equilibrium was not a relativistic principle that demanded giving equal weight to all perspectives. Rather, it was the desideratum of searching for equilibrium in the interplay of cognitive forces, without some forces overpowering others, without some cognitive influences becoming unchecked and unbalanced. So the question becomes, how can we guarantee that the different epistemic perspectives available can properly check each other, serve as epistemic counterpoints to each other, so that there is beneficial epistemic friction among them? Keeping a perspective in a subordinate position with respect to a dominant perspective makes this impossible, for the values and ideals of the dominant perspective will remain unchecked and exempted from resistance. The power of white stereotypes on black life and thought can remind us all of how hard it is to resist conformity to the dominant ideology we have been born into and we have breathed as defining the air of normalcy.

How is psychic liberation from a dominant ideology possible? How is racial liberation for a double consciousness possible? We are better off not aspiring to a fully liberated subjectivity, but thinking about liberation as a constant struggle, an ongoing task which, though always unfinished, can nonetheless meliorate our lives. Du Bois’ account of the struggles of the American Negro in *The Souls of Black Folk* can be read as an account of episodes in the progressive and unfinished psychic liberation of black people in the United States. Du Bois offers a brief sketch of the history of the American Negro as the struggle to achieve this hard-to-obtain balanced subjectivity that is not simply overpowered by the dejected images offered by the white gaze. Du Bois describes this history as a hard journey full of suffering, but

> the journey at least gave leisure for reflection and self-examination; it changed the child of emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect. In those somber forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself—darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power. (1903/1996, p. 9)

And these cognitive achievements became possible, Du Bois tells us, because the Negro “sought to analyze the burden he bore upon his back, the dead-weight of social degradation partially masked behind a half-named Negro problem” (Ibid.). And thus he felt something that the white man was incapable of feeling: “He felt *the weight of his ignorance*” (Ibid.; my emphasis). This is a crucial meta-insight that is both cognitive and affective: the Negro *feels* the white man’s ignorance that he himself has internalized.
According to Du Bois, people of color, the target of racist oppression, are capable of seeing what the others do not see: their own degradation and the mechanisms of oppression and social distortions that produce them; they feel “the dead-weight of social degradation” masked as “the Negro problem,” they feel the weight of the ignorance of the white world. And this is what crucially distinguishes them at the meta-level from racially privileged subjects: they are aware of a social illusion and what this social illusion hides; they are aware of a whole body of ignorance, a set of blind spots, to which others remain insensitive. This is meta-lucidity: not just lucidity about the social world, but about the cognitive attitudes, cognitive structures, and cognitive repertoires of those who navigate that social world.
The meta-insights that constitute this peculiar kind of lucidity are mainly negative: racially oppressed subjects know what they do not know, while those who are not oppressed are blind to their own ignorance, insensitive to it, that is, cognitively and affectively ill-equipped to confront, or even to detect, their ignorance. And note that this meta-lucidity looks both inward (into the inner self) and outward (onto others) simultaneously, piercing and bringing down illusory dichotomies between the inner and the outer, between self and others. It looks inward insofar as it recognizes, through the internal friction of the perspectives available to itself, the limitations and obstacles of its cognitive structure and of its different component elements. Oppressed subjects have (p. 197) the cognitive advantage of being able to compare and contrast their marginalized perspective with the dominant perspective that they have internalized as standard or normal; and this epistemic friction has the potential of yielding meta-insights that can instruct subjects about the distinctiveness of each perspective as well as about their biases, distortions, and limitations. In particular, oppressed subjects, through this meta-lucidity, can become critically aware of the body of ignorance supporting relations of oppression that goes along with the dominant perspective they have internalized. But the meta-lucidity of oppressed subjects simultaneously looks outward insofar as the standard, normalizing perspective of mainstream culture that becomes the object of their critical scrutiny through the counterpoint of their resistant perspective is the dominant perspective that defines normality in their social environment, not just for them or their group, but for all members of society. Therefore, they can be said to hold meta-insights about the cognitive structures and epistemic habits of others in their social context. The epistemic obstacles and limitations that meta-lucid subjects recognize affect all members of the culture in question and most especially the privileged subjects, who are at the same time the most protected from these meta-insights and the most blind. In this sense, when it comes to the meta-knowledge of their own internal cognitive structures and their limitations (biases, prejudicial stereotypes, ingrained bodies of ignorance, etc.), privileged subjects tend to be ignorant about themselves, whereas oppressed subjects tend to become comparatively more knowledgeable and meta-lucid not only about themselves but also about their peers, including their oppressors. It is in this way that we can understand James Weldon Johnson’s famous contention in his novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912/1995): “I believe it to be a fact that the colored people of this country know and understand the white people better than the white people know and understand them” (p. 10).
The meta-lucidity of oppressed subjects enables them to satisfy the first two cognitive minimums previously discussed—that is, it enables them to attain sufficient degrees of self-knowledge and knowledge of their (significant) social others—and thus to become responsible epistemic agents, precisely when epistemic responsibility becomes rare in a context of systemic epistemic injustice. This idea fits in well with the most celebrated thesis of standpoint theory, namely, that there is a cognitive asymmetry between the standpoint of the oppressed and the standpoint of the privileged that gives an advantage to the former over the latter. As Harding (1983, 1991), among others, has argued, the perspectives from the lives of the less powerful can offer a more objective view of the social world, a view based on their experiences of being underprivileged that captures real disparities, instead of a view that ignores (or even erases) experiences of oppression and is more likely to be oblivious or blind to disparities and insensitive to injustice. In a similar vein—and with respect to very specific areas of knowledge—I have argued that the meta-lucid oppressed subjects with multiple (p.198) cognitive perspectives are the ones who, in contexts of oppression, can live up to the epistemic obligations required for responsible agency: to a sufficient degree, they know themselves and they know their (significant) others better than they know themselves—at least if their bifurcated consciousness achieves a minimal balance between perspectives, so that there can be mutual resistance and beneficial friction and not a mere overpowering of one perspective by the other (which would simply reproduce internally the relation of subordination and cognitive domination that characterizes oppression).
But how does a double consciousness with a balanced internal epistemic friction produce meta-lucidity? Seeing through the veil of ignorance can mean not only looking at the world in a different way, with fresh eyes; it can also mean seeing the veil itself, that is, becoming aware of epistemic limitations and obstacles, gaining insights about constraints on one’s cognitive powers. Being meta-lucid about the limitations of our epistemic lives can be decisive in contexts of oppression. It can be the key to epistemic responsibility, to complying with the cognitive minimums of self-knowledge and social knowledge of others that we discussed in the previous chapter. But how can this meta-lucidity about ignorance be used subversively to resist oppression? Ellison’s Invisible Man offers the description of one subversive possibility for this meta-lucidity: namely, trying not to undo white ignorance, but rather, to exploit it in the fight against racial oppression, that is, to maintain and even to exacerbate the blindness of racist ideologies so as to weaken white privilege, making it more restricted and easier to navigate, perhaps even making it self-undermining. This is what the narrator of Invisible Man suggests when he becomes aware—painfully aware—not only of his invisibility, but also of his distorted visibility, that is, of the pile of distorted images that have come to define him in the white world. He rejoices in the fact that he can also see himself as others see him, and he can use this distorted image of himself to his own advantage and against them:

Very well, I’d become a supersensitive confirmer of their misconceptions … I’d serve them well and I’d make invisibility felt if not seen, and they’d learn that it could be as polluting as a decaying body, or a piece of bad meat in a stew. (p. 384)

The narrator’s epistemic pessimism leads him to conclude that the only solution to the oppressive weight exerted by the blindness of white ignorance is not cognitive melioration, but to push white ignorance to its limits as a path to self-destruction for the white world and its racial oppression: “If I couldn’t help them to see the reality of our lives I would help them to ignore it until it exploded in their faces” (p. 386). Thus Ellison’s narrator decides to contribute to maintain white ignorance and the one-dimensionality of the white gaze until the white world implodes and self-destroys.
But is facilitating its self-destruction the only form of resistance we can offer to the white gaze, the only path for racial liberation? Du Bois and other race theorists have sketched another possibility, which includes denouncing white ignorance and trying to change it. This is a solution to the epistemic oppression inherent in racism, which requires complex and interrelated processes of learning for differently situated groups: each group will have its own learning process to go through in order to come to terms with the epistemic injustices they suffer or help to inflict; each group will have distinctive contributions to make to repair the shared ignorance; and, given the right channels and dynamics of intergroup communication, the differently situated groups can (and should) learn from each other’s learning process, thus taking advantage of every bit of cognitive and affective melioration that can be gathered from every corner of the social world. I will explore this alternative way of addressing white ignorance in the next section. But it is important to note that the different ways of fighting ignorance and epistemic oppression mentioned can be characterized as ways of exerting epistemic friction for the sake of progressive psychic liberation, that is, of cognitive and affective melioration. Even what Ellison as well as contemporary race theorists have proposed, the self-destructive exploitation of white ignorance, turning it against itself, could be understood as exerting epistemic friction from the inside, that is, making a particular gaze or mindset feel its own limitations, bumping up against the world again and again until it feels the weight of its ignorance as a burden that makes it dysfunctional or nonfunctional. This radical form of internal friction is important, and it may be the best—even the only—way of offering resistance in certain contexts of oppression. But we have to put it in the context of a wide range of forms of resistance, some of which may lead to more durable changes, offering not only destructive but also constructive solutions through critical and subversive interventions that not only make the oppressive structures collapse but also put something (or contribute to the building of something) in their place. In this respect, I will argue, following Linda Alcoff, for the possibility of creating a white double consciousness so that privileged white subjects also bifurcate their cognitive and perceptual habits, attitudes, and structures by internalizing underprivileged perspectives that can exert epistemic friction and offer epistemic resistance from the inside. Similarly, from racial oppression to other forms of oppression, we can also contemplate and explore the possibility of creating—even if by a sort of social engineering that involves exerting great amounts of epistemic friction—a male, a heterosexual, a Western (or First World), a class-privileged double consciousness, as well as other possible ones.
The concept of double consciousness I have elucidated in this section is crucial to understanding the particular lucidity that oppressed subjects can achieve. But this concept needs to be expanded to live up to the demands that have arisen from my discussions of epistemic resistance. Although I said above (p.200) that a double consciousness with a balanced epistemic friction inside it constituted a virtuous subjectivity because it complied with the principles of epistemic friction, this is only true as long as there are only two epistemic perspectives available; but of course, there can always be more. What is needed is a kaleidoscopic consciousness that remains forever open to being expanded, that is, a subjectivity that is always open to acknowledge and engage new perspectives, and always open to strive toward a better balance among possible perspectives. The counterfactual dimension of this kaleidoscopic consciousness is crucial, for what is required for its production is to become capable of appreciating not only how things look from the multiple social locations available, but also, how things might look if we were to entertain newly created locations (or alter significantly the existing ones) and situate ourselves differently, in other words, if we were to keep considering how things might look from elsewhere. In Speaking from Elsewhere (2006a) I considered the critical power of eccentric forms of intelligibility (“an intelligibility from elsewhere”), which could shed light on our meanings and help us appreciate the limitations and blind spots of our semantic structures and communicative capacities (which I would now call semantic blindness or insensitivity). The same could be said about a consciousness from elsewhere, which is what we need to cultivate in order to achieve as much meta-lucidity as possible, as much insight into the cognitive limitations and obstacles of our perspectives as possible—knowing of course that complete meta-lucidity is unreachable, for the process of cognitive and affective melioration does not have an end and there are always blind spots that remain unnoticed.
What is needed is the cultivation of the ability to keep searching for new perspectives and actively trying to expand our perceptions and thoughts by contemplating things from elsewhere. This is the key to a kaleidoscopic consciousness. And nothing short of this complex cognitive and affective achievement will be adequate to the meta-blindness problem I have raised—that is, the problem of blind spots and insensitivities that remain hidden to the subject, who therefore becomes incapable of cognitive and affective melioration because of his insensitivity to insensitivity. For, indeed, if a double consciousness is not enough because the plural and heterogeneous nature of the social fabric can generate more than two perspectives, this problem is not solved by going to a triple or quadruple consciousness, for indeed, a fifth perspective may have been marginalized and rendered invisible and inaudible. Indeed, the social fabric can generate forever more standpoints: in fact, the perspectives of each group and even of each individual can always—at least in principle—be (further) pluralized. Instead of an infinitely pluralized consciousness, what is needed is a kaleidoscopic consciousness that has built into it a flexible and dynamic structure so that it can always adapt to the possibility of excess, that is, of there being more ways of experiencing the world than those considered. A kaleidoscopic consciousness is what is needed to confront the problem of pluralism. And note that for a kaleidoscopic consciousness to have some degree of lucidity at the meta-level, it does not need to have full mastery of the different perceptual perspectives and standpoints (which is often impossible without having lived one’s life in a certain way). Rather, it is sufficient to know that these different standpoints are there with their cognitive-affective powers and their cognitive-affective limitations—that is, that they have certain ways of framing that open our eyes, ears, and hearts to some things but not to others—and that there may be other standpoints that remain opaque or even invisible to us.
The meta-lucidity of a kaleidoscopic consciousness is first and foremost lucidity about the multiplicity of perspectives and of the limitations of one’s own standpoint, and only secondarily lucidity about the specific features of those perspectives with which one’s own is entangled. The metaphor of the kaleidoscope captures well some aspects of the multiplicitous consciousness that can hold and maintain active multiple perspectives simultaneously. The metaphor of the kaleidoscope underscores a fluid way of imagining ourselves and others in which patterns of relations are in flux, changing seamlessly and ceaselessly, with some relational possibilities giving way to others. This brings to the fore the fluidity, dynamicity, and interconnectivity that our racial consciousness should aspire to. However, the metaphor of the kaleidoscope, like any metaphor, also has its limitations, for it forces us to construe patterns of color and their interrelations as symmetric and orderly; and, of course, as we all know, the complex interrelations among racial identities are often not symmetric and orderly, but quite asymmetric and chaotic. Although the metaphor of the kaleidoscope is indeed not perfect, we can compensate for the premium it places on order and symmetry by calling attention to the fuzziness present in the transition from one pattern to another and in the relation between what is in the foreground and in the background of the kaleidoscopic image. But, at any rate, the metaphor is an improvement over the metaphor of double consciousness.
How does one cultivate a kaleidoscopic social consciousness that remains sensitive to differences in multiple areas of social life, producing lucidity with respect to multiple forms of oppression? And does becoming meta-lucid with respect to some blind spots and bodies of ignorance always help to become sensitive to other social blind spots and bodies of ignorance? Different kinds of epistemic injustice, though typically interconnected and exhibiting deep resemblances in their logic and dynamics, are often quite distinct and develop their own defense mechanisms, so that a heightened sensitivity with respect to one kind of insensitivity does not at all guarantee any special sensitivity with respect to other forms of insensitivity. In other words, what is learned in one context of injustice or as a result of certain experiences of oppression should not be assumed to be immediately transferable to other contexts or experiences of oppression. Different experiences of oppression (can) produce different kinds of double—or, better yet, multiplicitous—consciousness. We can talk about multiplicitous consciousness with respect to class, gender, nationality, race, sexuality, and so on. And having one kind of multiplicitous or kaleidoscopic consciousness does not guarantee lucidity with respect to other forms of oppression: as discussed above, racially oppressed subjects can be blind with respect to gender and sexual oppression, women can have heterosexist and racist boomerang perceptions, and queers may be blind with respect to racial others or class others. Even if one is multiply oppressed (e.g., as a Hispanic, as a working-class subject, and as a gay person), it is always possible to remain in denial with respect to one’s own oppression in toto or in some particular respects: subjects who suffer multiple forms of oppression may not even develop a kaleidoscopic vision of any kind, but remain cognitively and affectively numbed with a one-dimensional social sensitivity and a well-entrenched body of complicit ignorance; on the other hand, they may acquire some degrees of lucidity with respect to some aspects of their own oppression and not with respect to others. And, of course, subjects who are oppressed in only one respect but remain privileged in others (e.g., wealthy Anglo-American gay men) are more likely to have a limited lucidity with respect to multiple oppressions and with respect to the heterogeneous forms of social insensitivity and diverse blind spots created by social injustices. This phenomenon of the compartmentalization of one’s lucidity or sensitivity with respect to insensitivity and blindness constitutes an important obstacle in the personal and collective learning processes concerning multiple experiences of oppression and, therefore, a crucial obstacle for the melioration of social and epistemic injustices. The domain-specificity of lucidity with respect to oppression can partially explain how difficult it has been for social movements of resistance to form coalitions and to fight against oppression on multiple fronts simultaneously without falling into the traps of in-fighting and divisive politics (with which we are all familiar, given the turbulent relations among the different movements within so-called identity politics).
We should be suspicious of any claim of complete lucidity or absolute sensitivity: “I feel your pain,” “I feel everybody’s pain”; “I see how your reality has been distorted,” “I see all distortions.” Just like our perceptions and cognitions, our meta-cognitions are also always limited and must be constantly checked and expanded. The illusion of seeing or feeling everything can be another form of blindness or numbness, of not seeing anything in particular or of seeing things out of focus, of making oneself inattentive or insensitive to possible blind spots or insensitivities that may have gone so far undetected. However, this does not mean that we can only become lucid with respect to those forms of epistemic injustices we ourselves have experienced and have become reflective about in our own life. After all, the domain-specificity of lucidity is a contingent and contextual phenomenon; and, even if there is no generic (domain- and context-independent) lucidity to be attained, there are nonetheless ways of expanding our sensitivity to insensitivities and of becoming progressively more lucid about the different forms of blindness and numbness that support epistemic injustices. The expansion of one’s social sensibilities—and with it also the pluralization of one’s racial consciousness—is an ongoing task that does not have an end. And it is a task that individuals cannot fully carry out all by themselves. Such a task requires sustained interactions with significantly different individuals and groups (interactions that provide disruptions and diverse forms of epistemic friction)—hence the Imperative of Epistemic Interaction I have argued for. And, as we shall see, the task of expanding our social sensibilities also requires the cultivation of intra- and inter-group solidarities through the chained actions of individuals in social networks and movements (see section 5.3); and it requires not only action, but also imagination, resistant imagination, or the continued critical interrogation of shared forms of imagining from multiple perspectives (see chapter 6).
Some of the social and historical contingent obstacles that have been erected against this kind of expansion of one’s social gaze and sensibility emerge from the creation of utterly separate vocabularies and practices to address different forms of oppression, and from the sociocultural habits of paying insufficient attention to the interconnections among oppressions and of privileging one over the others (making class or race or gender oppression the fundamental one, to which all others have to be reduced). Both the ideologies of privilege and the ideologies of resistance developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have rendered us ill-equipped to develop social contexts and practices in which the complex process of expanding one’s sensitivity to insensitivity can take place. But acknowledging all of this, I nonetheless want to suggest that particular experiences of epistemic injustice offer the learning opportunity to become progressively more lucid about the heterogeneous and multifaceted limitations and blind spots of cognitive-affective structures. To put it in the standard terms of double consciousness, the fracture or bifurcation of one’s perceptions and thoughts has the potential not only to make oneself lucid in the particular respect of the fracture or bifurcation (for example, with respect to the racialized ways of perceiving and thinking to which one has been subjected), but also to initiate a wider process of becoming meta-lucid that may eventually reach other forms of oppression and epistemic injustice. What can be initiated, along with the heavily specific and situated meta-lucidity initially attained, is the process of expanding one’s sensitivity to insensitivity: a cognitive-affective process of moral and political learning, that is, a process of sensitizing oneself to other silences, invisibilities, and distortions. But for (p.204) this expansion of one’s social sensibilities to happen, the learning process has to reach a meta-level where greater degrees of lucidity about one’s cognitive and affective meta-attitudes are reached.
As I argued in chapter 3, experiencing the inability to speak on certain issues, such as one’s sexuality, as well as the inability of one’s interlocutors to listen to these issues, can make one better attuned to hermeneutical gaps, that is, more sensitive to epistemic exclusions, on the lookout for what is left out. But there is no guarantee that this sensitivity will always flourish or that it will go far when carried over to the experiences of others in other domains. The experience of being excluded and silenced is the fertile soil for the development of a special sensitivity to insensitivity. But this sensitivity to insensitivity is not automatically transferred and carried over from issue to issue, from area of life to area of life, from context of oppression to context of oppression. It is always limited and contextually constrained, and it always needs more epistemic friction to continue its expansion. There are always undetected internal resistances and cognitive-affective limitations that are not experienced as such until one acknowledges and genuinely engages with other ways of perceiving, feeling, and thinking. In these encounters and engagements with differences, we experience epistemic frictions that can lead us to feel the contours of our social gaze and the blind spots of our cognitive-affective sensibilities. We can thus achieve some meta-lucidity that can facilitate other processes of cognitive and affective melioration of our social sensibilities. For example, as suggested above (in section 2.2), the experience of sexual stigmatization of a gay man may not necessarily make him more sensitive to the ways in which female sexuality has been pathologized and rendered opaque by the same (hetero)sexist culture; but he can draw on that experience, and his special sensitivity and critical openness with respect to some sexual matters can be used as the starting-point of a cognitive-affective learning process that will require the interaction with relevant others who have been sexually stigmatized in other respects. That is, what is required in order to be exposed to the appropriate epistemic friction that can expand one’s sensitivity is an interactive process in which the subject can learn to empathize with others and to become sensitive to those aspects of their experience that have been marginalized, suppressed, or rendered unintelligible. The process of expanding one’s sensitivity to insensitivity—of overcoming one’s cognitive-affective numbness, of attaining greater degrees of lucidity with respect to injustices—is always an interactive social process. Although one should always tap into one’s own experiences of difference, these are always limited. For that reason, the process of expanding our sensitivity requires that we connect the differences and excesses that we feel in ourselves with those felt by others that we may be ill-equipped to understand and to which we may remain insufficiently or improperly sensitive. This requires seeking others with significantly different experiences and engaging with their heterogeneous perspectives. Openness to differences—both to one’s own internal differences as well as to those of others—is the key to sufficient degrees of lucidity, sensitivity, and epistemic responsibility. (Different aspects of this openness to differences will be discussed in the next section and in the next chapter.)
My treatment of the domain-specificity of meta-lucidity as constraining but not rendering impossible the process of expanding one’s sensitivity to insensitivity can be put in the context of recent developments in standpoint theory. Recently, standpoint feminists have problematized the absolute distinction between privileged and oppressed individuals by considering multiple, intersecting, and overlapping forms of oppression. Drawing on discussions of intersectionality, standpoint theorists have argued that most individuals are oppressed in some respects and privileged in other respects, that is, oppressed in some contexts and practices, and with respect to some groups, but at the same time privileged in other contexts and practices, and with respect to other groups. An upper-class, heterosexual black woman, for example, may be the subject of racist and sexist oppression, but may not experience any homophobic or classist oppression. We may encounter a subject who appears to be oppressed in every respect, that is, in every context and practice, and with respect to every group we can think of—for example, the famous working-class black lesbian often discussed in the literature on oppression, to whom we would have to add many other features such as being disabled, a citizen of a Third World country, and so on. We may also encounter a subject who appears to be privileged in every respect, that is, in every context and practice, and with respect to every group we can think of—for example, the infamous upper-class white heterosexual male who is also often discussed in the literature on oppression, and to whom we would also have to add many other features such as being able-bodied, a citizen of the First World, and so on. But even the most extreme forms of privilege or oppression are not homogeneous and one-dimensional. My contextualist approach to domain-specificity calls attention to the complex interaction of privilege and oppression, and it asks us to acknowledge that experiences of privilege and oppression can be multifaceted and contain tensions. My polyphonic contextualism tries to meet the challenge raised by contemporary standpoint feminists to go beyond one-dimensional group experiences of oppression, to situate women and men within multiple systems of domination, and to explore the interrelations of their different social locations and standpoints, thus examining the complex relations among systems of oppression. Offering resistance productively and successfully to the different, but interrelated epistemic injustices produced by these systems of oppression requires that we consider a wide range of social locations and standpoints in their specificity. (p.206) That is precisely what my polyphonic contextualism on epistemic agency attempts to do.
The scope of the lucidity that subjects achieve with respect to their cognitive-affective structures is crucially dependent on the particular genesis of that lucidity, on how it was attained and, in particular, on whether its genesis revolved around experiences of privilege or experiences of oppression. As suggested above, those subjects who develop a double or multiplicitous consciousness from experiences of oppression have an important advantage: they live and develop in such a way that their experiences become lucid without ever having been completely blind, since they have been blinded only in one dimension of their multiplicitious or kaleidoscopic vision, always compensating for the blinded perceptions with their alternative vision and thus always maintaining some degree of lucidity. But what about those who have lost sensitivity and have become blind, and not just simply blind but actively blind, meta-blind? How can they recover from this predicament? How can they fight their blindness and develop forms of lucidity? How does one get rid of internalized ignorance that one may not even be able to recognize? In the next section I will draw on the recent work of two feminists and race theorists, Linda Alcoff and Shannon Sullivan, to address these issues.

5.2. Promoting Lucidity and Social Change
How is it that in social environments in which racial or gender differences figure prominently only some subjects develop a racial or gender multiplicitous consciousness? And how is it that privileged subjects are less likely to do so? Double or multiplicitous consciousness appears to be a cognitive (and affective) accomplishment of oppressed subjects but not—at least not typically—of privileged subjects because it is occasioned by experiences of oppression. But why exactly, we may ask, shouldn’t there be a fracture or a pluralization of perspectives within a privileged subjectivity? Why, for example, not a **double white consciousness**? Let’s remind ourselves of the mundane ways in which double consciousness is generated, according to the classic accounts in race theory. Let’s take Fanon’s account, which has the virtue of offering detailed phenomenological descriptions that emphasize double consciousness not only as a mental phenomenon but also as a material one, emerging from everyday social experiences of one’s embodiment. For example, Fanon describes how uncomfortably—almost painfully—he became aware of his body simultaneously in the first and in the second person under the gaze of white people on a train. He also gives an account of how his bodily schema started to feel differently, to become bifurcated, when he experienced the shock of being perceived as a rarity—perhaps even a monstrosity—by the seemingly innocent—but already arrogant—white gaze of a child who yelled “Look a Negro!” Now, why should we assume that white people do not have a similar—or at least analogous, even if very different—experience of their racial embodiment as perceived in the second person by those who are racially different? And even if this does not happen spontaneously, couldn’t an analogous experience be created, even if it has to be artificially manufactured, so that racialization is no longer a blind spot for white subjectivities? My discussion in this section tries to address these questions.

In *Mind, Self, and Society*, G. H. Mead (1934) offers an account of the development of self-consciousness in which we all go through the experience of seeing oneself in the first and second person simultaneously, that is, through our own eyes and through the eyes of others who look at us. The second person, the Thou, has a special formative force on us: it is the interlocutor facing us, addressing and positioning us in a particular way, making us feel the social gaze directed at us quite directly. According to Mead’s and other sociogenetic accounts of the self, the internalization of the social gaze and the social address of others is not optional but a required formative element in identity formation: adopting the perspective of the other toward yourself, putting yourself in the shoes of the person looking at you, is a necessary step in the development of self-awareness. When it comes to racialized perception and consciousness, the problem is not that some white people have not internalized the perspective of others toward themselves—everybody who has become self-aware has done this. White arrogant perception—“boomerang perception”—arises because only one kind of subjectivity and its gaze, the white gaze, are fully acknowledged and felt.
White consciousness becomes one-dimensional and arrogant because of the insensitivity to the non-white gaze and address. We all develop a sense of self by seeing ourselves through the eyes of others, but not always through the eyes of different others. Our responsivity to others is selective. We do not become sensitized to every gaze and every address, but only to the gaze and address of particular others. For white people, this would mean experiencing the perception of themselves as “white people” through the eyes of non-white people, and to register and internalize that gaze. Now, shouldn’t this have been a common phenomenon even during segregation, even during slavery? How can an arrogant white subject fail to construe himself as an object of perception for the black gaze? How do people become impervious to the gaze and address of some particular others? How do these particular others become invisible and inaudible to them? There are basically two options here, two main ways in which this can happen. On the one hand, the most direct and basic way of desensitizing oneself to the gaze and address of particular others is by suppressing the occasions in which one can be addressed or even gazed at by them—or at least minimizing the impact of their gaze and address. And indeed during slavery and segregation there were severe constraints on black people’s capacity to address and even look at white people. Even when there were no legal prohibitions, there were informal practices and cultural expectations that heavily constrained people’s agency in this respect: black people were trained from an early age not to look at whites directly; and indeed staring with impunity, without even a feeling of vulnerability, has always been a clear sign of privilege. And the gaze of particular others loses its force when you do not experience them looking directly at you. But, on the other hand, there is a more subtle way of desensitizing oneself to the gaze and address of particular others, namely, by not recognizing them in their distinctiveness, as genuinely different from oneself, as true others. Even if one is gazed at and addressed by those particular others, one may not register their distinctive gaze and address, that is, their distinctive standpoint, their distinctive way of perceiving, feeling, and thinking. One may not see these others as different from the dominant forms of subjectivity one has internalized and, therefore, one may fail to adopt their distinctive perspectives toward oneself. For example, if the dominant subjectivity that has become hegemonic is that of the heterosexual white male, one may tend to construe every “other” one encounters as approximating that paradigm of subjectivity, failing to see them qua queers, qua women, or qua people of color and, therefore, failing to internalize their distinctive gazes, addresses, and perspectives.
The failure to adopt the perspectives of particular others toward oneself involves missing the opportunity to bifurcate or pluralize our consciousness and to move toward a kaleidoscopic perspective. This failure can be grounded in the other-regarding attitudes that we identified in the previous chapter as the source of interpersonal distortions and social blindness: the tendency to assume that all others are like oneself—blindness to differences; and the assumption that others are utterly irrelevant to our life, that our life and theirs are sealed off from each other—blindness to social relationality. Changing these very general other-regarding attitudes is prerequisite for the development of duplicitous or multiplicitous consciousness; it is what is needed in order to learn to adopt the perspectives of others toward ourselves and to get a glimpse at how things might feel when we look at the world through their eyes. How do these general other-regarding attitudes that produce insensitivity and meta-blindness function? And how can they be removed so that subjects who are initially blind to differences and to social relationality can eventually achieve some degree of lucidity? As an illustration of blindness to differences and to social relationality, I will use the phenomenon of color-blindness, whose discussion was initiated in chapter 1 (in connection with gender-blindness).

I will focus on color-blindness only as a form of white ignorance in the contemporary United States. Insofar as processes of racialization in the United States have been and still are structured around the black and white binary, the color blindness of white subjects can be considered a double blindness: white-blindness, that is, blindness with respect to their own racial identity; and color-blindness proper, that is, blindness with respect to those who have been colored or racialized as non-whites. Notably it is only the latter kind of blindness that is explicitly professed in the ideology of color-blindness, because whiteness itself is not even registered, whereas racialized colors are in fact registered but disavowed and brushed aside. White-blindness runs much deeper than color-blindness because, for the white subject, whiteness is typically not even conceptualized as a color, but rather, as the absence of color, signifying the absence of race, rather than a way of color-coding one more racialized identity. White-blindness and color-blindness are intimately connected, and they are both crucial components of white ignorance. I will here analyze the distorting attitudes toward racialized others inscribed in color-blindness, linking the interpersonal aspects of white ignorance to the kind of self-ignorance involved in white-blindness. In particular, I am interested in elucidating the meta-attitudes in which color-blindness is grounded: meta-attitudes that channel and guide social perceptions, but also meta-attitudes that channel and guide one’s self-perceptions. According to my analysis, the meta-ignorance involved in color-blindness operates through distorting second-order attitudes about one’s cognitive and affective attitudes, resulting in cognitive and affective meta-numbness with respect to racial matters: ignorance of one’s own racial ignorance and insensitivity to one’s own racial insensitivity.
Two important clarifications are in order so as to understand properly this meta-blindness or meta-insensitivity. In the first place, although I have been focusing on blindness because the central target of my analysis is the ideology of color-blindness, it is important to note that the meta-insensitivity or numbness in which racial meta-ignorance consists goes well beyond sight and it affects also other modalities of social perception. This is to be expected, since processes of racialization operate not only through sight, but also through other senses, such as audition (accents, dictions, rhythms, characteristic sounds, etc.), or smell (characteristic cooking odors, body scents, etc.). The perception of racialized identities is multidimensional and highly contextual. We do not simply perceive whiteness as such, but rather, socially and historically situated configurations of white subjectivities, such as the Southern white upper-middle-class gentleman or lady, with their distinctive bodily comportments, clothing styles, accents, and so on. In the contextualized practices of racialized social perception, sight (and within it, the perception of skin color) has been given special cultural prominence, but it remains nonetheless only one perceptual modality among many for racial identification. What would happen when, for example, the color-blind subject registers the distinctively racialized accent of an African-American or Hispanic subject? In order to avoid contradictory social perceptions in which the encountered subject appears as not racialized in one sense but as racialized in another sense, the color-blind subject would have to become also accent-deaf—and in other contexts, insensitive to odor, taste, touch, and so on. In order to filter out racial elements from social perception, a cultivated kind of insensitivity or numbness has to be brought to all perceptual modalities. When taken to its ultimate consequences, the ideology of color-blindness requires the impoverishment of every perceptual modality that can carry racial markers. Although this is obscured by the obsessive focus on sight and color, the disregard of race—its erasure from social perception—requires not only blindness but the deprivation of every sense used in social perception.
In the second place, although I have explained the racialized ignorance involved in color-blindness mainly in cognitive terms, this ignorance also contains crucial affective elements. Racial ignorance involves both cognitive and affective attitudes and meta-attitudes with respect to racial others. This is why I think it is important to think of this peculiar kind of blindness as a form of insensitivity or numbness, for being insensitive or numbed conveys a lack of receptivity that is simultaneously both cognitive and affective. For example, as pointed out above, racial insensitivity may involve the failure to see the social relevance of race in one’s interactions, and this failure is not simply a cognitive deficit, but an affective failure: it involves the inability to feel concerned and to have an entire array of emotions such as empathy, sympathy, compassion, and so on. This is why those who do not see the social relevance of the racial aspects of social experience often charge those who do as being oversensitive, as having a thin skin or feeling too much when racial elements are present in social interactions. And note that the disagreement is often not just about what is there to see, but rather, about what the appropriate way to feel about what one sees is; that is, it is not just a disagreement about beliefs, but a disagreement about feelings and emotions. Color-blindness involves being affectively numbed to the racial aspects of social experience. There are of course very different kinds of affective numbness that may be involved in racial insensitivity. For example, a distinctive kind of affective numbness underlying racial insensitivity may consist in feeling indifference and apathy as a result of a cultivated lack of interest in the members of a social group and their predicament. A very different kind of affective numbness, however, would be to feel concerned by the situation of a group and by the racial injustices endured by their members, and yet not know how to talk about it and how to react to it. The latter I would call being affectively blocked, that is, unable to integrate in one’s life what one starts to see and feel as relevant (which is characteristic of subjects who begin to become sensitive to a social injustice without at the same time having resources to come to terms with it and to make their relation to it intelligible and manageable).
How does the cognitive and affective meta-numbness involved in color-blindness relate to issues of agency and responsibility concerning racial oppression? We can understand the contemporary ideology of color-blindness as a social orchestration that enables and encourages subjects to be in denial about racial differences as significant human differences and about their own positionality and relationality in a social network permeated by relations of racial oppression. Rendering these relations invisible makes it impossible for color-blind subjects to take responsibility for them. In her classic paper on feminism and racism, Adrienne Rich (1979) already pointed out that color-blindness is an ideology that protects racial privilege because it works to conceal the partiality of the white world and how the world is perceived from the privileged standpoint of white subjects. Rich uses the concept of “white solipsism”\(^9\) to describe the perceptual standpoint that assumes a white perspective as universal; and she refers to the ideology of color-blindness as the protective mechanism that makes that privileging of perspective go unnoticed. In their analyses of color-blindness, Benita Berry (1995) and Patricia Williams (1997) have also emphasized that color-blindness often functions as an ideological cover-up strategy that deflects issues of responsibility: color-blindness “reduces socially significant human differences to invisibleness and meaningless hype whereby one does not have to acknowledge what one does not see” (Berry: 1995, p. 46); “the very notion of blindness about color constitutes an ideological confusion at best, and denial at its very worst.” (Williams: 1997, p. 4) More recently, Linda Alcoff (2006) and Shannon Sullivan (2006) have also analyzed color-blindness in a similar way. Sullivan describes the contemporary ideology of color-blindness as “one of the hiding places of the terror of whiteness” (p. 127). “White people often are strongly invested in not knowing much about whiteness” (p. 128). And although the habit of ignoring race is typically presented as “a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture,” this form of socially orchestrated ignorance, far from being innocent, actually operates “as (p.212) a shield that protects a person from realizing her complicity in an oppressive situation” (Ibid.).
Following Berry and Williams, Alcoff (2006) has explained the phenomenon of color-blindness as motivated by “a (white) anxiety about seeing race” (p. 200). She tells us that in her experience, growing up in the post–civil rights South, “color blindness was regularly claimed by white folks and regularly repudiated by folks of color”: “There seemed to be an anxiety about the perception of race on the part of some whites, a fear of acknowledging that one sees it” (p. 199). These observations about color-blindness fit in well with my analysis of other-regarding attitudes and meta-attitudes that produce blindness, for color-blindness can be understood as a socially cultivated meta-attitude through which a particular group tries to monitor and control what they see and are willing to acknowledge as relevant and significant. The meta-attitude of color-blindness identifies the perceptual judgments that have to be disavowed, and the interpretations and valuations that have to be blocked and jettisoned, because we cannot find a place for them in the life we want to picture for ourselves—a life without race. One may think that this chosen and self-induced blindness cannot possibly involve meta-blindness, but rather, meta-lucidity, for one must recognize the chosen limitations of one’s social gaze in order to cultivate it and to train one’s eyes to the imposed blinders. However, although there is an important amount of self-awareness about racial seeing in color-blind ideologies, these ideologies remain blind about the relevance and significance of racial differences, and they rest on a meta-ignorance about the presuppositions and implications of one’s cognitive and affective attitudes with respect to color differences and racial differences. General distorting attitudes that remain blind spots in these ideologies are (1) the reduction of race to color (and racial differences to color differences); and (2) the delusions about people’s abilities to abstract from color differences and to achieve social perceptions “without color.” Color-blindness, even when self-consciously cultivated, can qualify as meta-ignorance or meta-blindness when and because color-blind subjects do not fully know what they don’t know, that is, the implications of their racial ignorance, the presuppositions and consequences of ignoring the social realities of race. This meta-blindness makes the color-blind subject cognitively and affectively ill-equipped to confront the contours of their ignorance at the object level, that is, unable to interrogate what is involved in ignoring race. In other words, the meta-attitudes that often accompany the ideology of color-blindness often instill in people a meta-numbness or meta-insensitivity: under the influence of this ideology, people run the risk of becoming numbed or insensitive to their racial insensitivity—to what this insensitivity means for the social locations they occupy and the social lives they lead.
Applying the analysis of the other-regarding meta-attitudes that produce blindness developed in the previous chapter, the self-induced blindness of the color-blind subject can be understood as a *double blindness*: blindness to differences and to social relationality. Repairing the damage that the internalization of the color-blindness ideology produces in people’s cognitive-affective structures would require, therefore, repairing their meta-blindness with respect to the visibility and significance of racial features and racial relations; or, to put it in the positive, it would require achieving meta-lucidity with respect to the forms of human diversity and human relationality that race has produced. In other words, the key is to figure out how to open people’s eyes to racial differences as significant human differences, and how to make racial features and relations relevant to their life. In my view, this task can be segmented into two phases or subtasks: a *diagnostic phase*, in which we gain positive and negative insights about our cognitive-affective functioning when it comes to the judgments of racial perceptions and the judgments of the significance and relevance of race; and a *reconstructive phase*, in which we pursue interventions and transformations aimed at instilling new attitudes and habits that can meliorate our cognitive-affective functioning in these matters. The diagnostic phase has as its primary goal a kind of self-mastery or getting to know ourselves better: becoming aware of the habits and practices that inform and sustain our perceptions, judgments, and cognitive-affective attitudes; whereas the reconstructive phase has as its primary goal the reconstitution of personal and social structures: the rearrangement of interpersonal relations, social conditions, and social contexts in and through which new habits and practices can develop so that our perceptions, judgments, and cognitive-affective attitudes can eventually acquire a different shape—that is, through the engineering of deep personal and social transformations that can lead to cognitive-affective melioration.
In *Visible Identities*, Alcoff offers a phenomenological account of the perceptual practices that make race (or processes of racialization) visible or invisible, which can go a long way in the diagnostic phase of repairing racial blindness. Alcoff argues that the reduction of racism and the melioration of racial relations require becoming reflectively and critically aware of our perceptual habits and practices concerning race. As she puts it, in our fight against racism, “our first task ... is to make visible the practices of visibility itself” (2006, p. 194). To put it in the terms of my analysis here, the fight for racial justice requires a kind of meta-lucidity, that is, lucidity with respect to racial seeing. It is in this sense that Alcoff undertakes the task of making practices and habits of racial seeing visible. In order to “unlearn racial seeing,” racial seeing must first be acknowledged and carefully investigated. The first task is, therefore, to unmask the invisibility of racial constructions and of whiteness in particular. Alcoff argues that visibility is the primary field of operation of racial constructions: “Because race works through the domain of the visible, the experience of race is predicated first and foremost on the perception of race” (p. 187). But, at the same time, racial constructions—and especially privileged ones—while inscribed in the very structure of perception, typically escape conscious perception and remain imperceptible. Alcoff describes this phenomenon in Foucaultian terms: “Visibility is a trap” (p. 191); what is rendered permanently visible—that which is inscribed on the body itself, “the flesh of the visible” (Ibid.)—is in an important sense rendered invisible: it is constantly being seen and not seen at the same time. What is hidden from view, precisely through perceptual practices, is the process of racialization as such, because “visible difference naturalizes racial meanings” (p. 191). Racial seeing as such is not open to view; the processes of racialization that come to structure our social perceptions are not seen, and yet our perceptual habits and our field of vision cannot escape them. The racial meanings inscribed in the body become part of the underlying structure of our perceptual habits, that is, part of the taken-for-granted background against which our social perceptions take place. As Alcoff puts it, racial seeing makes up a part of what appears to me as the natural setting of all my thoughts. It is the field, rather than that which stands out. The perceptual practices involved in racializations are then tacit, almost hidden from view, and thus almost immune from critical reflection. (p. 188)

And this immunity that perceptual processes of racialization acquire through their invisibility and inaccessibility to conscious reflection is a phenomenological feature common to all habitual perceptions: “Our experience of habitual perceptions is so attenuated as to skip the stage of conscious interpretation and intent. Indeed, interpretation is the wrong word here: we are simply perceiving” (p. 188). And what is simply perceived adopts an air of necessity. As Alcoff explains, locating race in the domain of the visible has the phenomenological result of experiencing racial differences as natural and immutable (see especially p. 192).
Alcoff’s phenomenological account can explain two things simultaneously: why perceptual processes of racialization “are nearly impossible to discern and why they are resistant to alteration or erasure” (p. 188). At this point, however, this account can make it difficult to see how personal and social change can be possible for those who have been exposed to racialized perceptual practices: “are we not led to pessimism about the possibility of altering the perceptual habits of racialization?” (p. 189). Alcoff finds a source of optimism in the heterogeneity and pluralism of human experiences. She claims that there are “multiple schemas operating in many if not most social spaces,” and that this multiplicity can serve to “mitigate against an absolute determinism and thus pessimism” about racial seeing (Ibid.). The plurality of alternative ways of perceiving that can be found even within the most strictly disciplined and constrained field of social perceptions can be exploited to produce changes and effect meliorations that improve social relations. This fits in well with the pluralism and polyphonic contextualism I have defended and with my emphasis on epistemic friction and resistance. As Alcoff puts it,

(p.215) Perceptual practices are dynamic even when congealed into habit, and that dynamism can be activated by the existence of multiple forms of the gaze in various cultural productions and by the challenge of contradictory perceptions. To put it simply, people are capable of change. (Ibid.)

Note that Alcoff points to tensions and contradictions in perceptual practices that can be exploited for change; and this is part of what I have described as standpoints exerting resistance against each other, thus making themselves noticed, felt, through a kind of epistemic friction that is both cognitive and affective. In this case, the epistemic friction to be sought is a perceptual friction that can produce critical awareness of multiple ways of seeing and can point in the direction of change. And it is important to note here that the key is to acknowledge the potential multiplicity of perceptual perspectives and not just two possible ones. For, although acknowledging that there is more than one perspective is a great step forward in breaking racial solipsism (and the cultural monopoly and hegemony associated with it), the reduction of potentially heterogeneous and multiple perspectives to two opposed and clearly differentiated kinds leads to a dangerous polarization that obscures differences and creates artificial social divisions.
In the contemporary United States, the goal of overcoming the social divisions created by racial oppression calls upon us to resist the black and white binary, which in the American imaginary has reduced multiple and heterogeneous racial perspectives to two polarized and artificially separated racial consciousnesses, conveniently color-coded in two clearly distinct and opposed colors in order to enforce a stark contrast and an aversion to mixing. The black and white binary rests on two crucial interwoven and simultaneous mistakes: the reductive identification of racial consciousness with color consciousness; and the artificial polarization and dichotomization of perspectives. The black and white binary creates a false dichotomy with respect to racial differences: either they are blackened and acquire a negative heightened visibility, or they are whitened and acquire a neutralized invisibility through assimilation or normalization. The cognitive and affective meta-attitudes that operate in these processes of blackening and whitening have to be rejected and replaced with a very different kind of sensibility with respect to racial differences if we want to transcend the false dichotomy between color obsession and color-blindness, and move toward a richer kind of racial consciousness that overcomes the problems of color coding in black and white.

How does the black and white binary contribute to racial insensitivity and meta-blindness? As Franz Fanon (1967) suggested, in the racial imagination of Western cultures, white is the color of the unmarked mainstream subject. In the social perceptions controlled by this racial imagination, people will see in white and they will imagine themselves and their fellows as white subjects. According to this racial imagination, people are white by default, that is, white until proven colored, until something calls into question their status as normal subjects within the culture. In this racial imaginary, differences are blackened and can only be perceived negatively, as departures from normalcy. Blackened differences acquire a heightened negative visibility, whereas whiteness goes unnoticed and becomes a blind spot. The presumed whiteness of normal subjects is masked as absence of color. Within this racial imaginary, the attempt to overcome stigmatizing differences becomes the attempt to whiten these differences, that is, to assimilate them to the white mainstream until they are no longer perceived as differences. But notice that this kind of color-blind perception smuggles in whiteness (or whitening processes) into the social world under the appearance of the absence of color. Whiteness is thus masked as discoloration or color-neutrality. This kind of color-blindness is part of a racial ideology that privileges the white mainstream and tries to assimilate all other possible embodiments and perspectives (no matter how different) to the mainstream white culture. Within this racial imagination, a color-blind universe is a white world.
In order to find alternative ways of racial seeing that can create beneficial epistemic friction, we do not even have to abandon the dominant white world and resort to differently racialized ways of seeing. Epistemic friction can be found even within white perception. Subjects who have internalized white perception can be more or less lucid about their racial structures of social perception; and we can find particularly lucid subjects who have become critics of their racialized standpoint. We can see this in what Alcoff calls the phenomenon of “white anti-whiteness.” Alcoff uses Jack Kerouac as an example of someone who was able to develop some degrees of meta-lucidity about white perception, felt a deep discomfort with the white standpoint that he recognized as his own, and became critical with the white world from within. Kerouac wrote, “I wished I was a Negro, a Denver Mexican, or even a Jap, anything but a white man disillusioned by the best in his own ‘white’ world. (And all my life I had white ambitions!” (1998, p. 56). Kerouac feels disillusioned with the values and aspirations of his own white culture and, as Alcoff explains, “out of this disillusionment he senses the arbitrariness of his dominant status, which makes it impossible for him to rest easy with it or relax in it. And thus he longs to escape it” (p. 186). But, as Alcoff points out, even in his non-white sensibility, Kerouac “operates from within a white schema of signification (a paradox that can also beset nonwhite bodies)” (Ibid.). In Kerouac’s experiential accounts of racialized spaces and of lived racial meanings and identities, Alcoff sees the testimony of a discrepancy or disequilibrium between first-person experiences and an internalized historico-racial schema (which produces what Fanon called “a corporeal malediction”). Alcoff claims that this disequilibrium is becoming more common and typical of white subjects who feel trapped and dissatisfied with the standpoint of a hitherto uncontested racial seeing:

(p.217) I would suggest that today, more and more whites are experiencing a similar disequilibrium, as they come to perceive the racial parameters that structure whiteness differently in different communities—white and nonwhite—and may find that none of these can be made coherent with their own preferred body or postural image. (Alcoff: 2006, p. 187)
Given the new social and cultural conditions of today, it is increasingly hard for whiteness to remain invisible. Whiteness has been revealed, unmasked. And this revelation or unmasking is painful; it produces discomfort for privileged racial identities, which were previously unnoticed and typically felt unproblematic. Critical white voices now come to join the critical voices of racially oppressed subjects. The dominant white gaze has come under attack by anti-white whiteness. Many subjects who were recruited to arrogant white perception in subtle ways during their upbringing and early socialization find many opportunities throughout their lives to grow uncomfortable with this racial way of seeing and to develop a critical distance with it. More and more subjects find it difficult to occupy and live privileged positions within a racialized world without hesitation and lack of comfort. More and more subjects find it difficult to inhabit the white gaze as a matter of course—no questions asked, no worry felt. Farewell to an invisible and uninterrogated white common sense. The white gaze—the dominant way of racial seeing in mainstream culture—has been rendered visible and has been challenged from all angles, including by whites themselves. Yet, as Alcoff goes on to argue, we have to keep in mind that the very interesting and productive phenomenon of white anti-whiteness is full of dangers and mystifications, with the possibility of self-delusion and overestimating one’s powers to overcome racial perceptual practices and to become disloyal to one’s race. Alcoff analyzes two versions of white anti-whiteness, which—although they are commendable, because they contain insights that many white subjects remain blind to—nonetheless fail to produce a sufficiently critical awareness of white identity that can take responsibility for racial oppression in a productive way. I would say that what we have in these instances is white consciousness without racial lucidity, that is, we have ways in which white people become self-conscious about their racial identity but insufficiently lucid about how deep this identity goes and about its multifaceted complicity with relations of oppression. In these instances of white anti-whiteness, the reconstructive phase cannot even begin because the diagnostic phase has not been completed: in other words, the reconstitution of one’s racial identity (one’s racial attitudes, cognitive-affective structures, habits, etc.) becomes practically impossible when one does not yet have an adequate understanding of one’s racial identity and the network of relations in which this identity is inscribed.
One such form of white awareness without sufficient racial lucidity that Alcoff analyzes is the one developed by Judith Katz in the 1978 book *White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-Racist Training*. According to Alcoff, Katz offers a psychologistic account of racism devoid of social or historical content and without much attention to its structural underpinnings: “Katz makes no reference to exploitation or the need for a redistribution of resources, and instead treats racism as a psychological pathology that can be solved through behavior modification” (pp. 211–12). Carefully avoiding self-indulgent white guilt fixations, the focus of Katz’s approach is the psychological destructiveness of racism for white identity: “She holds that racism causes whites to suffer; it cripples their intellectual and psychological development and locks them ‘in a psychological prison that victimizes and oppresses them every day of their lives’” (p. 211). For Katz, the only hope for a healthy white subjectivity that can retain “self-trust” and “self-love” is the repudiation of racism, the cultivation of a robust antiracist attitude that denounces the unfair privileges and supremacist ambitions on which whiteness has been constructed. As Alcoff notes, in Katz’s account whiteness acquires a purely negative meaning and, “unlike ethnic identities, it has no other substantive cultural content” (p. 212). And although Katz recognizes that it is important for white people to “develop a sense of positive identification with their whiteness,” as Alcoff argues, Katz’s “book provides no help in determining what the positive aspects [of whiteness] might be” (Ibid.). Although this form of white awareness can certainly open people’s eyes to the significance of racial differences, this significance becomes purely psychological and mainly negative, and this is shortsighted. Those who successfully complete the behavioral therapy recommended by Katz may become psychologically lucid about race while at the same time remaining quite blind about the social, historical, and structural significance and relevance of racial differences in their life. They may acquire important degrees of psychological lucidity because the self-centered therapy may enable them to understand aspects of their psyche that they did not understand before—in particular; they may learn how racism and unfair racial relations have contributed to impoverish their affective lives, even if they do not learn how they can become enriched. But these subjects remain ill-equipped after the therapy to understand the social, historical, and structural aspects of their positionality and relationality in a racialized world.

The second form of white anti-whiteness that Alcoff analyzes and finds wanting is that of the web journal *Race Traitor: A Journal of the New Abolitionism*. As Alcoff describes it, the *Race Traitor* web forum was

> a space where radical whites [could] share and spread ideas, get feedback and criticism from people of color, and help to educate themselves and their readers on the “true” history of the Civil War and the neglected legacy of white resistance to racism. (p. 213)
Unlike Katz’s white anti-whiteness, these traitors to whiteness have an explicitly sociohistorical and structural approach to racial identities and racial relations. The contributions to the journal tended to be critical analyses of current social phenomena with a special emphasis on class issues. As Alcoff puts it, the central target of critique of this movement is white supremacy, as “an ideology used by the wealthy and powerful to fool the white poor into being more race-loyal than class-loyal, blinding them to their own interests” (Ibid.); but, with its working-class political perspective on whiteness, “the journal tends toward class reductionism that sidelines other kinds of struggles and homogenizes class interests” (Ibid.). As Alcoff points out, intersectionality is an important blind spot of Race Traitor, which pays insufficient attention to the multifaceted aspects of oppression, how race intersects with gender and sexuality, and how feminists and queer activists can be important allies in the fight against racism. Another important limitation that springs from the class reductionism of Race Traitor and curtails the lucidity that its racial education can provide, is that racial identities and relations have only a sociohistorical and structural significance and lack psychological depth. Race Traitor bloggers can certainly not be accused of being blind to the significance and relevance of race, and yet they can be quite myopic about the psychological impact that racial relations and practices have in their lives.

It is far from clear that Race Traitor bloggers developed any appreciation for the immediate psychological relevance of their racialized social environment for their deep cognitive-affective structures and habits. As Alcoff puts it, the journal has “the tendency to emphasize that most whites have not committed racist violence” and “to promote a disassociation or disidentification between whites (especially the working class) and racist institutions” (pp. 215–6). This obscures how internalized racist attitudes can haunt us despite our best intentions, and it plays in the hands of the insidiousness of our complicity with racist practices and institutions, which can take many forms.
Symptomatic of the psychological and cultural naïveté of *Race Traitor* was its calls for the abolition of the white race. Alcoff does not doubt the significance (even expediency) that betraying the social and cultural expectations of whiteness can have. Indeed, “in the civil rights movement, white individuals refused white solidarity over Jim Crow and sat in at lunch counters with African Americans, rode in the back of buses, and marched in open opposition to their communities” (p. 215). But she argues that, outside the context of particular social and political movements (which tend to be well-scripted), acts of white treason are less predictable and can have harmful unintended effects. For Alcoff, the most obvious problem with the proposed abolition of the white race is “that whites cannot completely disavow whiteness or distance themselves from their white identity.” (Ibid.) Alcoff considers the act of white treason discussed by one of the contributors to *Race Traitor*, Edward H. Peeples: at a Richmond newsstand in 1976 he was told by the white cashier “You don’t want this newspaper; it’s the colored newspaper,” to which he replied “You *must* think I’m white,” leaving the cashier furious and at a loss about what to do with this “white Judas” (Ibid.). Alcoff does not doubt that acts of “white treason” such as this one can have critical significance, but she warns us that we should not overinflate what they achieve and that we should keep in mind that “such acts cannot completely eliminate the operation of white privilege, and the subsequent treatment of the ‘white Judas’ will be affected by both his whiteness and his treason” (Ibid.). Since any single action undertaken by a white person with the goal of undermining white privilege leaves such privilege largely in place, it would be naïve for the white subject to feel, on the basis of such action alone, “entitled to disengage with whiteness without feeling any kind of responsibility for white racist atrocities of the past” (Ibid.). So *Race Traitor* was ultimately inadequate for the task of producing the kind of racial lucidity for white subjectivities that would allow them to take responsibility for racial injustices and to contribute to the melioration of racial relations.
What is needed is a way of bringing together the psychological and the sociohistorical and structural, offering subjects the kind of lucidity that can help them to understand the racialized standpoints they have inherited and at the same time can guide them in their attempts at reconstituting their racial identities. So here we need to turn to the reconstructive phase of repairing racial blindness: we need to explore ways in which subjects can reconstruct their perspectives and learn to inhabit them in new ways, so that they can reconstitute their positionality and relationality in a racialized social environment. As Alcoff suggests, “only the creation of new structures of identity formation” (p. 216) can meet the challenge of offering genuine racial liberation for white subjects, so that they can take responsibility for the structural racism that has informed their privileged standpoint and at the same time overcome complicity with ongoing racist practices. But developing a positive sense of identity while taking responsibility for racial oppression is not easy for white subjects, for the recognition of responsibility can be shattering. As Alcoff puts it, “whites’ moral culpability … threatens their ability to imagine themselves as having a socially coherent relation to a past toward which anyone could feel a positive attachment” (p. 217). What is needed is a transformative but not shattering lucidity that enables subjects to see how their whiteness has been constructed socially and historically vis-à-vis other identities, and at the same time a lucidity that points in the direction of new ways of inhabiting that identity. This requires a context-sensitive approach that examines racial attitudes and habits as they operate in the particular context in question, and an approach that is both sociohistorically and psychologically sensitive, carefully tracing the genesis of racial standpoints and offering an array of possibilities for how they can be phenomenologically experienced by different individuals. Alcoff finds an example of a fairly successful localized attempt at coming to terms with a racist past and offering paths for the rearticulation of racialized (and, in particular, white) subjectivities in Michael L. Harrington’s Traditions and Changes: The University of Mississippi in Principle and in Practice. This is a textbook that Harrington developed to use it in his University Studies 101 class at the University of Mississippi. Without shying away from providing a complete account of Ole Miss’s racist past, Harrington offers the students a way of positioning themselves in resistance to that past and as part of a sustained effort to create an antiracist university identity and to locate racial solidarity at the center of university life. Harrington does this through a critical and revisionary approach to U.S. Southern history and American history, arguing that U.S. cultural and political traditions have a dual character, containing both ways of institutionalizing oppression and inequality and ways of appreciating freedom and equality and trying to achieve them for all.
Emphasizing and exploiting the dualities, tensions, and contradictions that can be found in one’s heritage, Harrington’s book gives students the sense that they can learn and draw from the unfinished projects of the past, while at the same time warning them about the negative things that have also become part of their culture, of their traditions, and even of themselves, which need correction and melioration. With respect to race, the book urges Mississipians to acknowledge racism and to work together to fight it, developing racial solidarity so that black and white Mississipians can support each other and advance common goals. Through critical, open, and democratic reflection, Harrington’s book and course aim at recruiting students to the task of transforming their university, their community, and themselves. Although acknowledging its important limitation (e.g., no class analysis or discussion of reparations or redistribution of resources), Alcoff finds here a good illustration of what a local attempt to fight racial blindness and to instill a transformative lucidity with respect to racial identities and positionalities can look like. And given Ole Miss’s white past and its overwhelmingly white student population, Alcoff appreciates in particular what Harrington’s book and curricular efforts can do for the reconstruction of whiteness and the reconstitution of white identity:

I found Traditions and Changes to provide a helpful model for acknowledging white complicity in racism and the need to repudiate key aspects of white identity within an overall project that seeks to develop a collective transformation toward a nonracist white identity. (p. 221)

Following on the steps of Harrington’s emphasis on the dualities and tensions of American (and, in particular, white American) culture and history, Alcoff emphasizes the importance of developing a bifurcated white standpoint that articulates and exercises this dual approach in relation to its cultural past, present, and future. It is interesting to note that this bifurcation of white consciousness is very different from the one that generated the double consciousness of black people for Du Bois and Fanon: it is a double attitude with respect to oneself, a dual perspective on what is recognized as one’s own (one’s cultural past, present, and future), which need not involve the internalization of the white double consciousness “to name [the] two-sided sense of the past and the future” that “white identity needs to develop” (p. 222). As Alcoff herself recognizes, this notion of a white double consciousness does “not involve the move between white and black subjectivities or black and American perspectives, as Du Bois and Fanon developed the notion” (p. 223). But this kind of “double consciousness” achieved without epistemic friction in actual encounters with others will not be sufficient and it will remain quite shallow: As the Imperative of Epistemic Interaction emphasizes, a rich epistemic life requires experiencing resistance from significantly different perspectives in social interaction.
I want to go beyond Alcoff’s account of white double consciousness in two ways. In the first place, following my Imperative of Epistemic Interaction and drawing on Shannon Sullivan (2006), I want to argue for a notion of white double consciousness produced through epistemic friction in actual bodily encounters with differently racialized others. In the second place, I also want to argue for a multiplicitous or *kaleidoscopic* consciousness—rather than a *double* consciousness—that includes the multiplicity of perspectives required for genuine open-mindedness and for avoiding the arrogant perception that keeps excluding even when it pretends to acknowledge (a colonizing gaze that conquers the perspectives of others, rather than being transformed by them). A good starting point for these extensions of Alcoff’s account is Sullivan’s phenomenological and pragmatist account of the racialized habits of whiteness in *Revealing Whiteness* (2006). This account goes along well with Alcoff’s anti-intellectualist, embodied, and practical approach that claims that “rational arguments against racism will not be sufficient to make a progressive move,” and that we need to address the deep “psychic process of identity formation” (p. 221).

Sullivan offers a situated account of embodied racial habits that is both psychological and sociohistorical, and points in the direction of a double or multiple consciousness for white subjects in a Du Boisian and Fanonian sense. As Sullivan’s account makes clear, the kind of racial self-consciousness required by white double consciousness will be different from the racial awareness of black double consciousness in crucial respects, but both forms of double consciousness must coincide in the following: they require a kind of shattering of a bodily schema produced by the internalization of the gaze of differently racialized others toward oneself, which can only happen in *actual bodily encounters with racial others* that disrupt the normal operation of one’s racialized transactional habits and produces a vivid racial awareness, a new way of seeing oneself. (p.223) Racial awareness of this sort involves seeing yourself as others see you, as racialized in a particular way different from them, making you self-aware of that difference in your bodily transactions with them. In her elucidations of Fanon’s account, Sullivan makes clear that it is not sufficient to have tensions or dualities within one’s psyche in order to have double consciousness; you need specific events, *lived disruptions*, that trigger the fracturing of one’s subjectivity, the “zebra-striping of the mind,” as Fanon calls it (1967, p. 63).
Sullivan recounts some personal experiences in which her psychosomatic racial habits were disrupted and a new kind of racial consciousness started to emerge. Even in apparently simple experiences such as a middle-class white person’s evening ride on the bus with black workers returning home, the subject can experience an uncomfortable and heightened consciousness about how she might be perceived by others as a differently racialized subject. She might internalize the gaze of these others and look at herself through their eyes, as an object in their world. As Sullivan puts it, what occurs in cases like this is “the shattering of a white person’s ‘normal’ bodily schema into a racial epidermal schema: I became white, not neutral, and my whiteness interfered with the smooth, non-reflective living of my body” (p. 117). Sullivan emphasizes that experiences of racialization do not disrupt bodily schemas in the same way for those perceived as white and privileged and for those perceived as colored and underprivileged:

While [the experience] transformed my body into an object to manipulate, the historico-racial valuing of whiteness as good and blackness as evil was not disturbed.... Even my disrupted bodily schema retained its white privilege. While unsure of how to live my body, I was never reduced to a subperson who faded into non-existence. (Ibid.)

Although there is no “zebra-striping” of the white mind strictly speaking, white consciousness can nonetheless be pluralized; that is, it can acquire inner diversity through disruptions that force it to take the perspectives of differently racialized others toward itself. And the more a white subjectivity is pluralized—that is, the more it internalizes the gazes of racial others and learns to see itself as a perceptual object for them—the more lucidity it can achieve about its positionality and relationality with respect to racial differences. There are many differently racialized others; we can be the object of perception of many different standpoints and gazes. It is highly distorting to dichotomize the social gazes available into two: the mainstream gaze, or the gaze of privilege, or the white perspective, on the one hand; and the marginalized, out of the mainstream, or colored perspective, on the other. Within each side of this polarization we find distinctive groups, experiences, and perspectives. If we take this social pluralism seriously, we need a more expansive lucidity about our positionality and relationality with respect to racial differences: we need not only a double consciousness, but a multiplicitous or kaleidoscopic consciousness that (p.224) does not reinscribe the black-and-white binary in one’s racial imagination. To this aspect of racial lucidity I now turn.
We need to move toward a kaleidoscopic (rather than merely dual) perspective on racialized identities. As argued above, what is needed is a *kaleidoscopic consciousness* that remains forever open to being expanded, that is, a subjectivity that is always open to acknowledge and engage new perspectives. The expansion of one’s social sensibilities—and with it also the pluralization of one’s racial consciousness—is an ongoing task that does not have an end. And it is a task that individuals cannot fully carry out all by themselves. Such a task requires sustained interactions with significantly different individuals and groups (interactions that provide disruptions and diverse forms of epistemic friction). This is what the Imperative of Epistemic Interaction of my polyphonic contextualism tries to capture. In order to expand their social sensibilities and overcome their blindness and numbness, individuals need the sustained support of other particular individuals with whom they can interact, the support of networks of individuals of which they can be a part, and of social movements that can create the conditions for deep transformations and the restructuration of cognitive-affective attitudes. The epistemic friction produced by the interaction of heterogeneous standpoints can yield a critical awareness of multiple ways of perceiving and can point in the direction of change, of the melioration of our perceptual attitudes and habits. But note also that—as Alcoff emphasizes—change is not easy, and it takes more than merely becoming aware of one’s blind spots by experiencing tensions and contradictions. Lucidity with respect to one’s blindness or insensitivity is a *prerequisite* for genuine change and cognitive improvement, a necessary but not a sufficient condition. What else is needed for overcoming racial blindness and defective habits of arrogant seeing? Retraining one’s sight and widening one’s vision; that is, developing *new habits* of racial perception and gender perception. It is crucial to note that this reconstructive task of repairing blindness and expanding social sensibilities starts with *friction*, the kind of friction that can be both disruptive and reenergizing: a friction that can disrupt established habits (e.g., racist or sexist habits), but can also constitute the starting point of new chains of performance where new social habits get consolidated. In the next section I will argue that although deep transformations of social sensibilities require friction produced by acts of resistance, this kind of insurrectionary resistance is the complex and laborious work not only of individuals but also of social networks and of social movements: It is in social networks and movements that individual acts of resistance are *echoed* in performative chains of insurrection that can have far-reaching consequences. In the final chapter I will elaborate on my elucidation of the transformative task of expanding social sensibilities by focusing on resistant imaginations. As I will argue, the task of expanding our social sensibilities and attaining a kaleidoscopic social consciousness requires the continued critical interrogation of the collective imagination from multiple perspectives, from (p. 225) the resistant imaginings articulated by heterogeneous social networks and movements.
5.3. Echoing: Chained Action, “Epistemic Heroes,” and Social Networks
In some contexts it may appear that it takes exceptional individuals and communities with exceptional qualities to overcome the collective blindness in question and to develop a hitherto unknown kind of lucidity. I will call these exceptional individuals and groups *epistemic heroes*. I will not call into question that there are indeed individuals who display out-of-the-ordinary qualities and virtues (such as courage), and that we owe them a great deal for their work toward epistemic justice. But I will argue that these *epistemic heroes* are neither necessary nor sufficient for the social and cultural changes required for achieving greater degrees of epistemic justice. These deep changes in the dynamics of social recognition and epistemic interaction can only be produced by the *chained actions* of individuals and groups, which I understand as the interconnected and mutually influencing actions that become chained in social networks and sometimes in social movements (with different degrees of explicitness, self-awareness, and organization). When acts of resistance are not simply isolated instances without repercussions, but they become the chained actions of individuals and groups linked through social networks, these acts of resistance become *echoable*, that is, they acquire a repeatable significance and, therefore, they are memorable, imitable, and have the potential to lead to social change. In some cases, the echoing of acts of resistance can be so self-conscious and widespread that it can consist in what is typically called *collective action*, that is, the deliberate coordinated action of all (or most) members of a collective, or the action of some executive branch that acts on behalf of the collective. So, for example, the acts of mourning that took place in the United States after 9/11 can be said to constitute not only chained, but *collective* action in either of those two senses: entire collectivities acted or reacted to the event at unison in vigils and remembrance acts of various sorts; but there were also specific actions that the US government or its representatives produced on behalf of the entire nation. But, on the other hand, in other cases, chained acts of resistance can consist simply in the spontaneous actions of a small cluster of individuals which, after repetition, coalesce in such a way that they become a *traceable performative chain*, with each action in the chain having traceable effects in the subsequent actions of others.
Chained actions are actions that echo or resonate with one another, actions that overlap and share a conceptual space or a joint significance, actions that can be aligned and have a (more or less) clear trajectory. When the performative chains become big enough and their trajectories explicit enough, chained actions lead to the formation of more or less organized groups or social movements, such as the women’s movement or the civil rights movement. But I want to emphasize from the beginning that while social groups and movements require the chained actions of individuals for their existence and operation, individuals can engage in chained actions prior to and independently of the existence of an already formed social group or movement. When actions become chained, the agents who produce them automatically become members of a social network, even if they are unaware of that membership, that is, even if they are unaware that their action contributes to a particular performative chain through which they become linked to others. In this sense, there is an important distinction between a social network and an organized social group or movement: the former can be implicit, unconscious, spontaneous; but the latter has to be at least minimally explicit, self-conscious, and deliberate. At the level of language and communication, a social network becomes an organized social group or movement—a public, Dewey would say—when and because its members engage in communication with one another and make their problems, interests, and goals explicit, developing their own discursive resources and distinctive ways of talking about themselves and their experiences.

Social networks constitute a hybrid category in between that of individual actors and that of well-defined social collectivities. Similarly, I introduce the notion of chained action as a hybrid, middle ground between the notions of individual and collective action. For chained action is an action with individual elements, the significance of which can only be properly understood within a chain of actions, being thus crucially dependent on the actions of others, indefinitely many others, but always particular others and not (at least not necessarily) entire collectives or social groups. These chained actions can have narrower or wider social impact depending on the nature and scope of the performative chains in which they are inscribed. The measure of the efficacy of chained actions is how they reverberate in the subsequent actions of others; and these reverberations consist in performative reactions, that is, ways in which the chain of actions is taken up by the acts of others. So, when it comes to chained actions, the issue of uptake is key. In the assessment of a particular cluster of chained actions, we must always ask: What are the reactions that it provokes? What are the social networks in which this cluster of actions is taken up? What are the performative chains in which the cluster reverberates?

The hybrid notion of chained action can help us get out of impasses and false dichotomies produced by polarized views of agency—purely individualistic or purely collectivistic views. In particular I am concerned here with the false dichotomy concerning responsibility, namely, that our responsibility can only be
discharged in one of two ways: through individual action understood as the action of each isolated individual independently of what everyone else does; or through the collective action of all, understood either as the coordinated action (p.227) of all the members of a collective acting at unison or as the action of the executive branch of a group on behalf of the entire group. But of course both options are quite inadequate for addressing issues of shared responsibility such as the ones we face in widespread epistemic injustices (such as the ones relating to insensitivity, social silences, hermeneutical lacunas, or collective bodies of ignorance, discussed above). On the one hand, isolated individual actions are typically ineffective, and this level of response misses the depth of the problem. On the other hand, the collective action of the entire social body is typically not feasible or realistic, especially as a starting point when we begin to address an injustice. My notion of chained action derives from the social connection model of responsibility defended in chapter 4; and it tries to make explicit the distinctive way in which shared responsibilities are to be discharged. As Iris M. Young (2006) emphasizes, structural injustices call for collective responses and not merely individual ones; they demand that we assume shared responsibility and that we act together: this shared, “forward-looking responsibility can be discharged only by joining with others in collective action” (p. 123). But, at the same time, this collective response is also individual, for it involves the particular actions of particular individuals: “The structural processes can be altered only if many actors in diverse social positions work together to intervene in these processes to produce different outcomes” (Ibid.). In the light of this last point, I want to rephrase Young’s formulation of the normative demand of shared responsibility as the demand to unite in chained—rather than collective—action, in order to emphasize that the actions through which shared responsibilities are discharged are always individual and collective at the same time. With this friendly amendment, I want to make room for individuals to start discharging their shared responsibilities and working toward justice even when few individuals are yet engaged in anything resembling collective action. Even in that dismal scenario—which is exactly what we find at the beginning of a new struggle toward justice—it is possible for individuals to start living up to their responsibilities and displaying some degree of virtue. How else could clusters of individuals pioneer new social struggles and begin resisting complicity and working toward justice? It is a mistake to think that there is nothing individuals can do to discharge their shared responsibilities until there is an ongoing collective action to join. Of course isolated acts of particular individuals will not repair structural injustices, but it is important to distinguish clearly between achieving justice and discharging one’s responsibilities. Individuals can start discharging their responsibilities and becoming increasingly more virtuous agents even when they cannot yet change the structural conditions with their acts and, therefore, their activities (perhaps even their entire lives) will fail in achieving (or even bringing us closer to) justice. But these efforts and acts of resistance are not in vain, even when they do not stand a chance of bringing
about justice: in the first place, resistant acts of this sort break down the complicity of the agents in question and thus result in the melioration of their moral characters; and, in the second place, the way in which these resistant acts disrupt complicity and challenge complacent attitudes shows a performative move in a different direction, which has the potential to open up new possibilities of action. Perhaps in the long run, and after these gestures are continued in long performative chains, the resistant actions may have made a contribution toward justice after all. The account of resistance in terms of chained actions I am proposing fits in well with what is known as connected activism in the contemporary literature. But I want to stress that resistance through social networks and the chained actions of their members has a long history and explains the resistance struggles of intellectuals, leaders, and activists of past centuries; and, therefore, connected activism should not be restricted to social networking as this is understood in the twenty-first century.

According to my particularistic social contextualism, as individuals we need to find a way to start discharging our share of responsibility in the epistemic injustices that permeate our lives (e.g., social silences, hermeneutical lacunas, bodies of ignorance, insensitivity). This discharge may involve all kinds of adjustments and interventions in our daily behavior (from reacting to silences differently, to entering communicative interactions differently, changing our listening and speaking habits, etc.). And of course what we can do has a lot to do with our positionality, our relationality, and the social contexts we inhabit: who we are, where we are, who we are interacting with, in what particular activity and dynamic, and so on. But it is important first of all to recognize that we all have (typically plenty of) particular things to do in the work toward justice. It is important not to expect heroes to save us and not to excuse ourselves behind the anonymity of a collectivity. It is important to appreciate the ordinary ways in which people can resist injustices in their daily activities. As discussed above, we have to adjust the epistemic responsibilities we assign to subjects and groups so that we can establish reasonable normative expectations, without demanding heroic behavior but without giving up the obligation to resist epistemic exclusions and injustices. According to my polyphonic contextualism, the strength of resistance resides not in isolated individual agency or in anonymous collective agency, but rather in the interconnected actions of particular individuals in particular contexts. Looking at the chained acts of resistance of particular individuals in social networks can preserve this specificity for us, without our losing sight of the general fights for justice of which they are part.

In order to make my particularistic social contextualism perspicuous, I propose to take a critical look at what passes for heroic behavior in the fight against gender and racial oppression in specific social and historical contexts. Through my critical assessment of alleged heroines, I will examine the role that the interconnected actions of particular individuals within a social network play in overcoming injustices.
In the next two sections I will discuss the contributions to epistemic resistance that individuals and social networks make, highlighting how individual and collective lucidity with respect to oppression and epistemic injustices are mutually dependent and mutually supportive. On the one hand, movements of resistance and shared forms of lucidity are often occasioned by—and critically dependent on—the acts of defiance of particular individuals whose epistemic agency can be described as exceptional, even heroic. And yet, on the other hand, no single individual (or set of isolated individuals operating autonomously) can be deemed solely responsible for undoing a systemic epistemic injustice and transforming an entire pattern of social perception, for the transformative power of their action depends on their being echoed by others, that is, on their being taken up by members of a social network whose collective efforts and actions form a pattern of transformation. In my discussions of insurrectionary acts and positions of resistance in these sections I will focus on the connection between lucidity and one particular epistemic virtue: courage. I will focus on epistemic agents who are courageous in pursuing participation in epistemic practices despite their exclusion, and in persevering in epistemic journeys despite all obstacles. But I will also discuss how courageous forms of political activism involve both individual and collective forms of lucidity, both as its presupposition and as its consequence. I will argue that although courage is indeed a crucial epistemic and political virtue that belongs to individuals, the transformative impact of courage depends on courageous acts being echoed by others and reverberating in a social chain until their effects become consolidated in new habits and attitudes, that is, in the normative restructuring of practices.

The two examples I will use to illustrate acts of resistance that exhibit epistemic and political courage could not be more different. The first one will be Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: a seventeenth-century intellectual deeply involved in academic debates and exerting epistemic friction as an eccentric figure within an intellectual elite. My second example will be Rosa Parks: a mid-twentieth-century grass-roots activist whose actions became emblematic of the resistance struggles of ordinary working people of color. But, although they could not be more different, these are both iconic figures in social movements of resistance: Sor Juana is one of the earliest and most prominent figures in the history of Latina feminism, and Rosa Parks is one of the most iconic figures in the history of the civil rights movement. Both remarkable women planted the seed of social change as part of ongoing daily practices of resistance. What is common to both, in my interpretation, is that their acts of insurrection (and the lucidity involved in them) linked up with social movements in such a way that their resistance could be echoed and could thus reverberate through social networks and practices, even though their deeds are (mis)remembered as isolated and individualized acts of heroism.

(p.230) 5.3.1. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Epistemic Courage, Resistant Imagination, and Epistemic Friction
Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was the transgressive living proof of the intellectual accomplishments that women in seventeenth-century Mexico could achieve and were denied. For this reason, she became a dangerous figure for the gender norms regulating the production and dissemination of knowledge, and for the authorities that enforced those norms. Sor Juana’s amazing intellectual achievements became her downfall: her passion for knowledge brought her prominence in the Hispanic world but also persecution. In response to this persecution as a woman of letters—and more specifically in response to being prohibited to read or write, Sor Juana wrote her “Response to Sor Filotea de la Cruz” defending women’s access to and participation in the epistemic practices involved in the production and consumption of knowledge. In what follows I will highlight a few provocative ideas that can be found in this letter and in her epistemological poem “Primero Sueño” (“First I Dream”; 1994) where she reflects on the limits of knowledge.

It is interesting that Sor Juana’s conduct was considered both intellectually transgressive and also sexually transgressive: she was accused of conducting multiple lesbian affairs with prominent women in Mexico (or New Spain, as it was called at the time). Sor Juana often reflected on the erotics of knowledge. In her writings she often brings together the sensual and the epistemic aspects of interpersonal relations. For Sor Juana, the process of learning is emotionally charged; and one of the emotions required for the acquisition of knowledge is courage, the willingness and audacity to test the limits of the world that is given to us, to take risks and question taken-for-granted boundaries. Sor Juana teaches us that knowledge is not an easy matter; it takes courage. Epistemic agents are courageous agents, for knowledge is elusive and we never know where our pursuit of knowledge might take us: perhaps to places we didn’t want to go.

Knowledge requires courage and perseverance because it is all too easy to quit our epistemic journey, to be dissuaded by the fear of not ever knowing, of trying in vain, of our views becoming more distorted as we advance, and ending up with more—rather than less—ignorance at the end of the journey. In “Primero Sueño,” Sor Juana describes this elusiveness of knowledge and the epistemic fears that result from it in the following way:

Knowledge runs away
and cowardly our discourse derails
...
understanding gives us its back,
and astonished our discourse gets frightened
...
(p.231) because it fears—cowardly—
understanding badly, or never, or late.13
But if everyone needs epistemic courage, there is a special kind of courage that the pursuit of knowledge requires for epistemically marginalized subjects, that is, for those subjects who have been excluded from the epistemic practices involved in the production and consumption of knowledge.

Epistemically marginalized subjects are those who have been deemed not fit for the epistemic journey, just as in the Greek myth Phaëthon was depicted as ill-equipped to control the chariot of the sun and Helios had to resort to violence and kill him to prevent a disaster. Interestingly, Sor Juana alludes to this mythological narrative; and in the context of her letter to Sor Filotea—arguing against the claim that reading and writing were improper for her as a woman—the myth can be read as a fable about epistemic hubris, an allegory that is used to police the access to epistemic practices and to keep women excluded from the production of knowledge. The myth thus becomes a legitimating and threatening epistemological narrative: one that justifies epistemic prohibitions against women and also tries to scare women from any possible transgression. But Sor Juana’s use of the narrative is subversive. Perhaps we should note that Phaëthon was thought by Helios to be unfit for controlling the forceful and yet delicate device at his disposal. Perhaps the emphasis should be on Helios’ presumption: perhaps the precipitous character in the story, the one who rushes to judgment and action is not Phaëthon in daring to control the chariot, but rather, Helios in thinking that Phaëthon can’t do it and in stopping him, a premature destruction (the killing of Phaëthon) dubiously justified by invoking a bigger imaginary destruction (the destruction of the world if Phaëthon is not stopped).

More important, as Sor Juana seems to suggest, everyone, and not just women (and who is to say who is a woman?),¹⁴ can be Phaëthon. But the (p.232) fact that any of us could lose control of the epistemic means available to us does not mean that we should refrain from using them and from trying to exercise epistemic control over them. Despite Sor Juana’s constant critique of epistemic arrogance and constant (even excessive) exercises of humility, she argues that we should not get discouraged by the difficulties and dangers involved in the pursuit of knowledge. For, no matter how extreme these difficulties and dangers may be, they make the journey and its achievements all the more valuable; and it is ultimately up to the subjects themselves (regardless of their gender identity or sexuality) to decide whether they are up to the challenge and whether the epistemic risks are worth taking.
No matter how courageous we may be, it is possible that the more we strive to know, the less we understand. This skeptical concern is one of the central themes of Sor Juana’s poem “First I Dream.” I want to call attention to two different sets of reflections in this epistemological poem: first, reflections on the limited and precarious nature of human knowledge, where the skeptical theme appears; and second, reflections on the imagination and the poetic exploration of unrealized possibilities that go beyond the things we have experienced. It is in this second set of reflections that a renewed hope for human knowledge is articulated. Our experiential perspectives can be broadened with our capacity to imagine, to survey possible worlds in which alternative experiences can be had. This kind of imaginative knowledge has a crucial counterfactual dimension: even if the actual world does not allow certain experiences to be had, their possibility can be used as the basis of an alternative knowledge, an *epistemic counterpoint* to lived experience and knowledge, which is still grounded in real life and embodied experiences.\(^{15}\) Entertaining epistemic counterpoints makes possible what I have called internal *epistemic friction*, through which the subject can interrogate her own meta-attitudes, that is, her attitudes about cognitive-affective attitudes, thus alleviating not only her ignorance but also her meta-ignorance. This is the critical epistemic role that a *resistant imagination* can play, allowing for increasing degrees of lucidity in our cognitive-affective lives.

For Sor Juana, the imagination is an important source of self-knowledge and of knowledge of possible human realities. It is (at least in part) thanks to this epistemic role of the imagination that Sor Juana can identify important limitations in our cognitive faculties (in reason and in the senses) and in our intellectual activities (in philosophy and in the sciences) without thereby falling into radical skepticism or mysticism (that is, without maintaining that knowledge is impossible or esoteric). We are not bound by the limitations of any single human capacity or of any single intellectual discipline: to confront the limitations of reason and faith, we can resort to the imagination; to the limitations of science and religion, we can offer poetry.
Our imaginative explorations can correct and extend our knowledge of the world and our knowledge of ourselves. Sor Juana emphasizes the role of the imagination and of literature (especially poetry) in the articulation of possible experiences and embodied knowledge—gendered, sexualized, and racialized knowledge. We should pay attention to the epistemic importance of dreaming; of imagining; of conceiving of alternative futures, presents, and pasts; of thinking up alternative (counterfactual) possibilities, alternative lives. The imagination can be a valuable source of knowledge, and literature can be a precious domain for explorations in which alternative knowledges can flourish, resisting and challenging each other and making themselves richer and stronger in the process. It is in this sense that a resistant imagination that provokes epistemic friction is an invaluable tool for addressing epistemic problems concerning sexual and racial differences, for it offers possibilities for fighting sexual and racial ignorance and for developing alternative gendered, sexual, and racial epistemic perspectives. I take this suggestion to be one of the key lessons we can learn from Sor Juana’s reflections. And it is important to note that the critical epistemic role that the imagination can play in our cognitive-affective lives becomes possible through the epistemic resistance not only of particular individuals, but also of social networks and movements. In other words, the critical and transformative power of a resistant imagination requires both individual and collective efforts.

Sor Juana’s critical imaginings had the power they did in rethinking the role of women in the production and reception of culture, because those reimaginings were taken up and echoed by others, and they became part of new cultural narratives in which social identities and positionalities were reimagined. These new, emerging cultural narratives were in the making long before Sor Juana came onto the scene; and their slow and fragmentary construction was achieved by the contributions of many eccentric voices: other Latina women who came before Sor Juana and many others who came after her. These courageous individual voices of resistance have to be acknowledged, but the complex interconnections among them as well as the social presuppositions of their effective critical agency also need to be recognized. The courage to persevere in our epistemic journeys and to speak out for alternative standpoints is certainly a feature of virtuous epistemic agents, of individuals such as Sor Juana who initiate and facilitate epistemic transformations for all of us. But indeed, resisting and subverting cultural gender norms is not something that Sor Juana did all by herself.
On the one hand, Sor Juana developed and employed her critical voice and agency as a member of a religious order—the Carmelites—which made it possible for her to become a woman of letters and to acquire a prominent social and intellectual position. And this order in particular had an internal history of subversion and had accumulated many past acts of resistance, of female voices against the male-dominated ecclesiastical and monarchic institutions.\(\text{p.234}\) Besides, Sor Juana was able to cultivate strong connections with the aristocracy and with a network of intellectuals who constituted the intellectual elite of Hispanic culture at the time. Being part of this elite and being under the protection of some of its members enabled Sor Juana to do and to say things that she could have never achieved by herself. On the other hand, the resistance and friction exerted by the critical voice of Sor Juana was echoed by many others both during her lifetime and thereafter. To begin with, her contemporaries, both supporters and critics alike, took her seriously and engaged with her writings and positions; and this was indeed a crucial mechanism by which her voice and her writings acquired currency and became a point of reference for future acts of resistance and for other eccentric voices wanting to exert epistemic friction, which in turn slowly eroded the epistemic exclusions and moved the center of gravity of the social imaginary away from uncontested male privilege. Thus the individual words of an eccentric voice such as Sor Juana’s become part of interconnected discourses that echo each other and become mutually supportive (even if in tension). As I have argued elsewhere (2006a), it is in this way, through this echoing, that eccentric voices and discourses become interwoven into emerging cultural narratives, and these narratives offer new ways of imagining that exert epistemic resistance.

But deep epistemic transformations and the correction of epistemic injustices are achieved not only with words and discourses, but with actions and practices—as my Imperative of Epistemic Interaction reminds us. Besides the epistemic friction that alternative narratives and cognitive standpoints can produce, we also need the epistemic friction of insurrectionary acts and contestatory practices (i.e., the epistemic friction of actual interactions in which there is resistance). We need forms of activism that in changing the social standing of subjects can change epistemic attitudes and habits of social perception, for indeed in addressing issues of exclusion and marginalization that distort the social perceptions of a community, we need to resist not only hegemonic ideologies, but also hegemonic sociopolitical structures and institutions that mediate social interactions and sustain the injustices in question. This requires political resistance and deeply transformative forms of activism. To this form of resistance and the epistemic virtues that sustain it, such as courage and lucidity, I now turn.

5.3.2. Rosa Parks: Counter-Performativity, Chained Agency, and Social Networks
There is probably no act of resistance more celebrated than that of Rosa Parks on her bus ride home in a cold December evening in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955, when she refused to give up her seat so that a white passenger could enjoy the privilege of sitting by himself in a row without a Negro. And it is important to note that segregation practices were such that not only could (p. 235) white passengers claim a seat taken by a black passenger, but they could also claim the privilege of sitting in a row without any black passenger, even if it was in the black section of the bus. Parks was sitting in the black section toward the rear of the bus when she was asked to move by a white man after the white section had filled up. She famously refused: she was arrested, taken to court and fined, and the rest is history. But what passes as the official history, the commonly heard history, is a suspiciously schematic and naïve picture of social transformation propitiated by the courageous act of an ordinary individual who—we are often encouraged to assume—could have been anyone. Rosa Parks is typically portrayed as an isolated individual actor, and her act of resistance as a spontaneous reaction, the spontaneous reaction of a tired working woman returning home who could simply not take it any more. However, Parks had attempted similar acts of resistance against bus segregation laws and practices before; and she had been trained to do so, coached to act in particular ways to the request of white passengers, bus drivers, and police officers in these attempts at insurrection. She herself (1994) traces the roots of her acts of resistance back to the Underground Railroad. And she was not the only one. She was actually not the first, but the third black woman arrested that year for refusing to uphold bus segregation practices. And yet—not only in pop-culture depictions, but even in textbooks and academic discourses—Parks’s actions are described as the random and lucky performance of an isolated subject. This misdescription and the companion misremembering of this iconic act of resistance are philosophically and politically revealing: they reveal individualistic biases of our mainstream culture and our dominant political philosophies, as well as misconceptions about the cognitive-affective conditions and structures required for insurrectionary acts and contestatory practices. These biases and misconceptions make it very hard to see what is required for effective resistance, that is, for producing critically lucid agents capable of actions with genuine transformative potential.
Was Rosa Parks’s act of resistance a lucid act? Was it grounded in and motivated by a special kind of lucidity about the racial oppression it was trying to subvert? I will argue that this legendary act of insurrection was informed by lucid social perception; and—I will argue—what infuses this act of resistance with critical force and transformative potential was not only the lucidity of the agent who executed it, but also (and more important) the *lucidity of a social movement*. Rosa Parks’s performance was the result of the carefully calculated activities of an insurrectionary consciousness that she shared with other local activists and members of an emerging social movement of resistance. And yet even well-informed feminists on the left without a conservative agenda, such as Judith Butler, have described Parks’s performance as the act of defiance of an individual agent. In *Excitable Speech* (1997) Butler uses Parks’s infamous act of resistance to criticize the limitations of a purely social account of performativity such as Pierre Bourdieu’s, and to develop her own account of *counter-performativity* centered around individual agency.

(p.236) According to Butler, Bourdieuan subjects are completely engineered by the social systems in which they emerge and operate, and their *habitus*—the set of receptive and productive dispositions that govern their performance—is thoroughly determined by dominant social forces. In this Bourdieuan social framework, according to Butler, there is no space for resistance: it is not possible for agents to act contrary to social expectations and to deviate from the established dominant habitus. For Butler, the problem with the Bourdieuan view of performativity is that it allows for no performance that has not been previously authorized by the dominant social forces. By contrast, Butler wants to make room for a different kind of performativity, *counter-performativity*, which consists of acts that go beyond what subjects have been authorized to do so far. Butler argues that the normativity that governs social performance is never fully determined and established, and it is always open to contestation. She emphasizes that subjects can always deviate from established normative expectations and even act in complete violation of prior authorizations in the attempt to establish new forms of authorization. Emerging alternative forms of social authority can spring from the insurrectionary acts themselves without those acts having yet being independently backed up by any authority or established power, that is, without having yet being authorized by anything other than the agent herself who authors the act.
In her discussion of agency in *Excitable Speech*, Butler sets up Bourdieu as her antagonist in the following way: whereas the Bourdieuian account of the habitus suggests that the performativity of social agents is fully controlled by the social systems that authorize their acts, Butler insists that discursive agency is always *excessive*, for it always exceeds what speaking subjects have been authorized to say and do. As she puts it, “This *excess* is what Bourdieu’s account appears to miss, or suppress: the abiding incongruity of the speaking body, the way in which … it remains uncontained by any of its acts of speech” (1997, p. 155; my emphasis). For Butler, the Bourdieuian habitus cannot accommodate this excess because it is always retrospective and backward-looking, without being aware of its history and its contingent determinations from the past. And indeed Bourdieu often talks about the social production of the habitus in these terms, describing our embodied habits as the storage of past behavior produced by the process of “incorporation, which exploits the body’s readiness to take seriously the performative magic of the social” (1980, p. 161). Through the mechanism of incorporation, the habitus hides its own contingent genesis and forgets its social determinations, projecting the performative possibilities that the social milieu has offered as the only possibilities that can exist, as the exhaustive range of possibilities established by some kind of *(p.237)* (fictional) necessity—a necessity produced by forgetting the contingency of the social order and naturalizing its effects (which is what Bourdieu calls “the performative magic of the social”). Butler, by contrast, emphasizes that there is always a performative excess that escapes this mechanical social production of behavior. And this excessive aspect of performativity is what makes counter-performativity possible: the omnipresent implicit capacity of our performance to go beyond all prior authorizations is, for Butler, what creates possibilities of resistance. Butler uses Rosa Parks’s famous act of civil disobedience to illustrate that performativity against the system is always possible. When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat,

she had no prior right to do so guaranteed by any of the segregationist conventions of the South. And yet, in laying claim to the right for which she had no prior authorization, *she endowed a certain authority on the act, and began the insurrectionary process of overthrowing those established codes of legitimacy*. (1997, p. 147; my emphasis)
Butler portrays Rosa Parks as a single individual against the system, opting to transgress all authorized boundaries; and, more generally, she describes acts of resistance as individual acts of transgression against the system in which the individual finds herself trapped. Melissa Clarke (2000) has objected that this inadequately prioritizes individual agency over socially constructed agency (i.e., the habitus), arguing that Butler “underestimates the force of the social situation, overemphasizing the ability of subjects to opt for resistant performances” (p. 163). Terry Lovell (2003) develops an entire essay aimed at refuting Butler’s claim that Rosa Parks herself “endowed a certain authority on [her] act,” arguing that the isolated individual cannot be the sole source of authorization of her acts and that Rosa Parks’s act of resistance came to command a very different kind of authority, one that is socially based and is socially effective. As these Bourdieuan feminists have argued, both Butler’s reading of Bourdieu and her alternative proposal centered on individual agency are misguided. I will follow these Bourdieuan feminists in order to offer a different picture of counter-performativity, arguing that it is a mistake to pit individual agency against collective agency, because they are interrelated and cannot be understood independently of each other. This is why I propose to focus on the concept of chained action, which is both individual and socially extended at the same time and can help us overcome the polarization and false dichotomy between individual and collective views of agency.
We need to take a closer look at the social conditions of possibility of individual acts of resistance such as that of Rosa Parks. We need to bring to the fore the interrelations between individual insurrectionary acts and ongoing social practices that make those acts possible or at least leave room for them. Indeed Rosa Parks’s act of resistance, though clearly a brave act of defiance that disrupted legally binding norms and standard practices, was not an act that stepped outside all available social practices of the time. Quite the contrary, it was clearly an act that took place at the crossroads of conflicting practices: *practices of oppression*, such as Alabama bus segregation practices, and *practices of resistance*, that is, those emerging patterned activities developed by groups of local activists such as the sit-ins at whites-only lunch counters and the sit-ins at whites-only sections of buses—the latter being one of the practices Rosa Parks contributed to shape, without her act being the first one or even fitting the description of what became the stereotypical act of civil disobedience in segregated public transportation. Both Clarke (2000) and Lovell (2003) reconstruct the social support that Rosa Parks’s act received and the socially constructed habitus that went into her courageous performance. Clarke urges us to identify the “points where counter-performativity is possible, or even predictable” (p. 165). How did Parks’s resistance become socially feasible and socially efficacious? What social conditions and social processes went into her ability to act so courageously, and into her act’s having the social repercussions and transformative effect that it did? As Clarke asks, “How did Parks acquire the habitus that enabled her not to move and give her seat to a white man?” (Ibid.). Clarke gives two very different characterizations of Parks’s habitus to feel entitled to her seat and to remain seated, wrongly assuming that both characterizations converge and are fully compatible. Clarke’s Bourdieuan account of Rosa Parks’s counter-performativity operates at two levels: relating Parks’s performance to *habits of privilege*, and relating it to *habits of resistance*. I find the first level of analysis unpersuasive and unnecessary, whereas the second level of analysis is crucial and right on target.
On the one hand, Clarke (2000) argues that Parks’s performance could be the expression of a habitus of privilege that moves the agent to feel entitled to what she has and ill-disposed to give it up. However, Parks was a working-class black woman who was not at all likely to have a privileged habitus in which entitlement figured prominently. Although Clarke is certainly right that working-class blacks and upper-class blacks in 1950s Alabama had very different kinds of habitus, her hypothesis that Parks may have developed some sort of hybrid habitus with features characteristic of both social classes is quite artificial. Clarke speculates that, because Parks attended a teacher’s college, she may have picked up some of the habits of privilege that upper-class blacks started to exhibit around that time. But this part of her account is highly ad hoc and—worse yet—it rests on a conceptually confused description of Parks’s performance. Motivating this part of Clarke’s account is the following thought: “Parks would have had to somehow be produced with a habitus that allowed her to be able to play the game of the privileged” (p. 166). However, in refusing to give up her seat, Parks was not at all playing “the game of the privileged”; she was playing a very different game, the game of resistance: she was not comfortably assuming privilege, she was resisting it! And the game of resistance is not at all about holding on to entitlements. It is, rather, about refusing to be subjugated (p.239) and about undermining unfairly allocated entitlements or privileges. Very different kinds of dispositions—not simply those of the privileged—are required to pull that off: one’s habitus needs to admit the ability to refuse to occupy a position of subordination, which is very different from—almost antithetical to—the predisposition to occupy a position of privilege. The kind of courage that resistance requires is not at all the same as the kind of “courage” (if it can receive that name) involved in holding on to privilege when this privilege is in jeopardy: the agent’s position in the social field and in the distribution of power across it could not be more different; and the risks and vulnerabilities involved are worlds apart. And also the kind of social lucidity involved in resistance is quite different from the one typically involved in privileged social agency: it is not merely a lucidity about one’s own entitlements; it is a lucidity about one’s social location vis-à-vis that of others, that is, a lucidity about the normative interrelations among differently situated subjects and about the gap between what these subjects are given and what they are owed—in short, a lucidity about social injustice.
The courage that Rosa Parks exhibited in her performance can only be explained in Bourdieuian terms by attributing to her a habitus of resistance, and not a habitus of privilege. Fortunately, the latter is also part of Clarke’s Bourdieuian account of Parks’s counter-performativity. Although she mistakenly attributes to Parks “a habitus of someone accustomed to having privileges” (p. 167), she also correctly attributes to Parks the cultivation of habits of resistance and develops an account of how these habits prefigured Parks’s celebrated act of civil disobedience. And there is indeed ample evidence that throughout her life Parks cultivated habits of resistance. Through her personal experiences and her training in activism, Parks became disposed not to conform to established normative expectations in the hope of producing a more just social field, so that what happened that famous December evening of 1955 was not at all a lucky accident or a random, spontaneous act of an isolated individual actor. Clarke summarizes well Parks’s history of cultivating habits of resistance in the following passage:

[Parks’s] life showed evidence that she indeed had the habit of acting against the explicit restrictions of the culture. She was 42 when the bus incident occurred, and had spent her lifetime in the resistance movement. She had been escorted off a bus 13 years earlier for entering at the front (“whites only”) door. Parks was more than just a member of the NAACP, she was its secretary. She was also the leader of a youth group that was scheduled to attend a major conference just days after her 1955 arrest…. The affiliation with the NAACP, and the occurrences of other acts of transgression then can be seen as precisely evidence of Parks’s having the set of dispositions that enabled her to transgress the explicit boundaries of the social structure. (p. 167)

(p.240) So Parks’s act of resistance was in fact socially sanctioned and “authorized, “ albeit by the growing authority of the insurrectionary groups like the NAACP” (Ibid.) and not yet by mainstream culture. In the light of Clarke’s Bourdieuian account, we can see that the sharp dichotomy that Butler sets up between individual and collective agency—between the liberating agency of the resisting individual and the oppressive agency of the social system—does not work. We cannot fully and properly understand the individual acts of Rosa Parks independently of the collective agency of an emerging social movement of resistance. Those acts originated in a socially developed habitus, that is, in the practical dispositions to counter-perform that Parks developed as a member of a social movement of resistance. As Clarke argues, Bourdieu has more theoretical resources to offer to a philosophical account of resistance than Butler gives him credit for: “Bourdieu’s notion of habitus provides the conceptual means for understanding the situation of resistance within its social conditions. His work reminds us of the social conditions of the very possibility of resistance” (p. 167).
But what are the central theoretical tools that the Bourdieuan framework has to offer to a social account of resistance and counter-performativity? Two ideas are crucial for such an account. One is Bourdieu’s emphasis on the heterogeneity of the social field as always including different social classes, which are themselves, in turn, internally differentiated. The very mechanism of distinction that he is famous for is a mechanism for the differentiation of the social field: social classes are formed by distinguishing themselves from each other, and new classes emerge from old ones through distinction. Bourdieu’s account of generational conflicts in terms of a social struggle for distinction, for example, shows how the new habitus of a younger generation gets formed through acts of resistance and insurrection directed against the normative expectations of the established habitus of the older generation. Because a social field is always fractured and composed of many groups and subgroups (which are dynamic constructions that keep changing), there are always multiple and diverse social perspectives available, and social actors always have a wide and heterogeneous range of options available to them. As Clarke puts it, “The range of options is much wider than those explicitly sanctioned by the dominant class” (p. 167). Possibilities of resistance arise because of the heterogeneity of the social field and its processes of internal differentiation that keep producing (and encouraging) differences. The heterogeneous and conflictual nature of the social field that Bourdieu emphasizes can also be understood in terms of social friction: the friction of social classes and social worlds that challenge each other in the social contexts in which they coexist. The complexity and heterogeneity of social fields always allows for the possibility of finding or producing sites and opportunities of resistance. And this shows that resistance is a social and systemic phenomenon. Therefore, agents do not have to be all alone in their acts of rebellion; they do not have to resist dominant powers all by themselves. (p. 241) Their attempts at insurrection can be coordinated and orchestrated, that is, woven into performative chains of resistance, so that the insurrection takes place through social networks and social movements and becomes politically effective, altering institutional arrangements and social structures. And if insurrectionary acts are not to remain isolated, disconnected, and politically inefficacious, resistance has to become part of the habitus of social agents.
This brings us to the second crucial idea that we find in Bourdieu for a social theory of resistance, namely, that “there exist dispositions to resist” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 81). Bourdieu points out that there can be social classes—and oppressed groups are indeed excellent candidates—that can develop their habitus around dispositions to violate the normative expectations that dominate the social field, that is, around what we have called, in Butlerian language, dispositions to counter-perform. Besides his references to these dispositions (and to the cognitive-affective structures that support them) in his discussions of generational conflicts and class struggles, Bourdieu also talks about them in his analysis of the cultivation of transgressive attitudes in artistic production (e.g., pp. 105ff). As Bourdieu puts it, the task of a social approach to resistance is “to examine under what conditions these dispositions [to resist] are socially constituted, effectively triggered, and rendered politically efficient” (p. 81). The key challenge that the Bourdieuian framework raises for any account of resistance is the need to identify the social conditions of counter-performativity. This challenge can only be met by carefully contextualizing insurrectionary acts of resistance. This is what the social contextualism I have been defending in this book also recommends.

My contextualist approach suggests that we should start by asking what the enabling and constraining effects are of the social contexts in which acts of resistance take place. So far we have focused on the enabling conditions that we find in the available social practices and in Rosa Parks’s own social history. But there are also constraining or limiting factors that we find in the social context. Why were Parks’s previous attempts at resistance as well as those of other black activists unsuccessful, or at least unable to have a noticeable impact and to initiate an effective chain of political transformations? Why was this particular instance of resistance so successful? Why did it become so iconic? Why this one and not the other ones? Terry Lovell (2003) offers a comparative analysis of the different insurrectionary acts that challenged bus segregation practices—those of Parks prior to 1955 as well as those of other black activists—without achieving the prominence and the performative legacy of the legendary one. Lovell asks, “What was the difference between these acts that ‘endowed’ one but not the others with authority, to mark it as the beginning of an insurrectionary process?” (p. 8). Lovell’s analysis does precisely what my social contextualism suggests, namely, to look at what came before and what came after these acts so that we can assess their specific effectiveness—or lack thereof—in their particular social contexts. This is what it means to socially contextualize acts of resistance, and this is what Lovell’s Bourdieuian account offers.
On the one hand, Lovell’s analysis of the antecedent conditions that made possible the success of Rosa Parks’s resistance underscores issues of *social recognizability*. As Lovell emphasizes, it is important that “at the level of everyday practice, actions like that of Rosa Parks in December of 1955 were familiar to drivers and passengers alike” (p. 8). Claudette Colvin, another black activist who counter-performed to challenge bus segregation practices and was also arrested earlier that year (in March of 1955), is reported as saying, “I thought [the driver] would stop and shout and then drive on. That is what they usually do” (Ibid.). A social movement of resistance against segregationist practices was reaching momentum and acquiring social visibility. Insurrectionary acts such as those of Colvin and Parks were being repeated often enough that they became a visible social phenomenon, and the reaction to them by the authorities and the courts had been escalating. As Lovell puts it,

The difference between the 1955 cases and the earlier ones surely lies in part in the enhanced mobilization of coercion and the law in response: the arrests, detentions, charges and convictions, and most analysts attribute this escalation to the mounting resistance in the South, including Alabama, to a number of Supreme Court decisions, including most importantly the landmark Brown case of 1954 relating to segregation in schools, which had ruled against the segregationist practices of the South. (p. 8)
With their repetition and their orchestration by emerging activist organizations, acts of resistance against bus segregation practices became standardized. There was even a standard protocol, a regular and expected way of proceeding in these contexts of resistance both for activists and for the various social agents who could act to protect the observance of segregationist practices (the bus drivers, other passengers, police officers, etc). As Lovell puts it, “A *re-iterable practice* was in formation” (p. 8; my emphasis). Any of the individual insurrectionary acts have to be understood as contributing to that reiterable practice in the making; and, therefore “it would be a mistake to look for an original act of transgression” within that practice, which was progressively being shaped, for the designation of any particular act as the absolute origin of the insurrectionary performative chain would be arbitrary. And since the effectiveness of Parks’s act only became possible in the context of that reiterable practice, Lovell argues, *pace* Butler, that “we need to look beyond Parks’s ‘performance’ on that day in 1955 to understand the authority of her act of resistance” (p. 9). We need to look at what happened before that day; but, even (p.243) more important, we need to look at what happened in the aftermath of that particular bus incident: “we should recognize that the originality of Parks’s action lay in the response it produced” (p. 8). And we need to distinguish here between two different and equally important levels of responses: the legal responses and the sociopolitical responses. At the level of legal repercussions, Parks’s act of civil disobedience was indeed special: Parks’s conviction for violating the Alabama bus segregation ordinances was challenged and a long legal battle ensued, with an appeal to the federal justice system and eventually to the Supreme Court. This case challenged the constitutionality of segregation in public transportation and, finally, in December of 1956, the Supreme Court ruled that Alabama’s bus segregation ordinances were unconstitutional. As this legal battle was taking place, Parks’s act of civil disobedience also provoked strong political responses at the local, regional, and national level. As Lovell puts it, it was

the response of the Montgomery black community organizers, and ultimately, the actions of thousands of black people in supporting the boycott ... which “endowed” Parks’s act with a *retrospective authority* that the earlier incidents, including those that involved Parks herself, lacked. (p. 9; my emphasis)

The critical and transformative force of Parks’s resistance, far from being immanent and locatable within the act itself, as Butler suggests, is crucially dependent on antecedent and subsequent conditions. This is what Lovell’s conclusion underscores: that “the authority of Rosa Parks was retrospective, the outcome of a process of group formation that was social and collective” (p. 10).
Parks initiated a pattern of insurrection because her act was so widely repeated by activists that it progressively expanded from a local to a regional and eventually a national boycott of segregationist practices. And it is important that Parks’s act of resistance produced not only repetition, but echoing. It was indeed crucial that it was imitated and that it became a model to follow in a growing movement of resistance. But it was also crucial that the act resonated in many different ways and in many different corners of the social fabric beyond activist practices. Parks’s resistance was echoed by the discourses of black leaders coming into national prominence such as Martin Luther King (who spoke of the case in Montgomery shortly after Parks’s arrest). But it was also echoed by white voices and the mainstream discourses of white culture: it was widely discussed in the mainstream media, depicted in powerful representations of popular culture, mentioned in a wide variety of debates about race and class from the streets to academia. Clearly many people, practices, and institutions contributed to the echoing of Parks’s resistance. The social conditions were slowly and gradually produced for this echoing of a particular act of resistance to become possible. In a social climate in which public opinion was growing increasingly uneasy with segregationist arrangements, especially when enforced with violence and producing social unrest, the time was right for a sympathetic character and her suffering to provoke a response in the general public. The time was right for (a sector of) public opinion to be moved by an anti-segregationist act of resistance that was answered with a forcible removal, an arrest, and legal sanctions. And thus this particular incident became an effective tool for making people rethink carefully who in this political battle was on the side of social justice: the local authorities and local courts, or poor old (and tired) Rosa?
It was the echoing of a complex and heterogeneous social network—rather than the intentional agency of any particular set of individuals or single group—that explains the critical and transformative force that Parks’s resistance acquired. This complexity is obscured by Lovell’s insistence that Parks was chosen by local black activists as the most suitable candidate to initiate an effective chain of counter-performance. As Lovell puts it, “The choice of Parks as ‘suitable’ was initially the result of the judgment of local black activists, and their choice was confirmed by the subsequent success in mobilizing the black community to participate in the bus boycott” (p. 10). But was Rosa Parks chosen? And was she chosen by the black community alone? It is clear that there were social processes at play that selected her and her performance, but these processes are mis-described if they are depicted as reducible to intentional processes, to a choice. For in these processes we find much more than intentional agency; what we find when we examine the social forces and chains of events that played a role is a mixed and hybrid kind of agency in which intentional and non-intentional acts of individuals and groups become interwoven, enabling and constraining each other in complex ways. This is what I have called chained action.
In chained action there is a confluence of heterogeneous elements shaping a particular pattern of action that becomes repeatable, echoable, and is both individual and collective at the same time. In chained action there is a mixture of lucid and blind agency—with different kinds of lucidity and blindness in the different individuals and collectivities involved. Reducing this complexity to a choice is misleading. On the other hand, Lovell is right in calling attention to the crucial role played by black activists and the black community in this complex process, but it was not completely up to them to decide who could mobilize a widespread boycott and become an iconic figure of resistance. I agree with Lovell’s Bourdieuan point that dominant culture and the dominant classes are not the only source of authority and the only ones with “the power to confer ‘symbolic capital’” (Ibid.). And Lovell is certainly right in emphasizing that “the willingness of the black community in Montgomery to accept Parks as ‘a suitable standard-bearer’ for their cause” (Ibid.) was of the utmost importance. Indeed black activist groups and organizations played a crucial role in giving center stage to Parks and her act of civil disobedience. She was not produced by white culture, and her act of resistance was not turned into what it became by white power. But neither were Parks’s notoriety and the iconic status of her counter-performance manufactured by the black community alone. Other segments of the population and other organized groups also helped. Some white and mixed organizations and institutions, and eventually even the mainstream media and the general public, also played an important role (even if they joined the efforts of resistance at a later point). It is this complex and heterogeneous range of uptakes and responses that we need to take into account to paint the complete picture of the subversive and transformative force that Parks’s counter-performance acquired within a social pattern of resistance.
An opportunity of resistance was seized, not chosen. But why was this particular opportunity so successful? And why Parks? Why couldn’t one of the other local activists have become the protagonist of this cultural script of resistance in the making? It is clear that her act of resistance and not that of other activists who were counter-performing in similar ways around that time was exploited by local activists, black leaders, and a growing movement of resistance. Lovell gives an account of the special “suitability” that black activist groups found in Parks. I want to reformulate the issue slightly so that the question becomes not what made Parks and her act especially suitable, but rather, especially echoable. Echoability provides a much more specific and fine-grained notion than mere suitability to assess the likelihood of an insurrectionary act to become part of a performative chain of resistance with transformative potential. Echoability is a more clearly relational concept than suitability: to ask about the echoability of Parks and her actions is to ask about the social relationality that binds together Parks with other actors, as well as her actions with those of others. My reformulation of the issue of “suitability” into an issue of “echoability” is an attempt to shift the focus from the actor’s conformity with certain standards to the interrelations of performative chains enmeshed in social networks. Lovell summarizes well some of the features that made Parks a sympathetic character and her action potentially echoable across a wide spectrum of social locations: Parks’s background and profile exhibited the markers of working-class status, which made her a likely regular bus commuter; she spoke quietly and displayed a peaceful and apparently docile demeanor, lacking any sign of aggressiveness or irrationality; and, most important of all, Parks’s appearance provided a compelling image of middle-age respectability with her rimless spectacles, her neatly kept graying hair, her clean and tidy clothes, and so on. Other activists lacked some (or even all) of these features. There is a particularly sharp contrast between Parks and Claudette Colvin, who is described in the following way:

A feisty high school student ... who defended her right to the seat in language that brought words of disapproval from passengers of both races ..., Colvin was crying and madder than ever by the time (p.246) the policeman told her she was under arrest. She struggled when they dragged her off the bus and screamed when they put on the handcuffs.... immature, prone to breakdowns and outbursts of profanity ... pregnant ... Colvin would not do. (Branch: quoted in Lovell: 2003, pp. 11–12)
As Lovell emphasizes, “Colvin lacked the insignia of respectability that Parks embodied” (p. 12). Everything about her played into the hands of stigmatizing stereotypes about black rebellious characters as being unreasonable, out of control and needing tutelage: “Too dark-skinned, too ‘rough’ in class terms, too young, too loud, and pregnant and unmarried” (Ibid.). Parks’s figure and her action were sympathetic in ways in which those of other activists were not; and this sympathy is crucial for her performance to become reiterable and echoable. But this sympathy, which was exploited by local activists and emerging groups of resistance, clearly shows that Parks’s act of insurrection contained a lot of concessions to the normalizing expectations and racist stereotypes of the white mainstream culture of the time. As Lovell argues, this brings to the fore that we can “find elements of submission/consent to norms within the most courageous acts of resistance, and vice versa, elements of resistance in the habitus of submission” (Ibid.). Pure and uncontaminated acts of resistance are not to be expected, but neither are pure and uncontaminated acts of submission without the slightest hint of possible discomfort and without the seed of a possible resistance. This ambivalence between resistance and submission that, following Bourdieu, Lovell emphasizes in our social agency is a double-edged sword: it underscores that even in the most constrained and heavily disciplined social practices we can find possible sites of resistance; but it also brings into light that any act of resistance—even the most radical—can be normatively constrained and may contain concessions to established powers. Social constraints on acts of resistance can be identified by investigating their echoability. This is what my discussion of how Parks’s counter-performance was rendered echoable has tried to show.
Many interrelated social processes had to converge to make Parks’s act of insurrection into what it became: an emblem of the social struggle that was taking place. And it is crucial to note that Parks’s figure and action became echoable as an emblem, but not as a subversive force with a voice and a criterion of her own. As Lovell’s analysis shows, with the notoriety that her act of resistance achieved, Parks did not become “a leader but an emblem of the mundane harassment that black people routinely suffered: an ‘innocent’ victim of impeccable credentials who had suffered abuse on the buses” (p. 11; my emphasis). Parks was given a place, but not a voice, in the activist groups and the emerging movement of resistance in the battle against segregation. What the social movement of resistance needed was an emblem, not a voice: an image of respectability that resonated with a general public and could be echoed by a wide range of differently positioned agents, including mainstream subjects. As Lovell aptly puts it, Parks was used as an emblem by the social movement, but she was not allowed to occupy a leadership position. She was repeatedly “shunted aside” at rallies, and when Nelson Mandela visited Detroit in 1990, “Parks was left off the VIP list, and was made an uneasy party to the reception group as an afterthought…. There was no real leadership role for her in the SCLC, the organization she helped to create” (p. 15). Lovell correctly suggests that, among other factors, the dominant (white) norms of gender relationships are to blame for the marginalization of Parks within the civil rights movement. I would add that both being a soft-spoken woman and being a working-class subject with little cultural capital are features for which she was selected as a sympathetic figure and, at the same time, features that contributed to her marginalization within the movement of resistance. As I have been arguing, we should not be surprised to find concessions to heterosexist and classist norms in the social struggles against racism. Movements of resistance should not be expected to be devoid of submission and domination, which is all the more reason why we must cultivate multiplicitous movements of resistance that exert friction on each other, and can thus correct each other and compensate for each other, without ever expecting a movement of complete liberation in which pure resistance opposes pure submission.
Bringing together some of the key Bourdieuan themes of this section, we can sum up its central point as follows: possibilities of resistance are produced by the social friction of heterogeneous social fields, and they are performatively exploited—both individually and collectively—by agents with a habitus of resistance, with dispositions to counter-perform. Sometimes these possibilities are perceived and seized by particularly lucid and courageous individuals, but it takes an entire network of interconnected individuals and/or a social movement to exploit effectively these possibilities of resistance in chained actions. Even when resistance starts with courageous individual acts, it does not become politically effective and transformative for as long as these acts remain isolated and disconnected. Hence the importance of echoing: acts of resistance need to be echoed through the social fabric—that is, reacted to, engaged with, remembered, mimicked, and resonated in subsequent words and actions in multiple ways—in order to acquire prominence and become part of a performative chain or social pattern. It is when acts of resistance are echoed that they can become repeatable, readily intelligible, and woven into patterns of insurrection that can lead to social change. Although there is no invisible hand directing this process and there is indeed plenty of contingency and sheer luck in it, the emerging shared (or sharable) lucidity of social networks and social movements is crucial for the identification of sites of resistance and for the echoing of insurrectionary acts.
There is only so much that isolated individuals can achieve by themselves. Hence the importance of interactive processes of communication being available to social agents, so that they can relate to each other, pool their resources, compensate for each other’s blindness, share their (always limited) lucidity, and collectively exploit possibilities of resistance. Attempts at insurrection need to become not only repeatable, but also widely echoable if they are to leave a noticeable cultural mark (i.e., a transformation in the culture that affects all groups and not only the ones who engage in the insurrectionary acts). And echoability often requires that we repair the insensitivity that blocks fluid social relations and processes of communication among members of society. The melioration of cognitive and affective structures that I have focused on in this book is aimed at the improvement of social relationality and of the communication among social agents and social groups, so that relations of solidarity become possible and increasing degrees of lucidity can be achieved by individuals and groups. Iris M. Young (1990a, 1990b) has been one of the leading political theorists who have drawn attention to the importance of improving and expanding the processes of communication available in our public life, so that we can achieve a vibrant pluralistic democratic culture in which differences are not only tolerated but appreciated and integrated in our life in common. The importance of forging relations of solidarity that can bring together individuals into well-communicated social networks and social movements cannot be overemphasized: this will be further discussed in the next chapter through Carol Gould’s (2007) concept of “network solidarity.” We should not wait for epistemic and political heroes to save us; we all have the shared responsibility of improving our social perceptions and the social processes of communication available to us. Following Bourdieu, I have also suggested that we also share the collective responsibility for producing social locations, social relations, and social subjectivities that are congenial with the cultivation of habits of resistance, so that differently situated subjects and groups can exert friction, interrogate the social order, and expand the available range of options for the epistemic and sociopolitical life of a culture.
As we have seen in our discussions of Sor Juana’s and Rosa Parks’s acts of resistance, the fight against epistemic marginalization (such as that of women) as well as the fight against social injustices that are not distinctively epistemic (such as racial segregation in public transportation) require the mobilization of shareable acts and of shareable imaginings. This shareability typically involves disrupting or interrupting well-entrenched forms of social ignorance and meta-ignorance. There are indeed particular individuals who play a key role in the fight against epistemic injustice and in facilitating social lucidity. We have called them epistemic heroes, but we have seen that their heroism is a complex cultural artifact in which a multiplicity of individuals, groups, and publics are implicated. Their so-called heroism becomes possible and effective only within specific social contexts and thanks to the support of social networks and social movements. Heroic acts become such only because of the (p.249) place they have been given within social movements of resistance. Sor Juana and Rosa Parks are indeed icons of social contestation and insurrection. If anybody can qualify as heroes of epistemic and sociopolitical resistance, they certainly should. But they could not have accomplished what they did by themselves, or solely by virtue of their courage or other epistemic and political virtues (which themselves were socially produced). Their actions and their characters were rendered possible by the social support they received. It is thanks to the fertile soil of a particular social field that they could develop the attitudes and habits of resistance that they developed; and it is thanks to the subsequent social support of networks and movements that their insurrectionary acts could be echoed and woven into collective practices of resistance. We should not minimize the key contributions that particular individuals make to the fight against social and epistemic injustices. But it is important to emphasize that individual contributions have to be interwoven into a network of collective efforts, and that the ultimate protagonist of the fight across contexts and across generations is a social network of resistance—a network that in some cases becomes an organized group or movement. We need to interrogate critically the special place that particular individuals come to occupy within social networks, bringing to the fore the social conditions under which their critical interventions become possible, and highlighting the social consequences of their actions that lead to new forms of identifications and new forms of social relationality and group dynamics. This points in the direction of a contextualized notion of solidarity that supports individual acts of resistance and sustains their echoing, thus facilitating their effective and mutually reinforcing interconnections and making chained actions possible. But for this form of solidarity and chained action to become possible, the social imaginaries available have to be transformed. In the next chapter I will elucidate what is involved in transforming a social imaginary so that the social fields in which we act can provide sites of resistance.

Notes:
(1) Also, we cannot assume that all those invisibilized subjects who belong to a marginalized group share the same standpoint. This is the other warning that Wylie (2003) issues against essentializing epistemic standpoints by relying on one-sided definitions of social groups and social locations and thus homogenizing the diverse and heterogeneous experiences that people can have within them.

(2) This sort of epistemic advantage can also be found in the context of scientific inquiry where women researchers by virtue of having multiple perspectives are more likely to detect sexist biases than men, as it has been discussed by another influential standpoint theorist, Sandra Harding (1991). See also the different essays in the collected volume on the philosophy of science and technology edited by Harding and Figueroa (2003).

(3) As it will be discussed later, the black and white binary that has dominated the American racial imaginary has polarized social perceptions into rigid and distorting categories and has functioned as a central source of racial blindness. Rather than a mere bifurcation of our social gaze and racial consciousness, I will argue that what is needed for genuine racial lucidity is a polyphonic and kaleidoscopic consciousness.

(4) See Lugones (2003) and also the discussions about strategies of subversion that exploit ignorance in Sullivan and Tuana (2007).

(5) And this critical learning process of checking and expanding our perspectives requires the interaction of multiple, heterogeneous perspectives that resist one another and create epistemic friction. This is the rationale for the Imperative of Epistemic Interaction I have proposed. It follows from my polyphonic contextualism that the learning processes required for the melioration of epistemic injustices through resistance and friction are multiple, heterogeneous, and never-ending, for these processes are tied to indefinitely many possible perspectives that a community can contain or bring to life.

(7) Black people were expected to be deferential and “to know their place” with respect to white power and status. A horrifying illustration of the very constrained and heavily policed acceptable agency of black people’s gaze and forms of address can be found in the brutal murder of Emmett Till in 1955 (a black teenager who was killed and dismembered for looking and approaching—whistling at, according to some accounts—a young white woman). In general, those who violated white expectations of black deference were traditionally deemed “uppity” or “insolent.” Black people’s constrained agency to address whites can be exemplified in the legal context by their limited ability to give testimony—for example, blacks were often barred from testifying against a white person.

(8) In *Blindness* (1999), José Saramago describes a city ravaged by an instant epidemic of white blindness. Saramago’s novel can be read as a parable about social insensitivity and even more specifically racial insensitivity, where those who see everything in white are unable to see anything at all. Interestingly, as those suffering from white blindness become more numerous and control spaces of interaction, the sighted become vulnerable and forced to pretend they do not see. This thought-provoking parable highlights not only the problems concerning blindness, but also the dangers and vulnerabilities that sight (e.g., racial lucidity) can carry in a world of blind people. Saramago offers a masterful commentary on the anxieties, aggressive reactions, and defense mechanisms that are activated when the blind realize that there is more than what they can perceive, that there is an entire realm or dimension of the world they cannot control while others have knowledge about it.

(9) In a similar vein but with respect to sexual blindness, Rae Langton (2009) has coined the expression “sexual solipsism,” linking the objectification of women to a heterosexist gaze that is incapable of fully acknowledging another subjectivity with its own desires, feeling, emotions, and interests.

(10) Gutmann (1996)

(11) Ibid.

(12) I am grateful to Brooke Ackerly for pointing out to me the connection between my view and contemporary forms of global activism, especially “connected activism.” For discussions of “connected activism,” see especially Allison Fine (2006) and (2007). For a lucid discussion of global feminism that emphasizes the crucial importance of becoming aware of “global connectedness,” see Ackerly and Attanasi (2009).

(13) This is my own English translation. Here is the original Spanish text:

Huye el conocimiento
y cobarde el discurso se desvía
Meta-Lucidity, “Epistemic Heroes,” and the Everyday Struggle Toward Epistemic Justice

... 

da las espaldas el entendimiento, 
y asombrado el discurso se espeluza 
...

porque teme—cobarde—
comprenderlo o mal, o nunca, o tarde ... (p. 118)

(14) As I have argued elsewhere (2008b), both with her actions and with her intellectual production Sor Juana questioned the taken-for-granted gender binary that separates men and women and subversively criticized established gender roles. In Sor Juana’s writings and in her own life we find subjects who have to disguise their gender identity in order to become epistemic agents. Sor Juana herself describes how she had to become what I call an epistemic agent in drag and pass as a boy: “It came to my attention that in Mexico City there were schools, and a University, in which one studied the sciences. The moment I heard this, I began to plague my mother with insistent and importunate pleas: she should dress me in a boy's clothing and send me to Mexico City to live with relatives, to study and be tutored at the University. She would not permit it” (p. 15).

(15) We can find here an analogue to Maria Lugones’s (2003) concept of “world-travelling.”

(16) For an account of this phenomenon, which I have termed genesis amnesia, see my (2003). As I argue there, Wittgenstein also talks about this phenomenon in similar terms in his discussions of learning and social normativity.

(17) For this quotation, Lovell cites page 11 of the article “She Would Not Be Moved” by G. Younge in The Guardian Weekend (December 16, 2000).

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