INTERSECTIONALITY

Origins, Contestations, Horizons

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EXPANDING FRONTIERS
INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO STUDIES
OF WOMEN, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

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Set in Garamond Premier Pro by Rachel Gould.

To my sister, Katerina
and to my yiayia, Katerina

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Robyn Wiegman characterizes intersectionality, without "exaggeration," as "*the* primary figure of political completion in U.S. identity knowledge domains" (2012, 240). This is a striking development for a term that was proposed, initially, as a provisional concept. I suggest that, paradoxically, taking intersectionality seriously may mean disrupting the facile consensus that has emerged around it and trying to radicalize its insights by reinvigorating its provisionality. As we will see in the next chapter, this is a different project than that advocated by those who claim to "go beyond intersectionality"; in my view, to make the "post-intersectional" move is to misunderstand the role of intersectionality in effecting the *conceptual transition* between essentialist, analytically discrete categories, on the one hand, and a (more) unified theory of oppression, on the other. The "post-intersectional" move is not only premature, since, "if anything, we are pre-intersectional"; in her conclusion of a recent lecture, Crenshaw expressed a "hope and an aspiration" for "a neo-intersectionality, a post-post-intersectionality, an erasure-of-the-'post'-intersectionality," which would enable us "to build more solid coalitions that reach across difference and reach across the globe" (2014).

If certainty about what "intersectionality" means reveals a failure to tarry with the concept in a substantive way, on the path to a "neo-intersectional" sensibility that embraces the political and cognitive tasks ahead, we face the dual task of disrupting the narratives of completion *and* of redundancy that surround intersectionality. In these first three chapters I have argued that a serious engagement would recognize that intersectionality—a concept with a long history—signals a point of departure, not the triumphant arrival of antiracist feminist theory; it constitutes part of a Black feminist intellectual tradition that is inadequately engaged when intersectionality comes to stand in metonymically for a multiplicity of heterogeneous and complex theories stemming from that tradition. In the next three chapters I discuss recent critiques of intersectionality, revisit an overlooked normative conclusion, and consider the possibility of a synthesis of intersectional and decolonial feminisms.

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Critical Engagements with Intersectionality

If the 1990s and early 2000s were marked by an enthusiastic, if at times superficial uptake of the notion of "intersectionality"—marked by its widespread travel across various disciplinary and geopolitical borders but also by inattention to its origins, social-movement contexts, and political and theoretical implications—in more recent years the concept has come under criticism in feminist theory (see Garry 2012, 494–95). Indeed, May discerns a "mushrooming intersectionality critique industry," ranging from the "remedial" and even "quasi-Eugenic" (promising to "deracialize" intersectionality to "render it more robust and universally applicable") to calls for a "renaissance of gender-first or gender-universal approaches" (2015, 98, 101, 104). It is to a few of those critiques that I turn in this chapter. Synthesizing the literature, I group critiques into eight categories. The first four—each of which takes issue with some or all of the purported analytic merits of the intersectionality paradigm, which I discussed in chapter 1 (complexity, simultaneity, irreducibility, and inclusion)—are the Scalar Critique (intersectionality is too microscopic—or too macroscopic—and/or cannot account for all levels of social totality or the relationships among them); the Infinite Regress Critique (intersectionality could never account for the infinite differences that constitute social identities); the Mutual Exclusion Critique (intersectionality assumes a unitary model of identity or oppression, since the logical precondition of intersection is the mutual exclusion of the categories being intersected); and the Reinscription Critique

(intersectionality reinscribes the epistemological and political problems it identifies; rather than overcoming them, it reifies them).

Four additional critiques I expose draw upon these foregoing four "ideal types" to advance a distinct, oppositional, or "frictional" intellectual project. First, the Marxist Critique contends that intersectionality lacks an explanatory theory of power, a problem that results from intersectionality's insistence on the irreducibility of racial, gender, and other oppressions to class exploitation (Gimenez 2001). Second, the New Materialist Critique claims that intersectionality is a form of representationalism, which stages an ontological dualism between (active) representation and (passive) represented and, having an inadequate theory of power to account for intersectional subjects' ambiguous agency, advances a defeatist theory of victimization (Geerts and van der Tuin 2013; Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2013). Third, the Assemblage Critique asserts that intersectionality presupposes the primacy of the (oppressed) subject and its investment or self-understanding in identitarian politics, taking as static entities (identities, axes of oppression) what are actually relations between and among human and nonhuman existents which are always already emerging, becoming, and transforming (Puar2007, 2012). Finally, the Post-Intersectional Critique, largely articulated by scholars within the legal academy, alleges that intersectionality is too simplistic a theory or too crude a metaphor to account for the complex phenomenon of subordination, which can better be understood through alternative concepts such as "symbiosis," "interconnectivity," "cosynthesis," and "multidimensionality" (Ehrenreich 2002; Kwan 1997, 2000; Chang and Culp 2002; Hutchinson 1997, 2002; Valdes 1995).

The aforementioned critiques of intersectionality vary widely with respect to how convincing or plausible they are (which is, of course, a subjective judgment that depends on one's (pre)theoretical commitments), yet most (though not all) perhaps share one theoretical shortcoming: an oversimplification, reduction, or misreading of intersectionality which either sets up the concept as a straw figure that is easy to dismantle or tendentiously and sometimes inaccurately foregrounds one aspect of the metaphor or theory, occluding the others. As Carbado writes with respect to the critics of intersectionality he surveys in a recent article,

they tend to "artificially circumscribe the theoretical reach of intersectionality as a predicate to staging their own intervention" (2013, 816). Moreover, none of the widely rehearsed critiques of intersectionality grant the concept provisionality with respect to the categories it critically engages; further, when they propose a new model of "synthesis or interaction of things that are otherwise apart," Carbado argues that "at the level of appellation, they are no more dynamic than intersectionality" (816). He explains this deficiency with respect to our "discursive limitations" undermining "our ability to capture the complex and reiterative processes of social categorisation"; he claims that "the strictures of language require us to invoke race, gender, sexual orientation, and other categories one discursive moment at a time" (816). If we were to engage intersectionality as a critique of unitary categories, instead of redeploying them under its mantle, we could transition from complacency to disorientation, deconstructing the false inclusions and exclusions that categorial essentialisms entail. But to the extent that intersectionality is regarded—both by its critics and its proponents—as a multiplicative theory concerned with intercategorical complexity (see McCall 2005), the discursive and representational limitations Carbado identifies are not likely to be overcome.

In adducing these critiques, I do not assume, as Barbara Tomlinson does in her recent rejoinder to "critics of intersectionality" (including this author), that their intent is always to undermine the project of critiquing subordination or even intersectionality as such (2013, 996). Indeed, I grant the possibility that Tomlinson appears to exclude, of immanent critiques, and indeed—to use Jennifer Nash's and Tricia Rose's formulation—of "loving critiques" (Nash 2014a, 8, 155n25; see Nash 2011b). Conversely, the apparent absence of critical engagement in celebratory invocations or operationalizations of intersectionality does not necessarily demonstrate any greater "fidelity" or attention to the concept, and may be just as (if not more) "careless"—to use Tomlinson's descriptor (2013, 996)—than are critical approaches. Hence, as May points out, the problem is not that intersectionality is being engaged critically, but rather "how intersectionality is read and portrayed," often in "violation" of intersectionality's basic premises (2015, 98). Rather than assuming that critics of intersectionality are always simply "wrong" about the positive

views of intersectionality which their critiques address, I think there is something important to be learned about how intersectionality is predominantly mobilized by attending to this "mushrooming industry." Further, I do not emphasize (as Tomlinson does) the "rhetorical frameworks and tropes" of critical arguments; instead, I attempt to reconstruct their substantive objections to intersectionality.

THE SCALAR CRITIQUE

The first cluster of criticisms concern the scalar reach of intersectionality, that is, whether it is amenable to the study of micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of social reality. Particularly in its infancy, there was some debate even among proponents of intersectionality as to whether it functions as a micro-, meso-, or macro-level heuristic (or all three) (see Collins et al. 1995). It was in this context that some scholars first articulated a critique of intersectionality as being too limited to capture the various levels of social reality and the interactions among them. For instance, Martha Gimenez argues that intersectionality presupposes but does not theorize the relations of micro-level to macro-level phenomena. As a model of identity, she argues, structural intersectionality offers no resources to "link intersectionality to its macrolevel conditions of possibility, those 'interlocking' structures of oppression" (2001, 29). Taking the opposite view, Dorthe Staunæs interprets intersectionality as a macro-level theory, arguing that it does not illuminate how categories of gender and race function in the "lived experience of concrete subjects" and that the model needs to be supplemented with a theory of subjectification (2003, 101). Nevertheless, Staunæs states, intersectionality can be redeemed by relating it to "post-structuralist and social constructionist concepts of 'subjectivity,' 'subjectification,' 'subject position' and 'troublesome subject position'" (103). Elizabeth Butterfield is similarly optimistic about the political possibilities that intersectionality opens up, but she argues that "a new understanding of oppression will not be enough—we also need to formulate a new conception of the person" if we are to understand how oppressions intersect in the lived experience of concrete subjects (2003, 1).

One way that scalar critiques of intersectionality have manifested is

through a distinction between the terms "interlocking oppressions" and "intersecting oppressions." In her earlier work, Collins distinguished between the terms "interlocking" and "intersectional," taking them to refer, respectively, to macro-level and micro-level phenomena:

> The notion of interlocking oppressions refers to macro level connections linking systems of oppression such as race, class, and gender. This is the model describing the social structures that create social positions. Second, the notion of intersectionality describes micro-level processes—namely, how each individual and group occupies a social position within interlocking structures of oppression described by the metaphor of intersectionality. Together they shape oppression. (Collins et al. 1995, 492)

However, Collins seems to discard this distinction in her later work, where she uses "intersectionality" to refer to all three analytic levels of social reality (1998b, 2003). Nevertheless, her distinction between interlocking oppressions and intersectionality proved influential inasmuch as some scholars drew on Collins to argue that the former concept is theoretically superior to the latter (Fellows and Razack 1998; Razack 1998, 2005; see also Tong and Botts 2014). For instance, Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack claim that an "interlocking" approach theorizes "the relationships among hierarchical systems," whereas "intersectionality" merely stipulates or overlooks these relationships (1998, 335). They define "interlocking systems of oppression" as systems that "rely on one another in complex ways"; the examples they offer are capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy, though from their discussion it becomes clear that this list is illustrative , not exhaustive (335). These systems of oppression come into being "in and through one another" and are sustained and supported by one another. Because systems "interlock" in "complex ways," Fellows and Razack observe that "it is ultimately futile to attempt to disrupt one system without simultaneously disrupting others" (335–36). In a monograph published the same year, Razack parses the difference between intersectional and interlocking approaches as one of analytic emphasis and theoretical acuity:

> Analytical tools that consist of looking at how systems of oppression interlock differ in emphasis from those that stress intersectionality. Interlocking systems *need one another*, and in tracing the complex ways in which *they help to secure one another*, we learn how women are produced into positions that exist symbiotically but *hierarchically*. We begin to understand, for example, how domestic workers and professional women are produced so that neither exists without the other. First World policies of colonialism and neo-colonialism, which ultimately precipitated the debt crisis and the continuing impoverishment of the Third World and enabled the pursuit of middle-class respectability in the First World, were implemented in highly gendered ways. (1998, 13, emphasis added)

The implication is that intersectionality does not impute to systems the properties of mutual constitution, interdependence, and hierarchical organization. By contrast, Razack claims, an analysis of the way systems of oppression "interlock" illuminates the transnational matrix of power relations that produce subject-positions. For Razack, systems do not "merely" intersect, they interlock; the latter concept, for her, captures how their convergence brings into being new forms of oppression. For Razack the key difference seems to lie in the capacity of each heuristic to deal with phenomenological simultaneity and ontological mutual constitution of oppressions. In a more recent essay, she reiterates that she prefers

> the word interlocking rather than intersecting to describe how the systems of oppression are connected. Intersecting remains a word that describes discrete systems whose paths cross. I suggest that the systems *are* each other and that they give content to each other. While one system (here it is white supremacy) provides the entry point for the discussion (language is after all successive), what is immediately evident as one pursues how white supremacy is embodied and enacted in the everyday is that individuals come to know themselves within masculinity and femininity. Put another way, the sense of self that is simultaneously required and produced by empire is a self that is experienced *in relation* to the subordinate other—a relationship that is deeply gendered and sexualized. An interlocking approach requires that we keep several balls in the air at once, striving to overcome the successive process forced upon us by language and focusing on the ways in which bodies express social hierarchies of power. (2005, 343)

Yet as we saw in chapter 1, simultaneity and irreducibility—"keeping several balls in the air at once"—are analytic benefits commonly imputed to intersectionality as well. Moreover, as Sirma Bilge has shown, some intersectional theorists claim mutual constitution as a premise of that approach as well, although views differ markedly on the ontological implications of that claim (2010, 63–65). For instance, Ann Garry argues that "the fact that [oppressions] are enmeshed in people's lives does not necessitate their antecedent conceptual fusion" (2012, 840). Nevertheless, as far as I am aware, Razack (1998, 2005) and Fellows and Razack (1998) do not offer arguments to support the distinction between interlocking and intersectional approaches; consequently, the distinction between "interlocking" and "intersecting" seems to be a matter of stipulation with little theoretical basis in the existing literature. Similarly, the disagreement about the heuristic emphasis of intersectionality on micro-, meso-, or macro-levels of social reality is not resolved with respect to concrete arguments that demonstrate why it functions better or worse at one level of explanation rather than another.

THE INFINITE REGRESS CRITIQUE

Addressing intersectionality's analytic promise to capture structural complexity without reducing or fragmenting simultaneous experiences of oppression(s), Alice Ludvig has argued that the fact that the social world is "insurmountably complex" raises serious problems for intersectionality (2006, 247). Ludvig contends that "the endlessness of differences seems to be a weak point in intersectional theory" (247). Here, perhaps Ludvig is drawing on Judith Butler's argument concerning "the illimitable process of signification itself," which defies attempts to "posit identity once and for all" (Butler 1999, 182–83). Butler (in)famously pillories "theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness [which] invariably close

with an embarrassed 'etc.' at the end of the list" (182). This "horizontal trajectory of adjectives" expresses the "striving" of these theories to "encompass a situated subject," while the "etc." reflects their "invariable failure" to "be complete" (182). Similarly, Wendy Brown contends that "the model of power developed to apprehend the making of a particular subject/ion will never accurately describe or trace the lines of a living subject," an intractable theoretical "paradox" that cannot be "resolved through greater levels of specificity," since "there are always significant elements of subjectivity and subjection [that] exceed the accounting offered by such lists" (1997, 94).

Ludvig's "infinite regress" objection also asks, On what basis can a judgment be made as to which categories are salient? For instance, she points out that in daily life it is often not possible to discern the specific category of prejudice at work in an experience of discrimination: "Subjectively, it is often not possible for a woman to decide whether she has been discriminated against just because of her gender or for another reason such as a foreign accent" (2006, 246). It is difficult to see why this even constitutes a criticism of intersectionality unless we assume the stability and adequacy of extant categories and believe that intersectionality claims an additive relationship obtains among them. In a similar vein as Ludvig's "insurmountable complexity" objection, Shuddhabrata Sengupta argues that the phenomenology of oppression ultimately defies its reduction to "axes," "structures," or even "systems"; he claims the "algebra of our world" is too irreducibly complex and contradictory, flouting even those theoretical approaches that aim to capture irreducibility (2006, 635). At the very least, Ludvig claims, intersectionality theorists are faced with a definitional problem: "Who defines when, where, which, and why particular differences are given recognition while others are not?" (2006, 247). Similarly, Kathryn Russell argues that we lack "arguments about when and where we can emphasize one factor over another" as well as "analyses about how gender, race, and class are connected" (2007, 35). She contends that "current scholarship seems to be caught in a bind between collapsing social categories together and separating them out in a list" (35).

That is not entirely an inaccurate assessment of the state of intersectionality scholarship. Yet precisely this quandary—whether to flatten or fragment social experiences of multiple oppressions—is anticipated in Crenshaw's germinal discussion of intersectionality (1989, 148–49). What this set of criticisms reveals is that the methodological and conceptual challenge that intersectionality presents to categorial essentialism has been sidestepped by much "intersectional" scholarly research, which assumes the stability and explanatory power of monistic categories even as it explores their permutations and combinations (see chapter 3). As we have seen, these categories have been defined with the experiences of relatively privileged subgroups as their "historical base" (148). The "bind" Russell identifies and the definitional problem Ludvig raises for intersectionality presuppose the adequacy of analytic distinctions between systems of oppression and aspects of identity, rather than problematizing those distinctions. The conflation of "complexity" and the "particular" with multiply oppressed groups (such as Ludvig's "women with a foreign accent"), and the corresponding conflation of "simplicity" and the "generic" with (relatively) privileged ones (such as women without an accent marked as foreign), reveals that a single-axis framework is assumed. In other words, the "infinite regress" objection seems to rely upon a positivist understanding of essentialist categories, rather than engaging intersectionality as a critique of such categories. One encounters such a deployment of categories even in that now-classic statement of post-identitarian, anti-foundationalist feminist theory:

> If one is a woman, surely that is not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered "person" transcends the specific paraphernalia of gender, but because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. (Butler 1999, 6)

Yet this statement performatively contradicts itself, showing no difficulty in deploying distinct discursive identity categories, at least analytically; indeed, the force of the claim that these categories intersect (thereby

undermining the analytic separability or purity of "gender") seems to rest on the assumption of their prior mutual exclusivity.

THE MUTUAL EXCLUSION CRITIQUE

Indeed, still another ideal type of critique involves the relationship among categories that intersectionality theorists deploy. In skeletal terms, the argument is that the intersection of two categories logically presupposes that these categories are mutually exclusive. Of course, as we have seen in chapter 2, Crenshaw anticipates this critique, conceding that "the concept does engage dominant assumptions that race and gender are essentially separate categories"; yet she is explicit that the aim of "tracing the categories to their intersections" is "to suggest a methodology that will ultimately disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable" (1991, 1244–45n9). Indeed, the mutual exclusivity of emancipatory rhetorics is what Crenshaw's concept of political intersectionality contests:

> Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of colour have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling. (1991, 1242)

If mutual exclusion is, in part, what the intersectional critique of unitary categories problematizes, the most sophisticated versions of the "mutual exclusion" critique will be those which address interpretations of intersectionality that neglect to show how these categories are inadequate, interpretations that may even deploy them as if their analytic separability is phenomenologically legitimate.

To understand precisely in what the strongest versions of the "mutual exclusion" critique consist, it is useful to recall the distinction Leslie McCall makes in her widely referenced article, "The Complexity of

Intersectionality," between intercategorical, intracategorical and anti-categorical approaches to intersectionality research (2005; see chapter 1). As McCall parses this methodological distinction, if the *inter*categorical approach focuses on differences and relations among what are viewed as distinct social groups, requiring scholars to "provisionally adopt existing analytical categories," and the *intra*categorical approach focuses on differences and relations within social groups, only the *anti*-categorical approach deconstructs the received categories that construct social group memberships, viewing them as "simplifying social fictions that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences" (2005, 1773, 1774, 1776). McCall advocates for the intercategorical approach in her article, arguing that it is underrepresented in intersectionality research (1773). I would contend that most deployments of intersectionality operate with a degree of complacency about categorial distinctions and tend to naturalize demarcations between social groups. As we saw in the previous chapter, Nira Yuval-Davis critiques the intercategorical approach to intersectionality, arguing that "unless it is complemented with an intra-categorical approach, it can be understood as an additive rather than a mutually constitutive approach to the relationship between social categories" (2011, 7). According to Yuval-Davis, although social categories have distinct, irreducible "ontological bases," they are nevertheless "mutually constitutive in any concrete historical moment"; therefore, "simply assuming that any particular inter-categorical study would result in a full understanding of any particular social category in any particular social context, as McCall does, is also reductionist" (7–8). Instead, Yuval-Davis calls for "an intersectional approach which combines the sensitivity and dynamism of the intra-categorical approach with the more macro socio-economic perspective of the inter-categorical approach" (6). For Yuval-Davis, looking simultaneously between and within categories is a way out of what she identifies as a false dilemma which the distinction between inter- and intracategorical approaches raises. Moreover, Yuval-Davis's commitment to ontological pluralism undermines the forcefulness of her "mutual exclusivity" critique.

Yet research that assumes the stability, fixity, and homogeneity of social groups, social structures, and social identities can lapse into positivism,

or into an additive model that combines monistic categories. Elizabeth Cole makes a compelling argument that a positivist, intercategorical approach to intersectionality, which "assumes the definition and operationalization of social/structural categories as independent variables," fails to "address the processes that create and maintain . . . the categories" (2008, 445). Cole points out that the positivist approach to intersectionality ignores the fact that Crenshaw identifies three ways in which Black women's experiences are (mis)represented by categories defined with white and male subjects as their historical base: their experiences can be similar to those of white women and/or Black men; they can be compounds of single-axis categories; or they can be broader than the categories—or their sum—allow (Cole 2009, 171; see Crenshaw 1989, 149). At issue are the "conceptual limitations of the single-issue analyses that intersectionality challenges. The point is that Black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways and that the contradiction arises from our assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional" (Crenshaw 1989, 149). To see this, we must challenge the normative status of relatively privileged group members whose experiences become definitive of the group. Cole proposes that empirical researchers pose three questions to conceptualize "categories of identity, difference and disadvantage": "First, who is included within this category? Second, what role does inequality play? Third, what are the similarities?" (2009, 171). She continues:

> The first question involves attending to diversity within social categories to interrogate how the categories depend on one another for meaning. The second question conceptualizes social categories as connoting hierarchies of privilege and power that structure social and material life. The third question looks for commonalities cutting across categories often viewed as deeply different. (171).

Unlike McCall's schema, in which inter-, intra-, and anticategorical approaches are distinguished, Cole argues that these three questions are not mutually exclusive, but rather cumulative, that "each question builds on insights generated by the previous one" (2009, 171). Moreover,

Cole's questions ask us to do the opposite of what we are habituated into doing when confronted with categorial distinctions: to seek similarities across categories, and differences within them. In order to understand how, for instance, the category of gender is constructed through the exclusion of race—so that one is seen to be oppressed as a woman to the extent that one is not a person of color—one needs to simultaneously trace how difference is constituted, marginalized, disavowed, and hierarchized within a category, while commonalities between categories which reveal them not to be distinct but simultaneously operative in people's lives are systematically elided. Cole's insistence on tracing how categories are connotations of privilege and power is also tremendously methodologically important, yet it is rarely operationalized in the intersectionality literature. To say that categories are constructed prototypically around the experiences of normative subjects is to say that they are the sedimentations of operations of power and that their perceptual and cognitive use reproduces the systems of oppression that relegate certain subjects to the "basements" of social hierarchies, elevating others to the penthouse (see chapter 2). In my view, the continued, unreflective use of these categories naturalizes the very systems that intersectional scholars set out to contest, undermine, and transform.

In its strongest renditions, then, the "mutual exclusion" critique takes issue with a certain version of intersectionality that would reduce the construct to an additive or otherwise "interactive" model of jeopardy without problematizing the categories being deployed and addressing the relations of power in and through which they are constituted and reproduced. Another way to parse this critique is with respect to the normative claim of inclusiveness which is often attributed to intersectionality as a research paradigm and as a political sensibility. Can intersectionality deliver on the promise to transform feminist theory and politics by centering the experiences of multiply oppressed groups? Or does it participate in a "retrograde" form of identity politics which reproduces received notions of groups as separate and indeed constructs groups as ever smaller, more "specific," and less unifiable? Drawing on Crenshaw's largely overlooked discussion of identity-based politics (1991, 1299), Cole suggests that "although intersectionality may be misconstrued to sug-

gest a politics of identity [of] vanishingly small constituencies, in fact the concept holds the promise of opening new avenues of cooperation" (2008, 447). By contrast, Naomi Zack is dubious that intersectionality can deliver on its inclusionary promise. Zack argues that while intersectionality may indeed overcome essentialist constructions of identity, "politically, it easily leads to a fragmentation of women that precludes common goals as well as basic empathy. The *de facto* racial segregation of both criticism and liberation along the lines of historical oppression sabotages present criticism and future liberation because women of color speak only to themselves" (2005, 7). She asserts that women of color are only heard in white feminist discourses "if they are willing to present themselves as representatives of this or that disadvantaged racial or ethnic group—they have lost the ability to speak to and be heard by white women as women"; she calls on feminist theory to go "beyond intersectionality" to achieve a truly "inclusive feminism" (78). Although Zack's incisive critique of the abiding racial politics of U.S. feminist discourse is well taken, the tokenism she challenges hardly seems specific to, or inherent in, "intersectionality." Indeed, one of Crenshaw's aims in conceptualizing intersectionality was to reveal that positing white women's as the "standard sex discrimination claim" renders "claims that diverge from this standard" as "some sort of hybrid claim": precisely because Black women's experiences are "seen as hybrid," they are seen not to "represent those who may have 'pure' claims of sex discrimination" (1989, 146). When white women arrogate representational power in the ways that Zack and Crenshaw describe, contesting and redistributing that power is part of what intersectionality aims to do. To achieve this, I would suggest that what is required is a deconstruction and reconstitution of identity categories in ways that reveal groups' internal dissonances as well as their interconnections with groups deemed separate from them (see chapter 5).

THE REINSCRIPTION CRITIQUE

The fourth cluster of criticisms of intersectionality concerns the concept's tendency to reinscribe at the level of identity the exclusions, marginalizations, and false universalizations that it diagnoses at the level of political

practice and perceptual-cognitive habit. It is a criticism that sometimes emerges from a post-identitarian sensibility which doubts the efficacy or legitimacy of identity-based claims in redressing oppressions that, in large part, constitute those identities. For instance, Lynne Huffer suggests that "the institutionalization of intersectionality as the *only* approach to gender and sexuality that takes difference seriously masks intersectionality's investment in a subject-making form of power-knowledge that runs the risk of perpetuating precisely the problems intersectionality had hoped to alleviate" (2013, 15). As we saw in chapter 3, Nash argues that the construction of "black women as prototypical intersectional subjects" whose "complex . . . experiences of marginality" are used to demonstrate the lacunae of single-axis theories of oppression has problematic effects: it tends to represent Black women as a "unitary and monolithic entity" and to elide differences such as sexuality and class "in the service of presenting 'black women' as a category that opposes both 'whites' and 'black men'" (2008, 4, 8–9). Here, Nash argues, in effect, that intersectionality reinscribes categorial homogeneity by relying on the same race/gender binary which it critiques to define the "intersectional" identities of Black women, eliding "the sheer diversity of actual experiences of women of colour" (9). Gender and race are constructed as "trans-historical constants that mark *all* black women in similar ways," regardless of the other dimensions of their social identities (7). While Nash acknowledges that Crenshaw does not intend to reduce intersectionality to a race-gender dualism, gesturing at the "need to account for multiple grounds of identity" (Crenshaw 1991, 1245), she argues that the (non)generalizability of intersectionality as a theory of identity—the possibility of extending intersectionality to various social identities—reveals its incapacity to theorize the relationship of oppression to privilege (Nash 2008, 11–12). That is, Nash's claim is that intersectionality flattens differences among Black women, and specifically that it obscures relations of oppression and privilege within the intersectional identity category, thereby reinscribing "dominant conceptions of black women as 'the mules of the world'" (Nash 2008, 12, quoting Hurston). Nash argues for a revived intersectionality that "abandon[s] its commitment to sameness" in order to approach "'black womanhood' as its own con-

tested, messy terrain . . . producing a potentially uncomfortable disunity that allows for a richer and more robust conception of identity" (12). Her critique does not amount to a call to multiply the intersections (from two to three or four categories of identity) but rather to consider how the process of intersectional identity construction replicates the essentialism of unitary models of identity (12).

The central issue in the "reinscription" critique concerns intersectionality's relationship to monistic categories of identity—its use of those categories even as it seeks to transcend them. To the extent that it traffics in unitary categories to articulate a marginalized location, intersectionality risks "conjur[ing] the very ontology that its exponents set out to undermine" (Carastathis 2008, 27). Evacuated of its provisionality, most deployments of intersectionality construct "race and gender as analytically separable" precisely by permanently "relegating Black women to their intersection"; this serves to perpetuates the unmarked racialization of the category "gender" (as white) and the unmarked gendering of the category of "race" (as male) (27). Intersectionality has evidently not displaced white women as the normative subjects of gender oppression, or Black men as the paradigmatic targets of racial oppression; it may even reinscribe their representational privilege to the extent that it is construed in a positivist fashion as a cumulative model of multiple jeopardy. If deployed in essentialist terms, the categories of race and gender are not changed by their intersection. The logical precondition for the possibility of their intersecting seems to be their purity of one another (as implied by the race/gender binary); however, it is more accurate to trace the condition of possibility of the intersection of race and gender to the respective prior gendering and racialization of these categories (28). This is revealed when one tests the hypothesis that intersectionality can be generalized as a theory of identity to relatively and multiply privileged subjects. For instance, the intersection of whiteness and maleness reveals that these categories "are already co-extensive or mutually implicated" (28). The redundancy of the intersectional analysis of ostensibly "unified" identities reveals that the categories of race and gender presuppose maleness and whiteness as their normative content—and Black men and white women as the normative targets of oppressions—are already

invisibly intersectional, making their intersection at the structural location occupied by women of color a conceptually and politically productive impossibility. To the extent that intersectionality is evacuated of its provisionality and constructed as a representational concept adequate to the articulation of the experiences of women of color, the normative subjects of "race" and "gender" are not displaced from the center of these categories, even when intersected. The normative upshot is that intersectionality should be understood not as a model of identity but as a horizon of political contestation: if the problem of exclusion is a representational one—in its perceptual-cognitive, aesthetic, and political senses—it cannot be resolved at the level of identity, and hence "there is no sense in which individuals 'are' intersectional subjects" prior to or independently of their discursive assignment to the margins of categories of identity (29). Claiming intersectionality as an identity (which is how "structural intersectionality" has been widely interpreted and deployed) risks reifying "political intersectionality" at the level of identity "by discursively producing a political subject whose stable—if contested—identity is the sedimentation of . . . the failure of existing discourses to represent (in the descriptive and normative senses) the . . . experience[s] and interests of racialized women" (28–29).

Just as various exponents of the "mutual exclusion" critique aim not to "disprove" intersectionality but to reconstruct it in its strongest terms, so too, "expos[ing] the assumptions that underpin intersectionality" and which render it vulnerable to the "reinscription" critique examined here is motivated by commitments to anti-essentialism and anti-subordination (Nash 2008, 4; Carastathis 2008, 24, 29–31). The concern, then, is not, as Tomlinson contends, to make emancipatory claims "without referring to and using dominant discourses" (2013, 1009), but rather to reflect on the implications of remaining within the conceptual and political parameters that such discourses delineate. In this sense, I disagree with Tomlinson's claim that "working with and repeating hegemonic discourses is an inescapable feature of all oppositional arguments in a political world," even though I think she is absolutely correct that the enmeshedness of critique with its object is "not a problem singularly attached to the concept of intersectionality" (1009). However, to the

extent that intersectionality is widely represented as a concept that has transcended, or is capable of transcending, the conceptual and political limitations of dominant discourses of identity and oppression, it is vulnerable to the "reinscription" critiques that I have exposited here. Moreover, Tomlinson's riposte to such critics of intersectionality overlooks not only the motivations and substantive claims of their arguments (focusing, instead, on the "rhetorics" that, on her reading, they employ) but also disregards the fact that (many, if not most) celebratory deployments of the concept do it a greater disservice than do (at least some) critiques. To claim that at the heart of intersectionality there is a constitutive tension concerning its relationship to unitary categories is actually to reveal it as a provisional concept (Crenshaw 1991, 1244–45n9) that crucially illuminates, but does not achieve, the transcendence of categorial essentialisms and political exclusions.

THE MARXIST CRITIQUE

As we saw in chapter 1, part of the inheritance of intersectionality is the articulation of a Black feminist socialist analysis that is embodied in the integrative concepts of "triple exploitation," "superexploitation," "double" and "triple jeopardy," and "interlocking systems of oppression," as well as in the activisms of Black left feminists, the Third World Women's Alliance, and the Combahee River Collective. Nevertheless, some of the earliest or the most trenchant critiques of intersectionality, specifically addressing its conceptualization of class in relation to other axes of oppression, have been articulated from a Marxist perspective without, however, addressing intersectionality's Marxian genealogy (Brenner 2000; Gimenez 2001; Aguilar 2012; Archer Mann 2013; S. Ferguson and McNally 2015; see also Gallot and Bilge 2012). Integrative approaches such as intersectionality challenge a number of precepts in doctrinaire Marxism, and they reveal (directly or indirectly) the "profound failure . . . in Marx's work . . . to comprehend patriarchal, racial, sexual and other forms of oppression that, along with class exploitation constitute the interlocking matrices of social relations" (Camfield 2014, 9). First, intersectional approaches assert the irreducibility and mutual constitution of systems of oppression, whereas orthodox Marxism considers

racial and gender oppression as epiphenomena of causally basic class exploitation. Moreover, intersectionality emphasizes the simultaneity of oppressions and of resistances, while a dogmatic Marxism would tend to view antiracism and antisexism as divisive to working-class solidarity, and therefore as impediments to class struggle. If, for Marxists, racism and sexism constitute ideologies or forms of discrimination that are reflexes of contradictions between formal equality and material inequality inherent to liberal democracies, class is a function of a different and more fundamental order: that of capitalist exploitation. To the extent that intersectionality entails the leveling of hierarchies among categories of oppression, and remains, at the very least, agnostic about their relative salience in various contexts, the response from Marxist feminists, even those sympathetic to intersectionality, has largely been to reiterate the foundational status of class in relation to race, gender, and other axes (Gimenez 2001). Here I focus mainly on the critical argument advanced by Martha Gimenez, who addresses "race, gender, class" theorists and "intersectionality" theorists interchangeably.

Gimenez defends Marxist sociological approaches against the "ritual critique of Marx and Marxism," which diagnoses among their "alleged failures" "class reductionism" and an underdeveloped analysis of women's oppression (2001, 24). Although her main targets are scholars identified with the "race, gender, class" (RGC) approach, and indeed her essay is published in the journal *Race, Gender and Class*, to ground her arguments she principally cites Patricia Hill Collins (Collins et al. 1995), and she conflates RGC with intersectional and interlocking approaches. Gimenez identifies as RGC's "object of study" the "intersections of race, gender and class," which—following Collins's early macro- and micro-level distinction—are macrologically constituted in and through the interlocking of systems of racial, gender, and class oppression (2001, 26). Her argument against RGC/intersectional approaches is threefold: first, it "erases the qualitative differences between class and other sources of inequality and oppression" (26); second, it implicitly entails structural determinism without adequately theorizing it—which, ironically she points out, is the same charge levied against orthodox Marxism (27); and third, it lacks a theory that would "link intersectionality

to those macrolevel conditions of possibility, those 'interlocking' structures of oppression" (29).

First, rejecting the axiom of the nonhierarchy of oppressions, Gimenez asserts that class is not equivalent to race and gender, contending that "some power relations are more important and consequential than others" (2001, 31). There are two reasons given for why class is "qualitatively different from gender and race and cannot be considered just another system of oppression": first, "class relations . . . are of paramount importance for most people's economic survival is determined by them"; and second, class is not just "a site of exploitation" but also one at which "the potential agents of social change are forged" (31). While "racism and sexism are unremittingly bad," what uniquely "redeems" class is its "dialectical" potential to function as a revolutionary struggle identity (31). Gimenez acknowledges that class is not the only basis for constituting "resistance identities," but she does seem to assume that it is the only such identity inured from co-optation by hegemonic power (28). On the other hand, racial and gender identities may "emerge from the grassroots" but are vulnerable to being "harnessed by the state" and, in this way, are at risk of becoming "legitimating identities" (28). Yet it is not clear that class is differentiated from race and gender by these ascribed properties; or, if it is, this is only because class exploitation has been defined to the exclusion of racial and gender oppressions, and vice versa.

The second criticism of intersectionality concerns the "isomorphism" it posits between structural location and identity, which Gimenez claims is deterministic (2001, 27). Here, her objection is that just because an individual occupies an "objective location in the intersection of structures of inequality," this does not entail that the individual identifies with this location or with other groups situated there (28). This is the least developed of Gimenez's objections and the most difficult to motivate; it is unclear to me precisely why she thinks the "conflation" of objective location with identity is a problem for intersectionality, or why she does not grant the same dialecticity to racial and gender identities as she would to the concepts of class-in-itself and class-for-itself. Her point seems to be that "how 'intersectionality' is experienced . . . is itself thoroughly a political process" (28); but this is one of the central arguments

Crenshaw makes, and it constitutes the basis for Crenshaw's concept of "political intersectionality" (Crenshaw 1991).

Gimenez's third criticism, by contrast, is the most fully developed: in brief, she alleges that intersectionality is atheoretical insofar as it "cannot explain either the sources of inequalities or their reproduction over time" (2001, 29). According to Gimenez, intersectionality assumes but fails to theorize "the existence of a more fundamental or 'basic' structure of unequal power relations and privileges which underlie race, gender, and class" (29). Yet internal to Crenshaw's account is a complement to the intersection metaphor which illuminates the reproduction of hierarchy as it articulates sociolegal power (1989); this is the function of basement metaphor that we discussed in chapter 2. Gimenez charges that the RGC perspective lacks a substantive theory of race, gender, and class, and instead appeals to these as formal, ahistorical "taken for granted categories of analysis whose meaning apparently remains invariant in all theoretical frameworks and contexts" (2001, 29). To some extent, I am inclined to agree with Gimenez's assessment that a facile use of these categories prevails in intersectionality scholarship, where they often go undefined; indeed, their redefinition beyond the strictures of monistic theories is a process that has barely begun. But Gimenez's account offers little by way of advancing that project; although Gimenez defines class in classical Marxist terms as "exploitative relations between people mediated by their relations to the means of production" (24), she neither integrates white-supremacist and heteropatriarchal power into that conception of exploitation nor separately defines "racial" and "gender" oppressions. Rather, she contends that Marxism can come to the rescue of intersectionality from the impasse at which it finds itself if the latter rethinks the "postulated relationships between race, class, and gender" (30). Although she grants the "emancipatory" potential of the approach, it is not clear what, precisely, she thinks Marxism has to learn from intersectionality. Similarly, Sharon Smith (2013) argues that "intersectionality cannot *replace* Marxism—and Black feminists have never attempted to do so. Intersectionality is a concept for understanding oppression, not exploitation"; thus intersectionality cannot be anything more than "an additive to Marxist theory."

If Gimenez and other Marxist feminists have argued for a synthesis of intersectionality with Marxism (although in that unhappy marriage the former is clearly subordinate to the latter), feminists who identify as New Materialists critique intersectionality as a form of social constructionism for its commitment to "representationalism" (Geerts and van der Tuin 2013, 172; see Dolphjin and van der Tuin 2013). To be clear, New Materialist feminists distance themselves from Marxism notwithstanding the connotations that "materialism" carries (see Alaimo and Heckman 2008, 6n3). Departing from the observation that "language has been granted too much power" and that "matter" no longer "matters" (Barad 2003, 801), they critique the "linguistic turn" in feminist and gender theory, proposing "a new metaphysics" that restores "matter" to its "materiality" (see Jagger 2015, 321). According to Rosi Braidotti, New Materialism "emerges as a method, a conceptual frame and a political stand, which refuses the linguistic paradigm, stressing instead the concrete yet complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power"; "the key concept in feminist materialism is the sexualized nature and the radical immanence of power relations and their effects upon the world" (Braidotti in Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, 21–22). New Materialists therefore reject the passive role to which "matter" is consigned in "representationalist" accounts, which privilege the discursive construction of materiality, eliding the "agentic" capacities of nonlinguistic entities; they affirm an "agential realist ontology" in contradistinction to what they take to be the antirealism in poststructuralist accounts (Judith Butler is the preeminent target) that emphasize the ineluctable linguistic mediation of materiality (Jagger 2015, 325; see Barad 2003). "Representationalism" is defined as "the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent; in particular, that which is represented is held to be independent of all practices of representing" (Barad 2003, 804). Representationalism effects a separation of "the world into the ontological disjoint domains of words and things" (811); it construes "matter as a passive blank slate awaiting the active inscription of culture" and views "the relation of materiality and discourse as one of absolute exteriority" (821n26). By contrast, an agential realist ontology to which New Materialists subscribe views matter as "a congealing of agency" in a process of "intra-active becoming" (822). The neologism "intra-action" indicates the epistemological and ontological inseparability of subjects and objects, relata that do not preexist relations but rather emerge through them (815).

From this theoretical paradigm, Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin advance a critique of intersectionality, constructing it as a form of "representationalism" (2013). They draw on Karen Barad's definition of "representationalism" to argue against what they characterize as "a Butlerian notion of intersectionality" (2013, 140). Here they echo Nina Lykke's misattribution of the intersectional paradigm to Butler, (inaccurately) stating that its emergence follows the 1990 publication of Butler's *Gender Trouble* (Lykke 2010, 2011; May 2015, 147): "the major voices of intersectional theory founded their distinctive framework on the same grounds as Butler and Butlerians, that is, by sticking to difference as a linguistic 'construction'" (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2013, 133–34). The authors contend that intersectionality assumes a "duality between signification/representation (active) and materiality/reality (muted)" (134). Moreover, they assert that "what motivates intersectionality has always been part of the ["French"] concept of 'sexual difference,'" of which they cite Braidotti as an exemplar (136). They argue for a "rewrit[ing] [of] intersectionality according to [Barad's] agential realism, a concept close to Deleuze and Guattari's materialist notion of *agencements* (usually translated as 'assemblages')"—without acknowledging that precisely such a rewriting has already been attempted by Jasbir Puar (whose intervention we will discuss below) (138). But their interpretation of intersectionality reduces the concept to an additive positivism, according to which "it can be known, in advance, that only 'your' gender and 'your' ethnicity are at work" (139). "Replacing linguistics with ontology," they claim to excavate from "underneath a representationalist intersectional theory based on codification (an axiometric epistemology) . . . another intersectionality of becomings (a topological ontology) that had been there all along but that had been continuously overcoded" (140).

Dolphijn and van der Tuin's critique of intersectionality, which enables their New Materialist "rewriting," seems to rest chiefly on their asser-

tion that intersectionality constitutes a form of representationalism. If representationalism is the belief in the distinction between a (linguistic) representation and the (matter) represented, gender representationalism would be the belief in a distinction between the concept "gender" and the materiality of lived gendered bodies. Intersectional representationalism, I take it, would be the belief in a distinction between the "intersection" of categories of race and gender and the lived experiences of gendered and racialized bodies. The central problem with their account is that Dolphijn and van der Tuin offer no arguments as to why intersectionality is a representationalism. Conflating intersectionality with an additive theory of double jeopardy, Dolphijn and van der Tuin overlook that the intersection is a place of invisibility which reveals that Black women's representational claims are undermined and confounded—in courtrooms and social movements—by mutually exclusive, single-axis conceptualizations of discrimination and oppression that exclude them by design. As I argued previously, the intersection of these categories reveals the *failure* of representation, the *absence* of concepts adequate to the lived experience of simultaneous oppression(s), and the *inadequacy* of both hegemonic and critical discourses to represent the material conditions of Black women's lives. If anything, intersectionality is a critique of hegemonic politics of representation and how these are reproduced in contestatory discourses such as antiracism and feminism.

Evelien Geerts and Iris van der Tuin advance a similar New Materialist critique of intersectionality. In an iteration of the "infinite regress" critique discussed above, they claim that the "intersectional model could lead to an endless proliferation of identities composed of ceaselessly intersecting categories"; "intersectionality's politics of representation leads to relativism," and it is therefore, according to the authors, defensible only on moral, and not on theoretical, grounds (2013, 172). The mainstreaming of intersectionality is explained with reference to its supposed allegiance to feminist standpoint theory (172) but is also credited to the "similarities between feminist postmodernism and intersectional theories," and specifically to Butler (174). The "blind spot" of intersectionality, they contend, is "representationalism," in whose "logic" "intersectional theory still . . . appears to fully embedded" (174). Specifically, the authors allege that intersectionality constructs "subjects such as Black women as being restricted by the hegemonic discourse, though they themselves claim to be able to see through it" (174). In addition to locating the scholar in an epistemically privileged, extra-discursive position, Geerts and van der Tuin accuse intersectionality of lacking "a profound analysis of power and its affected subjects" and of relying on "easy assumptions about the workings of power" that view it as a "purely restrictive force, leading to the under-theorization of the ambiguity of intersectional subjects' agency" (175). Here they draw on Wendy Brown's assessment of intersectionality (and of women-of-color feminist constructs more generally) as well as Puar's "assemblage critique" to argue that "intersectional analyses in general tend to be self-defeating since they cannot but analyze the intersectional subject in a split manner, falling back to the same bifurcated models they wish to criticize" (176; see W. Brown 1997; Puar 2007). This is a rendition of the "reinscription" critique, but one that seems disconnected from intersectionality as a body of knowledge originating in Black feminist thought. Indeed, the emphasis of intersectionality on making visible the invisibility of multiply oppressed groups such as Black women is taken to mean by Geerts and van der Tuin that "the experiences of oppressed subjects who are also partially privileged disappear, which turns intersectional theory into a rather defeatist theory of victimization" (2013, 175). If "intersectionality" is hardly recognizable in the two critiques I have surveyed, perhaps it is because of New Materialism's more general reading practices, which have been critiqued by Sara Ahmed as tendentious. Ahmed focuses on New Materialism's characterization of feminist theory as "anti-biological" inasmuch as it is committed to social constructionism (2008, 24). This "false and reductive history of feminist engagement with biology, science, and materialism shapes the contours" and invests with novelty a field that is "often represented as a gift to feminism in its refusal to be prohibited by feminism's prohibitions" (24). If Ahmed is correct that "such a gesture . . . become[s] foundational" (24) of New Materialism, we can discern similar moves in Dolphijn and van der Tuin's and Geerts and van der Tuin's respective critiques and "rewritings" of intersectionality.

THE ASSEMBLAGE CRITIQUE

Perhaps the most influential critique of intersectionality has been articulated by Jasbir Puar, in two installments approximately five years apart: initially in her 2007 monograph *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, and revised and elaborated in her 2012 article "I Would Rather Be a Cyborg Than a Goddess: Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory." Indeed, Patrick Grzanka characterizes Puar as one of "intersectionality's most committed critics" (2014, xvii). In *Terrorist Assemblages*, Puar practices an interpretative method comparable to an "intersectional" method described by Mari Matsuda as "asking the other question": "When I see something that looks racist, I ask: 'Where is the patriarchy in this?' When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, 'Where is the heterosexism in this?' When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, 'Where are the class interests in this?'" (1991, 1189). As a point of entry into her project, Puar asks, "What is terrorist about the queer?" and, "the more salient and urgent question," in her view, "What is queer about the terrorist?" (2007, xxiii), in order to show how "queerness is always already installed in the project of naming of the terrorist" (xxiv). She introduces the concept of homonationalism (building on Lisa Duggan's "homonormativity"), which is framed by the biopolitical notions of "sexual exceptionalism," "regulatory queerness," and the "ascendancy of whiteness" in LGBTQI discourses, which "act as an interlocking nexus of power grids that map the various demarcations of race, gender, class, nation and religion that permeate constructions of terror and terrorist bodies" (xxiv). Sexual exceptionalism refers to the nationalist self-representation of the United States as inclusive and tolerant of sexual and gender minorities in contrast to what are constructed in its imaginary as "perverse, improperly hetero- and homo-Muslim sexualities" (xxiv). Regulatory queerness traces the projection of homophobia and transphobia onto minoritized Muslim populations by Western European states and LGBTQI nongovernmental organizations alike, which lead to calls to control, limit, or prevent the extension of residency and citizenship rights to Muslim migrants and communities (xxiv). The ascendancy of whiteness within "a global political economy of queer sexualities" is the controlling image of LGBTQI subjectivities

which "coheres whiteness as a queer norm and straightness as a racial norm" (xxiv).

It is in this context that Puar at once acknowledges her "reliance upon" and appeals to "intersectional approaches," but she also concludes the argument in the book with a critique of the "limitations of feminist and queer (and queer of color) theories of intersectionality" (2007, 206). Through this critique she motivates the argument for a "queer" shift from intersectionality to assemblage (211)—although at times she also suggests that the concepts simply do different kinds of theoretical work and therefore "must remain as interlocutors in tension" (213). Her objection to intersectionality, which she interprets as a model of identity, is threefold. First, it assumes a metaphysics of presence and an "unrelenting epistemological will to truth" "stabilizing . . . identity across space and time" (215, 212). Second, the intersectional model "presumes that components—race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion—are separate analytics and can thus be disassembled" (212). These first two critiques are renditions of what I have characterized as the "reinscription" critique and the "mutual exclusion" critique. Her third objection, building on these two, is that intersectionality constitutes a "tool of diversity management and a mantra of liberal multiculturalism" and that it "colludes with the disciplinary apparatus of the state—census, demography, racial profiling, surveillance" in that it hems in and controls "difference," "encasing" it "within a structural container that simply wishes the messiness of identity into a formulaic grid" (212). Like the New Materialist critics surveyed above, inspired by Gilles Deleuze (from whom she draws the titular concept of "assemblage"), Puar contrasts intersectionality, which she constructs as a representationalism that "privileges naming, visuality, epistemology, representation and meaning," with assemblage, which, although "ontological," "tactile," and "affective," somehow escapes or explodes representation (215). Yet the claim that intersectionality attempts a representation of identity functions as an assumption, and it is not textually supported in Puar's argument. Indeed, Crenshaw's description of political intersectionality suggests that the intersection of categories of "race" and "gender" refuses visibility, knowability, naming, and representation to multiply

oppressed subjects. What is made visible is their sociolegal erasure, and what is made present is their constitutive absence: "Black women are caught between ideological and political currents that combine first to create and then to bury Black women's experiences" (1989, 160). Indeed, intersectionality reveals that Black women's experiences are systemically rendered uncognizable and unrepresentable in oppositional discourses of political contestation and in hegemonic discourses of political legitimation. Moreover, constructing Black feminism as colluding with what is, in the final analysis, a white-supremacist, necropolitical (and not merely a "disciplinary") state apparatus, Puar fails to distinguish between generative Black feminist production and the appropriation and commodification of the products of that intellectual labor in the process of intersectionality's absorption by academics occupying discursively privileged enunciatory locations in elite private and state institutions.

In her article that responds to "anxieties" raised by her "apparent prescription to leave intersectionality behind (as if one could)," Puar elaborates on the politics of assemblages and revisits her critique of intersectionality (2012, 50). Here she performs a reading of Crenshaw's "formative" work, but not with the aim of "evaluating the limits and potentials of intersectionality for the sake of refining" it; rather, she proposes how intersectionality and assemblage "might be thought together" (51). Here she restates her objection to intersectionality as presupposing a metaphysics of presence and suggests that its theoretical sway is garnered by its commitment to "representational politics" (55). Puar glosses Crenshaw's intervention as an attempt to "rethink . . . identity politics from within" (51), but she moves quickly to discuss the "theory of intersectionality" in general terms (52). She does concede that "as a metaphor, intersectionality is a more porous paradigm than the standardization of method inherent to a discipline has allowed it to be" (59). To the "theory of intersectionality" she attributes the following two precepts. First, "all identities are lived and experienced as intersectional": "all subjects are intersectional whether or not they recognize themselves as such" (52). Second, she identifies as "'a key feature . . . decentering the normative subject of feminism'" (52, quoting Brah and Phoenix

2004). Not only has intersectionality failed to displace white women as normative subjects of feminist inquiry and politics, but given "the changed geopolitics of reception (one that purports to include rather than exclude difference)," intersectionality may even have become "an alibi for the re-centering of white liberal feminists" (53–54). Indeed, intersectionality produces women of color as the Other of feminism, still embedded in a gender foundationalism, due to its territorialization by white women (52). Puar is highly critical of attempts to situate intersectionality in a "discrete" genealogy of Black feminist thought, claiming that granting Black feminism generative status "might actually obfuscate" the variety of interpretations and deployments of intersectionality in Black and women-of-color feminisms (52). Tracing how intersectionality has traveled from the United States, where the concept arose from social-movement discourses, to western, central, and northern Europe, where the uptake of intersectionality is occurring in the insular and depoliticized space of the white-dominated academy, Puar observes that on both sides of the Atlantic," the language of intersectionality, its very invocation, it seems, largely substitutes for intersectional analysis itself" (53). While lucidly critical about the politics of race in European feminisms engaged with intersectionality, at another moment she chastises intersectional scholars for failing to "come into dialogue" with New Materialists (not exclusively, but largely developed in the Continental European context) who are "convinced of the non-representational referent of 'matter itself,'" observing that "there has yet to be a serious interrogation of how these theories on matter and mattering might animate conceptualizations of intersectionality" (55–56). The weaknesses of New Materialism in theorizing racism, "race," and racialization are not addressed; neither is the insularity and detachment of this feminist theoretical school from social movements. Puar goes on to argue that it is not clear that the "categories privileged by intersectional analysis" can or should "traverse national and regional boundaries," since this travel may constitute still another instance of epistemological (re)colonization: to the extent that the "cherished categories" of interesectionality "are the products of modernist colonial agendas and regimes of epistemic violence," the global travel of intersectionality may signal

the imposition of "a Western/Euro-American epistemological formation through which the notion of discrete identity has emerged" (54; see chapter 6). Yet New Materialism, which, in at least some instances advocates a return to "biology" as the disparaged term of feminist social constructionism (see Ahmed 2008), must also tarry with the modern/colonial legacies of biological determinism in constituting scientific racisms, rationalizing slavery economies, and perpetrating genocidal reproductive politics, among other violences, epistemic and material, that subtend Eurocolonial modernity.

The central criticism Puar develops against intersectionality concerns its commitment to a metaphysics of presence, and specifically its failure to engage critically with the normative construct of the subject, even as it seeks recognition, representation, and redress for subjects in legal and oppositional terms. Drawing a contentious distinction between disciplinary societies and control societies, she maps intersectionality—which, she claims, asserts a liberal politics of inclusion to restore to visibility excluded subjects through resignification and identity interpellation—onto the former and assemblage onto the latter. In societies of control, she claims, bodies are "modulate[d]" as "matter . . . through affective capacities and tendencies"—except for those that continue to be subjected to disciplinary and punitive forms of power that may even culminate in premature death (2012, 63). Although Puar advocates a synthesis of intersectionality and assemblage to theorize the "relations between discipline and control" (63), the conceptual segregation of these forms of power as targeting differentiated populations fails to contend seriously with the manner in which necropolitical and biopolitical regimes actually articulate each other, and with the possibility that intersectionality actually has more to do with the way white-supremacist and heteropatriarchal power is reproduced than with the way Black women's identities are constituted in this matrix.

Indeed, the basement metaphor illustrates how biopolitical power, which confers recognition and exalts subjects whose identity claims become legible through their hold on whiteness and masculinity, crucially depends upon and reproduces the necropolitical structure of the basement. The image of bodies stacked on top of each other, feet standing on shoulders, evokes a horrific spatialized experience of captivity that resonates with the racialized violence of historical practices of slavery: like the physical entrapment of people abducted and forcibly transported on slave ships from west Africa over the Atlantic, the basement evokes "the topographies of cruelty" (Mbembe 2003, 40) that characterize transatlantic slavery and its aftermath in contemporary configurations of global white supremacy. Reading the basement metaphor through Achille Mbembe's analysis of the spatialization of necropower in early modern and late modern colonialism—a process Mbembe calls "territorialization" (Mbembe 2003, 25)—can guard against the "flattening" of Black feminist geographies through their incorporation in neoliberal imperatives of diversity management.

Puar continues her critique of intersectionality in a more recent piece, where her concern is how the "the intersectional subject gets tokenized or manipulated as a foil such that the presence of this subject actually then prohibits accountability toward broader alliances," in "a gestural intersectionality that can perform a citational practice of alliance without actually doing intersectional research or analyses" (2014, 78). Here she reiterates her construction of intersectionality as "isolating" categories of analysis as "separate and distinct conceptual entities" that only come to "intersect . . . at specific overlaps" (78). The problem with this rendition of the "mutual exclusivity" critique is not that her characterization of intersectionality does not obtain; it is that Puar fails to distinguish between the various deployments of intersectionality in order to motivate her claim of a difference in kind between intersectionality and assemblage, which a close reading of Crenshaw's texts makes it difficult to sustain. That is not to dismiss the critique Puar advances or to suggest that it is entirely without merit. On the contrary, I find Puar's interrogation of the travels and travails of a mainstreamed, whitewashed intersectionality suggestive and challenging as an opening to neo-intersectional engagements that restore its provisionality: thus it is worth dwelling on the following question that Puar poses: "What is a poststructuralist theory of intersectionality that might address liberal multicultural and 'post-racial' discourses of inclusion that destabilise the [woman of color] as a mere enabling prosthetic to white feminists?" (2012, 54).

THE POST-INTERSECTIONAL CRITIQUE

Like the "New Materialism" critique and the "assemblage" critique, the "post-intersectional" critique, advanced largely within the legal academy, draws on a critique of identity (which in some but not all cases is a post-identitarian critique) in order to argue for the supplanting of intersectionality with some other model or metaphor of categorial complexity. Post-intersectional critics proffer "new complexity theories" or "multidimensionality theories" which they argue transcend the conceptual limitations of the intersectionality model (Hutchinson 2002, 433; see Hutchinson 2001). They contend that "multidimensionality is a natural progression of the powerful analysis first deployed by intersectionality theorists" (2002, 439). These scholars generally acknowledge a theoretical debt to intersectionality, but they take themselves to be departing from it in a number of "substantive" ways (434). First, they introduce "sexual identity and heterosexism," a "serious interrogation" of which they argue is lacking in intersectional scholarship (434). Second, they assert the "universality of complex identity" and contest the claim, which they attribute to intersectionality, that only multiply oppressed groups occupy social locations at the intersections of axes of power (436). For instance, Nancy Ehrenreich introduces the concept of "hybrid intersectionality" to describe partially oppressed/partially privileged subjects (2002). This move, argues Darren Hutchinson, "places multidimensionality on a substantially different terrain than intersectionality, for it permits a more contextualized analysis of privilege and subordination" (2002, 436). The claim is that intersectional scholars' "singular focus on 'women of color'" disenables the "positional shift" from multiple oppression to multidimensionality as a general theorization of identity (437). Moreover, Hutchinson argues that multidimensionality gets beyond zero-sum constructions of oppression and privilege, enabling an examination of how Black heterosexual men (along with LGBTQI Black people) "have endured a history of 'sexualized racism'" that cannot be conceptualized if it is assumed that they enjoy privilege on the axes of maleness and heterosexuality (437). Conversely, by exposing the "hybrid intersectionality" of relatively privileged subgroups, multidimensionality precludes the self-representation of these groups as

"uncomplicated and singular," or their disavowal of the way in which their experiences are inflected—in ways that benefit them and in ways that harm them—by multiple systems of oppression and privilege (438). A further claim is that multidimensionality moves from the level of identity to the systemic level to reveal how "systems of domination are mutually reinforcing" (438).

A focal point in the development of the post-intersectionality discourse within legal theory was the publication of Nancy Ehrenreich's 2002 article "Subordination and Symbiosis: Mechanisms of Mutual Support between Subordinating Systems," which argues that intersectional identitarians have stepped back from realizing the full implications of their analysis, namely, that it may be "impossible to eliminate one form of subordination without attacking the entire edifice of interlocking oppressions" (2002, 255). To move the analysis of subordination forward, Ehrenreich develops a "taxonomy" of mechanisms through which "interconnection" between systems is effected (256). In this analysis, she centers on "'singly burdened' individuals" who "simultaneously occupy positions of privilege and subordination, such as white women" (256). These groups face what she calls "hybrid intersectionality," an analysis of which reveals how systems of subordination sustain one another (257). Introducing the concept of "compensatory subordination," Ehrenreich challenges the assumption that "privilege" delivers an "unadulterated benefit" to singly burdened individuals and may instead act as a "double-edged sword," serving to "sustain and reinforce" their subordination (257). The metaphor of "symbiosis" is presented to illuminate the "mutually beneficial connection" among systems of subordination, and three mechanisms give content to this metaphor to show how these systems reinforce each other: first, the exclusion of certain members of groups in the construction of group interests; second, the exposure of vulnerable groups to subordination; and third, the obfuscation of the nature and sources of subordination (258).

Ehrenreich enumerates four objections to what she perceives as the "logical conclusions" of intersectional analyses, which "combine together to raise serious questions about the viability of identity theory" (2002, 271): first, the "zero sum problem: the apparent substantive conflict

among the interests of different subgroups that seems to make it impossible to simultaneously further the interests of all"; second, the "infinite regress problem: the tendency of all identity groups to split into ever-smaller subgroups," until the only "coherent category" that remains is the individual; third, the "battle of oppressions problem"—"a rhetorical war over which group is worse off, which is most oppressed"—that results as a consequence of the first two problems; and finally, the "relativism problem" that arises concerning judgments about legitimacy claims to oppression if *all* subjects are simultaneously both "oppressor and oppressed" (267, 269). Indeed, Ehrenreich characterizes the "myth of equivalent oppressions" as "a harmful—although probably unintended—byproduct of intersectionality theory" (271).

Part of what Ehrenreich contests is the view that "women of color can represent white women," because the former experience a "pure" form of gender oppression uninflected by racial privilege (2002, 275). She attributes this claim to intersectionality, as well as the asymmetrical criticism that although white feminists have discursively arrogated this kind of representational power, their "hybrid" (as opposed to "pure") intersectional experiences are not universalizable to women of color (275). In this respect, Ehrenreich misses the asymmetry that obtains with respect to the "identity politics" of relatively privileged groups when compared to multiply oppressed groups. We saw in the earlier discussion of Crenshaw's basement analogy that efforts to redress a singular form of discrimination (inflected with and mobilizing privilege on other axes) actually serve to reproduce social hierarchy, while addressing multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously has the potential to uproot or dismantle the entire hierarchy (Crenshaw 1989, 151–52; CRC 1983; see chapter 2). This important asymmetry—rather than some territorial claim to a "pure" form of gender oppression—is what justifies, in part, the intersectional emphasis on women of color—in addition to, of course, the inherent value of eliminating discrimination against this multiply oppressed group whose interests, experiences, and liberation are marginalized within monistic social movements.

Instead, Ehrenreich centers—both in explicit, conscious ways and in ways perhaps less conscious—on the structural position of "hybrid" intersectional subjects, emphasizing how their failure to recognize how they are ultimately harmed by "divide-and-conquer tactics" serves to reinforce their own oppression (as well as reproduce that of others). For instance, Ehrenreich insists that we must focus on "the ways in which exclusion [of multiply oppressed subjects] works against the interests of the very group doing it, by reinforcing the very system it is trying to attack" (2002, 281). Yet ultimately, Ehrenreich claims, "the distinction between singly and doubly burdened individuals is admittedly artificial," since few people avoid experiencing "overlapping oppressions," and experiencing "privilege also (paradoxically) makes them vulnerable" (290). To the extent that Ehrenreich redefines privilege as a source of vulnerability to oppression, she constructs being oppressed on the basis of multiple identities and being oppressed on the basis of one as a distinction without a difference. The concept of "compensatory subordination" performs this maneuver in her argument.

Her first claim is that since privilege—and specifically the fear of losing it—can "deter resistance," those oppressed along one axis are less likely to challenge their subordination, despite the fact that the privilege they receive "usually makes it easier for them to resist their subordination" (2002, 291). As such, they can "come to accept their oppressed position along one axis in exchange for the privilege they experience along another" (291). While this may well be true, it is not clear that it serves to negate one's privilege to stay silent in the face of one's oppression; if it were the case that "acts of compensatory subordination actually exacerbate, rather than ameliorate, [one's] subordinated position" (293), would it be a hierarchy-climbing strategy on which many singly burdened individuals rely in a patterned way? Although, "in contending that privilege can harm the privileged," Ehrenreich disclaims the view that exercising privilege "somehow makes privilege less real," nevertheless she does insist that "compensatory subordination . . . is a trap . . . [that] harms the very individuals who are tempted to use it" (298); "the privilege individuals enjoy comes not just at the expense of another group, but at their own expense as well" (306). Part of the problem with the concept of compensatory subordination is that, as much as it critiques the zero-sum construction of privilege and oppression in intersectional approaches,

it replicates precisely this quantitative relation, but simply reverses its logic: If intersectional analyses suggest that "hybrid" subjects are harmed by oppression and benefited by privilege, Ehrenreich responds that they are harmed by privilege to the extent that it coaxes them into acceding to their oppression. On an epistemological or motivational level, then, they may be worse off than multiply oppressed "pure" intersectional subjects who do not harbor illusions about their subordination and are in no position to calculate costs against benefits. But the deeper issue is that the notion of multidimensionality preserves precisely those categorial distinctions between forms of oppression that intersectionality reveals to depend on the experiences of privileged group members. In order to claim—of white women, for instance—that "both their subordination and their dominant status are effectuated by the same set of stereotypes," Ehrenreich preserves while combining monistic categories of race and class—which confer privileges—and a monistic category of gender—which locates them low in "a gender hierarchy among whites" (308). While claiming that "it is very difficult to distill out any essence of gendered experience from these racialized and sexualized particularities," her analysis does just that, mobilizing unitary categories to arrive at the appearance of paradox between "a racial hierarchy" in which white women, for instance, are "dominant" and "a gender hierarchy in which [they] are subordinated" (309). Her account is an additive model manqué, with the value added of motivating the apparently paradoxical claim that one's "subordination is inextricably bound to [one's] privilege" (309).

In itself, this insight is important, but in my opinion, it appears in more phenomenologically grounded terms elsewhere (e.g., Moraga 1983). The notion that "singly burdened individuals" feel "invested" in "the hierarchies that privilege them" (1983, 313) is precisely what is demonstrated by Crenshaw's account of the sociolegal reproduction of hierarchy through remedial measures such as antidiscrimination law (1989, 151–52). Indeed, it is not clear that the "symbiotic perspective" overcomes with any greater or lesser success the problems it has constructed for intersectionality (Ehrenreich 2002, 316–20). As Carbado argues, the problem with post-intersectional (among other) critiques of intersectionality is that they tend to "artificially circumscribe the theoretical reach of intersectionality as a predicate to staging their own intervention" (2013, 816). For instance, as Sumi Cho points out, it is not clear that intersectionality cannot be mobilized to account for what Ehrenreich terms "hybrid identities," since it performs a critique of how intra- and intergroup politics constitute identities and their normative subjects (2013, 398). Addressing Athena Mutua's "multidimensional" approach to masculinity, Cho questions whether "the problem with intersectionality is that it has become a 'pink ghetto,' overly populated by feminists (mostly of color)"; in seeking to go beyond it, Mutua's argument implicitly "relies upon a demographic analysis of intersectionality's end users" (399; see Mutua 2013). Perhaps something similar can be argued with respect to Ehrenreich's conceptualization of hybrid versus pure intersectionality and the host of metaphors and concepts she devises to address the former. Here, the demographic divergence is one of racialized identity—intersectionality is "for" women of color, while symbiosis is "for" white women—and the rhetorical strategy seems to be to "appeal to dominant groups' sense of self-interest" in order to form "coalition[s] . . . strong enough to carry the day" (2002, 324). If white women feel alienated by intersectionality, the concepts of compensatory subordination, hybrid intersectionality, and symbiosis can reassure them back into positions of (ostensibly self-defeating) dominance.

Ehrenreich's glib construal of coalition—as motivated by the self-interest of dominant groups—gives me an opening to foreshadow the argument of the following chapter, which concerns the relationship of intersectionality—as a critique of categories of identity—to coalitions. Chapters 5 and 6 illuminate the normative questions that intersectionality engenders as a critique of social movements and of the reproduction of hierarchies of power within them. In this way, we come full circle to the origins of intersectionality in organizing by women of color against the systems of oppression and the forms of power that pervade our lives. Only now we turn our gaze forward to consider how intersectionality as a provisional concept can materialize a coalitional horizon of struggle.

The "ontological humility" that queerness represents for Muñoz may also guide a "queer" approach to intersectionality as a radically disorienting, provisional concept illuminating decolonial struggles for social justice (see chapters 3 and 6). Approaching intersectionality horizonally means restoring to it the provisionality of knowledge produced through contestations of the poisonous conditions structuring the present; it also means refusing the closure of "intersectionality" by positivisms that would only be satiated by epistemic totalization. If the horizon has been conflated with the cardinal directions imposed by the modern/colonial spatio-cultural mapping of the world, its violent bisection into "East" and "West," "North" and "South," it can also radically disrupt the perceptual hold such a worldview has on our lived experiences. The horizon is not a knowable "straight line" or a "self-naturalizing temporality" (Muñoz 2009, 25); to approach it as such is to lull oneself into the false comfort of cardinal certainty and to willfully ignore the violences of "zero-point" epistemologies. If the "hubris of the zero point" is to imagine oneself as occupying a non-place, inhabiting a "detached and neutral point of observation" from which "the knowing subject maps the world" (Mignolo 2009, 2), the horizon intrudes into this conceit by locating us in an embodied here and now. Seen queerly, the horizon can inspire and humble us; it will generously nourish our struggles for an "elsewhere" and an "otherwise," but it will always disappoint a desire for mastery. The horizon exceeds our reach, it interrupts our gaze, but it also plentifully welcomes our strivings. The "horizonal temporality of queerness" discloses "a path and a movement to a greater openness to the world" (Muñoz 2009, 25). The horizon is not beholden to us, but we are beholden to it. It calls on us at once to be humble and hopeful, both here and there, then and now, to remember and to imagine: it helps us make sense of, delight in, and mourn beginnings and endings and especially live utterly the twilight moments in between.

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