

horizon. In this horizontal framework, human experiences are ambiguously open.

The openness in the horizon of the gestaltian framework better accounts for the conditions Bhabha refers to as splitting. The ambivalence can be understood not simply as conundrums that defy understanding but as ambiguous moments for expanding, developing, and growing.

Keywords: ambivalence, ambiguity, Bhabha, Merleau-Ponty, horizon, becomings

Introduction

Homi Bhabha, in his book *The Location of Culture*, brings into sharp relief the experiences of third world subjects who reside in the first world as a result of the history of colonialism. He avoids the entrenched focus of race theory in the United States as characterized by the black and white divide and reorganizes race theory to include all racialized subjects—people who live in the United States, but whose body features do not represent this country.¹ In this way, Bhabha broadens the notion of racialized subjects to include Asian, Latin, and Native Americans.

Bhabha's work has gained much attention from numerous fields, most notably for our present concerns, Asian American Studies. He has been all but neglected by most philosophers. This is unfortunate; for his work, along with a growing body of literature in Asian American Studies, addresses some of the most provocative thinking on race theory. Bhabha draws from fields as varied as Marxism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and psychoanalysis to weave a rich philosophical analysis of the situations of racialized subjects. Outside the field of philosophy, his work has been most frequently cited in race theory. The *Location of Culture* draws upon the history and policies of racism in the West to depict the daily, immediate, and often quite inchoate experiences of racialized subjects. In contributing toward an understanding of the lived sense of race, philosophy of race may benefit from engaging Bhabha's work.

Bhabha describes the experiences of racialized subjects as so inchoate that he characterizes them as split. Utilizing this dialectic notion of splitting, Bhabha emphasizes how the lived quality of racialized subjects defies reason. This article focuses on a particular split, an ambivalent split.²

**POSTCOLONIAL
AMBIVALENCE AND
PHENOMENOLOGICAL
AMBIGUITY**

*Towards Recognizing Asian
American Women's Agency*

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Abstract

Homi Bhabha brings attention to the figure of the postcolonial metropolitan subject—a third world subject who resides in the first world. Bhabha describes the experiences of the “colonial” subject as ambivalently split. As much as his work is insightful, Bhabha's descriptions of the daily life of postcolonial metropolitan subjects as split and doubled is problematic. His analysis lends only to the possibility of these splittings/doublings as schizophrenically wholly arising. His analysis cannot account for the agonistic moments when the colonial subject is caught in not knowing, and in developing understanding about present circumstances.

A framework with an account of context and horizons, such as in phenomenology, can better depict the experiences of the postcolonial metropolitan subject. Maurice Merleau-Ponty follows a gestaltian contact with the world, which advances that the “most basic unit of experience is that of figure-on-a-background.” One perceives the figure/theme because of and within the background/

Ambivalence ascribes a psychological state marked by contradiction, when one is caught vacillating from one belief to the other, unable to resolve the contradiction. Psychoanalysis suggests that a person caught in ambivalence may cope with the contradiction by projecting onto someone else that which one despises in oneself. To be caught within the vacillations of ambivalence is debilitating.

Although the colonizers' project ambivalence onto the colonized—the colonized experience the ambivalent situation. They must live in the environment of ambivalence established by those in situations of power. Even under such difficult circumstances, Bhabha locates agency among racialized subjects. Racialized subjects recognize and at times utilize such moments of ambivalence. Bhabha's work carefully illustrates how, while the lives of racialized subjects are very much produced by the sociohistorical circumstances of colonialism, they nevertheless still exercise agency. Such an admirable (and appealing) illumination of agency may be the reason for the popularity of Bhabha's work.

Bhabha presents an enlightening analysis of the ambivalent experiences of racialized subjects. But his theoretical framework with its strong reliance on a dialectic framework and epistemology constrains his analysis. Within this article, I argue that ambivalence's related concept—ambiguity—can complicate and offer a way out of the vacillations of ambivalence. To make this contrast, I turn to psychoanalyst Melanie Klein's work because she introduced the notion of ambivalence with the notion of ambiguity. Maurice Merleau-Ponty draws from Klein's work to explain the difference between ambivalence and ambiguity as part of a greater project of phenomenologically addressing the situated context of being, of being-in-the-world and coming to know the world, especially others in the world. Ambiguity is the ability to see the other in her complexity, that the other can act compassionately in one instance, and participate in mean acts in another. Ambiguity resolves the contradictions that mire ambivalence. I suggest that an understanding of ambiguity better explains the agency that Bhabha locates among racialized subjects.

This argument is presented in three parts. The first part explains the notion of ambivalence and describes Bhabha's argument that the experiences of racialized subjects are marked by ambivalent splits. In the second part, I explore how ambivalence marks the present-day experiences of racialized subjects specifically Asian American women in a particular area of employment. This example is offered to confirm and to illustrate

Bhabha's analysis that such contradictory splits very much characterize the lives of racialized subjects in the United States. The third section, through Maurice Merleau-Ponty's article, "The Child's Relations with Others," clarifies the difference between ambivalent and ambiguous personalities. I want to bring these two authors together for their synthesis has clear benefits. Merleau-Ponty's project to understand the ontological and epistemic impact of human beings' situatedness speaks to, and could benefit from, Bhabha's focus on racialized subjects whose lives are so manifestly impacted by situatedness. Here specifically, ambiguity better explains the agency Bhabha locates among the racialized subjects' living in ambivalence after colonialism. I conclude by returning to the concrete example of employment practices in regards to Asian American women to explore ambiguity.

Postcolonial Ambivalence

Bhabha describes the lives of racialized subjects living in the West as rife with split, doubled experiences—experiences that have more than one meaning. Such moments of splitting or doubling cause extreme discomfort and consternation. At the same time, they serve as sites in which racialized subjects might possibly exercise agency and promote change by contesting prevailing meanings of subjects, culture, and nation.

Bhabha attributes ambivalent splits in the lives of racialized subjects. I turn to Merleau-Ponty's work here only because he provides a concise definition.³ Ambivalent splits refer to being/identifying and not being/not identifying at the same moment. From Klein's work, Merleau-Ponty explains, "Ambivalence consists in having two alternative images of the same object, the same person, without making any effort to connect them or to notice that in reality they relate to the same object and the same person."⁴ Ambivalence usually marks a stage in childhood, when children first reductively relegate that which they know and love including themselves as good and that which they do not know and fear as bad. Because of such simplistic totalizing characterizations of their world, the persistence of ambivalence evolves into contradiction because of the inability to resolve the disparate images. Instead of understanding how a generous person can at times be mean, children remain in a vacillating state; the person is wholly good at one point and wholly bad at another point. While ambivalence

prevails during childhood and develops especially within authoritarian family structures, Merleau-Ponty's analysis suggests that some adults continue to exhibit ambivalent personalities. Individuals who exhibit ambivalence, especially adults, demonstrate rigidity in their personalities. To deal with the contradictory images, the ambivalent personality projects and externalizes onto others those features of oneself that one finds shameful or hateful. For one to be good, others must be simply and unanimously bad. Merleau-Ponty writes that rigid personalities:

showed very strong racial and social prejudices—prejudices which . . . bear witness to a sort of interior schism between what the subjects admit and recognize in themselves and what they do not admit, do not recognize, and are unwilling to see in themselves. The latter traits are projected on external subjects who play a role of scapegoat; while, on the contrary, the subject appears in his own eyes as immune to the defects he finds in external groups.⁵

In other words, here is the familiar analysis that racism and sexism arise from the external projection of one's own internally despised and feared qualities. Merleau-Ponty explains that some of the more well known racist projections such as the myths of the Negroes' greater sexuality or the Jews' miserly reputation may be the results of ambivalence.⁶ He also acknowledges that Simone de Beauvoir's insightful analysis in regards to women—that women cannot reason because they cannot separate from their bodies, whereas men can reason because they can distance themselves from their bodies—models precisely the tendency toward dichotomy and the projection of a unidimensional image onto the other.

In addition to these well-known dichotomies, ambivalence expresses itself in unpredictable ways. One of the more interesting expressions of ambivalence occurs among people who profess, in a liberal fashion, the equality of all human beings. Here in the adamant claim to equality, ambivalence exposes itself in such expressions that no differences whatsoever, not even in the details of the lives of human beings, exist.⁷ These individuals express ambivalence not in a completely negative fashion, but by rigidly insisting on uniformity. Such a rigid view of the situations of all human beings forgoes truly understanding the very real function of race in the daily lives of racialized subjects.

Ambivalence influences perception. Ambivalence tends toward rigidly perceiving the world dichotomously. Merleau-Ponty explains that "psychologically rigid subjects could be expected to show . . . a sort of perceptual rigidity. . . . They would have a tendency to refer any new experience of a different type that might be presented to them back to already familiar experiences."⁸ Similarly, such ambivalence surfaces in emotions and in intellectual development. Ambivalence forecloses the free association of ideas—an important indicator of intelligence.

Bhabha focuses on the systematic production, structure and maintenance of ambivalence in society. In other words, he is concerned with the *propagation* of ambivalence as knowledge. In Foucaultian spirit, Bhabha demonstrates a suspicion of knowledge claims, particularly because of the very real possibility that ambivalence may have participated in the formation of such knowledge claims. To appreciate his suspicion, let me describe his understanding of epistemology. Bhabha summarizes epistemology as endeavors toward making the "natural" or the "real" transparent.⁹ He argues that such transparency has been understood as possible "under the false appearance of the present", the semantic seems to prevail over the syntactic, the signified over the signifier."¹⁰ In other words, disregarding history, concepts and language, epistemology falsely claims to reveal only the real materiality of the world. Rather, Bhabha argues that in such epistemological efforts at "transparency is the action of the distribution and arrangement of differentiated spaces, positions, knowledges in relation to each other, relative to a discriminatory, not inherent, sense of order."¹¹ Bhabha writes that epistemological efforts structure that which they claim to reveal and hide as much as they reveal about the world. Such epistemological claims to revealing truth rely upon forgetting its origins in contestation and political construction.

In contrast to such epistemological endeavors, Bhabha highlights the linguistic difficulty in which the sign structures the appearance of the signified. Bhabha writes of "enunciations" to argue that epistemological "articulations" never fully escape the context, which produces such claims to knowledge. Bhabha speaks of "enunciations" to highlight the function of language by reinscribing each articulation in endeavors to know as a speech event. The structure of language hides, reveals and implicates itself in attempts to gain knowledge about the world. Enunciations, far from claiming to make the world transparent, reveal how the confines of

existing knowledge systems—including the very language—produce such knowledge claims. Bhabha insists that language is far from neutral.¹²

The event of enunciating cultural difference reveals ambivalence in its claims to be descriptive, for it, more often than not, simultaneously produces cultural differences and authorizes the cultural supremacy of the speaker's culture. Bhabha explains that "the meaning of the utterance is quite literally neither the one nor the other. This ambivalence is emphasized when we realize that there is no way that the content of the proposition will reveal the structure of its positionality; no way can that context be mimetically read off from the content."¹³ Epistemological articulations of cultural difference do not reveal the context within which such descriptions are spoken, written and forwarded as true. The context of the enunciation would reveal the role and function of the speaker, the author. Is he the administrator of a colonizing nation? Is he a diplomat of a country beckoning for his countrymen to resist colonizing forces? Is she a scholar working to disentangle historical narratives? Clearly the articulation of cultural difference by each of these personages would present a distinctive and specific picture of the culture. The descriptions may not even be recognizable to each other! As such, Bhabha finds most informative the context of efforts to come to know. Questioning the authoritative claims of epistemology, Bhabha's focus on enunciations, especially enunciations of cultural difference, reveals the ambivalence within the very knowledge claims held by society.

Bhabha provides two illustrative examples of the production of ambivalent knowledge. First, Edward Said's book *Orientalism* demonstrates that while the Orientalists claimed a synchronic narrative about their study, they unwittingly produced a diachronic narrative. Knowledge about the Orient did not simply result from the manifest present pursuit of knowledge, but from the persistent latent projection of dreams, images, fantasies et al of the Orientalists.¹⁴ Clearly such knowledge can only be ambivalent. Second, recall the famous moment in Frantz Fanon's text *Black Skins White Masks* when a colleague confidentially informs Fanon that he is not one of them, one of the other blacks. Fanon writes of being told "you're a doctor, a writer, a student, you're *different*, you're one of *us*."¹⁵ Clearly this colleague believes that blacks are not doctors, writers and students, and furthermore, that only whites can be doctors, writers, and students. Only with such a simplistic, reductive view of blacks and whites—a view that can only have originated from the projection of one's own fears, from a state of ambivalence—can

he draw the conclusion that Fanon is white. The projection need not be the confidant's; the confidant may simply be repeating existing knowledge claims with all its ambivalence intact. Bhabha describes this moment as "that ambivalent use of 'different'—to be different from those that are different makes you the same."¹⁶ Such invitations to identify with "us" who are not black, who are white do not simply illustrate "a neat division; [they involve] a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once that makes it impossible for the devalued . . . to accept the colonizer's invitation to identity."¹⁷ The confidant exhibits distaste for Fanon's race while attempting to compliment him by offering an alternative understanding of his identity. Fanon is and is not superior to other blacks at the same time; Fanon is and is not white. It is worth noting that the confidant unilaterally exercises the power to confer and not to confer white identity. Obviously Fanon cannot independently exercise this power—exhibiting yet another sense, the ambivalence of the invitation to identify with the white colleague. Apparently, the invitation does not include all the privileges in tow.

Because of the production and propagation of such ambivalent knowledge mostly by the colonizers about racialized subjects that ambivalence marks the daily experiences of racialized subjects. Bhabha's work brings to sharp focus these experiences that clearly startle postcolonial subjects. It is because his work illuminates these moments, with this quality in the daily life of racialized subjects, that I find his work important. Most interestingly, Bhabha locates possible contestation of ambivalent knowledge by the racialized subjects nestled here within these moments of ambivalence. Yet he does not explain how such contestation arises. How should the subject of enunciation react? What is the appropriate response in such moments of ambivalence? Bhabha recognizes that agency lies here, but he does not analyze its form and source. He leaves agency insufficiently explained. I suspect that Bhabha understands the source of agency as open-ended. I must agree that the source of agency must remain open-ended particularly because racialized subjects exercise this agency in surprising ways, confusing, and at times mocking colonial authority. Yet I do find the conceptual need for more closely isolating the source of this agency, especially if racialized subjects are to understand how one breaks through the overwhelming influence of ambivalence. For the vacillations of ambivalence in its inability to resolve contradictions leaves one in a debilitated state, forced to continuously repeat the vacillation. In Bhabha's last chapter, entitled

"How Newness Enters the World," and in his short references throughout the book to boundaries, borderlines, contingency, and liminal spaces as the sites for contestation—he exhibits a desire to grasp these emancipatory possibilities.¹⁸

Ambivalent Knowledge and Hiring Practices

Let me be clear, I think Bhabha accurately describes the ambivalence that racialized subjects experience. For although legal, institutional and social efforts at nondiscrimination of racialized subjects are manifest; such manifestations are clearly fraught with ambivalence in practice. In the trenchant difficulties of addressing both a racialized and a gendered identity, and the complicated ways in which these features are pivoted against each other, ambivalence precisely captures the treatment of people of color. To illustrate my point, I concentrate on an example that concerns Asian American women.¹⁹

In Karen Hossfeld's fascinating article, "Hiring Immigrant Women: Silicon Valley's 'Simple Formula,'" she describes the hiring practices in Silicon Valley for the assembly of circuit boards in the semiconductor industry from 1982 to 1990. Contrary to the image of Silicon Valley as technologically advanced, a quarter (50,000–70,000) of the production-related work comprises of "semiskilled operative jobs."²⁰ Among these workers, 68–90 percent are women, and 50–75 percent are minority workers, the majority of whom come from Mexico, Vietnam, the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan.²¹ Approximately 75 percent of management explicitly stated that they prefer Asian immigrant women.²²

In interviewing the hiring management for these jobs, Hossfeld reports on the unsolicited "moral legitimization" given by the management personnel.²³ She quotes a white male hiring supervisor, "I have a very simple formula for hiring. You hire right, and managing takes care of itself. Just three things I look for in hiring: small, foreign and female."²⁴ Clearly he expresses pride in possessing such insight about his hiring needs. As another manager states, this understanding of the working abilities of Asian immigrant women was based on their "relatively small size" that "makes it easier for them to sit quietly for long periods of time, doing small detail work that would drive a large person like [him] crazy."²⁵ Management justifies these hiring policies and the associated pay with claims that Asian women have

"poverty management skills" and exclamations that "these people from Third World countries really are incredible: they're so resourceful! I have this one woman who works for me—she's Filipino, or from somewhere around there—and she supports three kids and her parents on \$5.65 an hour."²⁶ Ambivalence clearly characterizes these statements in their claims to know that all Asian immigrant women possess this ability to sit still for long periods of time and to be financially frugal. The admiration of detail work and "poverty management skills" does not depict a desire to emulate these skills. In addition to the question of truth in the claim that all "small, foreign, and female" subjects possess these skills, surely such "compliments" are not sources of pride and cannot be taken without disdain. This particular essentializing piece of knowledge reflects the prevailing stereotypical knowledge about Asian Americans in general; they are diligent, hard working and fastidious but not leaders or visionaries. For these women the dominance of such ambivalent knowledge influences their employment, their opportunities to make a living—a very important area of life indeed.

This ambivalent knowledge, which both disparagingly essentializes while concomitantly expressing patronizing admiration for Asian immigrant women, has further repercussions when juxtaposed with African American workers as the more undesirable workers in this circumstance. The model minority myth encourages divisions among minority groups. The Silicon Valley management justifies not hiring African Americans and not building factories within predominately African American neighborhoods by arguing that unlike Asian immigrant women, African Americans arrive to work late, exhibit greater turnover rates, and because blacks "have lived here longer, they know how to scam better. . . . They don't need to get regular jobs in order to survive."²⁷ Hossfeld argues that her data and the companies' data do not support the first two reasons. I will not deign to comment on the last justification. In events like the Los Angeles riots, history exhibits the mixed benefits of gaining employment through antagonistically positioning African and Asian Americans. Ambivalence very much features in the lives of Asian female immigrants in the United States today.

Phenomenological Ambiguity

In appreciating Bhabha's work on ambivalence, I am surprised that he makes no mention throughout his book of its related phenomenon of

ambiguity.²⁸ Bhabha's analysis aptly portrays the ambivalence in the lives of racialized subjects and why their daily lives have a felt split quality; but this does not subsequently entail that ambivalence forever persists. As earlier stated, the psychoanalyst Klein introduced the notion of ambivalence with the notion of ambiguity. Understanding the psychological function of ambiguity illuminates how one need not remain perpetually in a state of ambivalence. Ambivalence's other, ambiguity, might explain how racialized subjects do not passively accept such ambivalent knowledge and instead find means to play with, if not make messy, this knowledge. This play, and the chaos and confusion play produces, may better explain the development of agency.

I return to Merleau-Ponty's article "The Child's Relations with Others" to explore ambiguity. As earlier explained, children most often exhibit the dichotomousness of ambivalence. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty explains, "ambiguity is an adult phenomenon, a phenomenon of maturity. . . . It consists in admitting that the same being who is good and generous can also be annoying and imperfect. Ambiguity is ambivalence that one dares to look at face to face."²⁹ With ambivalence, one cannot see more than one image of a person at one time, whereas with ambiguity, one can project alternative images onto one person at the same time.³⁰ Ambiguity permits seeing the other as complex with multiple and at times incongruous features. Unlike ambivalence, ambiguity and its ability to recognize complexity promotes the free association of ideas—a marker of intellectual ability. Merleau-Ponty writes that "one can say that a very strong emotional ambivalence shows up, at the level of understanding or perception, as a very weak ambiguity in the things perceived or in the subject's ideas of them. . . . Emotional ambivalence is what demands the denial of intellectual ambiguity."³¹ But more than ambiguity's association with intellectual development, ambiguity in its ability to see and play with complexity can free one from the vacillations of ambivalence, to act in the world.

For race theorists, much of this distinction between ambivalence and ambiguity probably sounds very familiar. As earlier acknowledged, most of this analysis mirrors the prevailing understanding of racism: psychological proclivities (in this case, ambivalence) promote racism; racism essentializes the other by projecting onto the other what one finds repulsive in oneself. To Merleau-Ponty's credit, he goes beyond this analysis. He ascribes openness to ambivalent personalities in the expression of their ambivalence. A simple and direct causal relationship between possessing an ambivalent

personality and the tendency toward projecting away one's own despised features by externalizing a unidimensional picture of others does not exist. That is, "there is always a relation between these two domains, but it is not always that of a single relation of analogy. There are subjects who, although psychologically rigid, *compensate* for that rigidity by great flexibility in the perceptual domain."³² Possessing an ambivalent tendency does not inevitably predict that one will perceive, will emotionally develop, and will intellectually comprehend the world only ambivalently. Openness—the possibility of developing ambiguity—resides here between one's psychological tendency, and the expression or development of this tendency. Hence, although Merleau-Ponty explains that a relation exists between the psychological tendency and the perception, emotion and intellectual ability of the person, he also specifies that these associations are not determinate. Growing out of ambivalence and developing ambiguous ways of being in the world marks maturity. Even children who possess a tendency toward ambivalence still exhibit openness in their expressions of ambivalence. Merleau-Ponty insists an openness resides in the child's responses and creative interpretations of the givens of the world. He writes that

the question of a causal sequence of the two phenomena is *meaningless*. For it to be meaningful would require that the two phenomena be capable of standing in isolation. But this is never the case. . . . It is as though there is in the child a sort of elasticity that sometimes makes him react to the influences of his surroundings by finding his own solutions to the problems they pose.³³

Merleau-Ponty provides an understanding of the creative expressions for both enforcing and countering racism. His reading of ambivalence illustrates that even with rigid tendencies, human beings can existentially draw from the givens of the world, to transform the necessary influence of ambivalence into the contingency of ambiguous expressions that compensate for the rigidity. Human expressions can challenge the reductive and totalizing attribution of certain meanings to specific features of the body. Merleau-Ponty's position against the determinateness of ambivalence illustrates that ambivalence has a relationship with ambiguity. One can compensate for ambivalence; one need not remain in the debilitating position of vacillating in ambivalence. One still possesses the ability to perceive, comprehend and choose meaning.

That ambiguity and ambivalence express themselves in surprising ways is consistent with the body of Merleau-Ponty's work in phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty's work focuses on openness. His phenomenology insists that knowledge and experiences arise from negotiations between the intentions of the subjects and the givens of the world. Arising from situatedness, knowledge remains incomplete. Merleau-Ponty writes that complete, certain, infinite contact with the world and others, "exceeds perceptual experience . . . as the notion of a *universe*, that is to say, a completed and explicit totality."³⁴ Far from the coincidence between thought and our endeavors to know the world and other members of the world, "experience imposes non-coincidence as a matter of principle."³⁵ Knowledge of ourselves and its concomitant knowledge of others transcend our consciousness and we remain immanent unto ourselves. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology centrally situates the role of the openness of ambiguity in our personal development and reactions to others. He writes that "ambiguity is of the essence of human existence, and everything we live or think has always several meanings. . . . Thus there is in human existence a principle of indeterminacy . . . it is the very process whereby the hitherto meaningless takes on meaning."³⁶

Conclusion

How does ambiguity complicate Bhabha's work on ambivalence? I do not introduce ambiguity to dismiss Bhabha's analysis. For as I corroborate with the example of hiring practices, I find enlightening his depictions of the immediate experiences of racialized subjects in the West as characterized by ambivalent splits. Living in a society that has developed such reductive, totalizing knowledge about racialized subjects—ambivalence cannot but function as a central experience in the lives of racialized subjects.

Hence I feel the need to heed Bhabha's suspicion about epistemology in its claim to innocently and simply reveal the world. He convincingly insists on the importance of the context of knowledge production. As Said's work demonstrates, many of those involved in the knowledge making process are not free from the influences of their own psychological states and are not free from prevailing social knowledge or ignorance. Poignantly, following Bhabha's focus on the context of knowledge production, knowledge producers may be under the influences of their own ambivalent tendencies and the desire to gain distance from despised aspects of

themselves. But I find unpalatable his reliance solely upon concepts such as "enunciations." A focus on linguistic performances does not sufficiently illuminate the very real social, embodied and situated state of being in the world. More importantly, a focus on enunciations suggests that Bhabha ultimately reneges any possibility of ever, in any small way, knowing others and the world. If all knowledge is simply speech events, can we claim to know anything at all about the world, especially human relations? In place of such an enfeebling position, turning to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological framework can account for Bhabha's suspicions about the context of knowledge production. More importantly, phenomenology accommodates, ontologically and epistemologically, how knowledge of the world is still possible even as the world transcends us and we remain immanent onto ourselves. Phenomenology systematically addresses the difficult task of working to know the world even as situated in the world. Endeavors to know the world may always remain endeavors, but this does not relegate us to never knowing the world at all.

I suspect it is the philosophical framework that Bhabha utilizes that constrains his analysis. This may account for why he neglects ambiguity in his analysis. Ambiguity better depicts the possibility of agency. I find appealing Bhabha's careful portrayal of challenges to colonization, demonstrating that colonialism although horrendous is not thoroughly crippling, is an appealing feature of his work. Bhabha un-buries these contestatory moments in history but he does not explain them.

To illustrate how ambiguity explains these moments when racialized subjects challenge the ambivalence they experience, I return to the hiring practices in Silicon Valley for some signs that the employees do not unambiguously share in the ambivalent knowledge held by the hiring personnel. Following good feminist praxis, Hossfeld carefully searches for agency in the reactions of the Asian immigrant women. Sadly, she admits that this particular group of workers does not join unions because many of them view these jobs as only temporary. The data does not validate this belief; among the women she interviewed, the majority held their jobs for more than two years. Nevertheless, Hossfeld points out that the workers do not share in the employers' beliefs about their talents. Employers may believe that Asian immigrant women's "small size" facilitates their ability "to sit quietly for long periods of time." To some extent, many believe in the correlation between size and ability to be sedentary. But at least one woman in expressing that "he preferred to hire physically small women because he could

then feel superior and intimidating, 'more like a big man,'³⁷ understood that such beliefs could result from the manager's projections. Additionally, all Asian Americans do not share in the notion of African Americans as undesirable workers in contrast to themselves as desirable ones. Hossfeld describes how, upon hearing about the availability of a position in the factory employing him, a Chinese American male recommended a friend who was like a brother. When the African American "brother" applied for the job the next day, the employer denied the existence of any positions.³⁸ Apparently all racialized subjects do not share in the ambivalent knowledge of African Americans as undesirable workers. At least one Asian American recognizes the differences among African Americans. Admittedly, this is an example of an act from an Asian American male, but I thought this noteworthy. (I am presuming that he does not regard all African Americans as his brothers.) I would like to provide some sign of ambiguity among the hiring personnel, but Hossfeld's article does not give one in the confines of her research.³⁹ These two examples illustrate that the ambivalent knowledge in this society pertaining to Asian Americans or African Americans is not completely, absolutely and thoroughly encompassing. One of the sad results of living in a society that propagates racist beliefs is that because such beliefs have the status of epistemic truth—even racialized subjects come to accept them. (Witness the number of Asian Americans who believe in the truth of the model minority theory.) Nevertheless, Hossfeld provides at least two moments when racialized subjects see through the dominant ambivalent knowledge to creatively understand the world, their abilities and their relationships. Such surprising reassessments of the circumstances of their lives form from the ability to recognize complexity and to freely and playfully associate ideas—a feature of ambiguity.

Bhabha's work illuminates the inchoate, split experiences of racialized subjects living under the auspices of ambivalent claims. I suggest Bhabha's analysis will benefit in remembering ambivalence's relation to ambiguity. I am not saying that developing ambiguity will resolve the production and dominance of ambivalent knowledge about racialized subjects; I am not suggesting such a facile solution. I am insisting that individuals and this society need not remain mired in the vacillations of ambivalence and ambivalent knowledge. Rather, in recalling ambivalence's relationship to ambiguity, I hope to more fully explain Asian American women's agency. Ambivalent knowledges about racialized subjects in the United States and the West need not prevail. Human beings are capable of openly, creatively, and ambiguously being-in-the-world.

NOTES

1. I would include here black bodies insofar as many still do not consider them as representative of the United States.
Bhabha writes specifically about the United Kingdom's population but the influence of his work suggests that it is applicable to the United States' population as well. Although all racialized subjects are not third world subjects, and all third world subjects are not racialized, Bhabha's work speaks of the populations group that overlaps here. I use the reference interchangeably because I am speaking about this population group. Moreover, I read Bhabha as gesturing toward forwarding a semi-general analysis that applies to both colonial and racial subjects. The central place that Bhabha's work occupies could only be explained because of the reach in relevance of his work.
2. Bhabha utilizes many other notions to describe the quality of the lives of racialized subjects—such as mimicry, hybridity, and metonymy. But I address these ideas in an earlier article; see "A Phenomenology for Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial Metropolitan Subject," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 537–57. Here I want to focus on just Bhabha's use of the psychoanalytic relation of ambivalence.
3. I suspect that Bhabha does not provide a definition of ambivalence. At times I read him using the word in a colloquial sense without regard to the psychoanalytic sense. But at other moments of the text, Bhabha demonstrates awareness of the psychoanalytic definition of the term ambivalence, especially in his analysis of fetishes. It is worth noting this lack of consistency.
4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relation with Others," *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie, trans. William Cobb (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 102–3. I turn to Klein following Merleau-Ponty for two reasons, although Bhabha draws from Jacques Lacan's work. First, I understand that Klein first introduced these terms in conjunction. Second, for the purposes here, I do not see a relevant difference between Klein and ultimately Lacan's understanding of ambivalence and ambiguity.
5. Merleau-Ponty, "Child's," 104.
6. *Ibid.*, 103.
7. The specific cite follows: "There are . . . subjects who are without social prejudices of any kind, who are perfectly 'liberal' in the sense that they admit that all men are brothers, that one cannot concentrate all the characteristics of evil in Negroes, Jews, or any other minority and yet who, for all that, are rigid subjects because they refuse to see among men even the most striking differences of *situation*—differences which pertain to the collectivity in which they have lived and received their initial training. There is an abstract or rigid liberalism, which consists in thinking that all men are *identical*. There are also liberals who are truly liberal; in the sense that they conceive very well that there can be differences of historical situation among men and different cultural environments. This does not prevent them from treating each man (in so far as his situation permits him to be a man) like any other." (Merleau-Ponty, "Child's," 106).

8. *Ibid.*, 105.
9. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 109.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. Bhabha holds a mistaken understanding of epistemology. He equates epistemology with correspondence theories of knowledge, and appears completely unaware of coherence theories of knowledge. He defines the difference between epistemology and enunciation, which is apparent in the following claim: "The epistemological is locked into the hermeneutic circle, in the description of cultural elements as they tend towards a totality. The enunciative is a more dialogic process that attempts to track displacements and realignments that are the effects of cultural antagonisms and articulations—subverting the rationale of the hegemonic moment and relocating alternative, hybrid sites of cultural negotiation" (177–78). The field of epistemology is more complicated; particularly within coherence theory, there is already understanding of the difficulty of distinguishing between analytic and synthetic statements.
13. Bhabha, *Location*, 36. See also 132.
14. *Ibid.*, 71. He cites from Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 240. More interesting and more subtle than this ambivalent diachronous narrative about the Orient, Said also explains the ambivalent absence and presence of the Orient and the Orientalist. Said writes, "I mean to say that in discussions of the Orient, the Orient is all absence, whereas one feels the Orientalist and what he says as presence; yet we must not forget that the Orientalist's presence is enabled by the Orient's effective absence. This fact of substitution and displacement, as we must call it, clearly places on the Orientalist himself a certain pressure to reduce the Orient in his work, even after he has devoted a good deal of time to elucidating and exposing it" (208–9).
15. *Ibid.*, 44.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. See *ibid.*, 5, 6, 7, 12, and 207.
19. I focus on Asian American women here, but this analysis is applicable to people of color. Work describing the African American experience as ambivalent is numerous. See Stan West, "Tip-Toeing on the Tightrope: A Personal Essay on Black Writer Ambivalence," *African American Review* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 285–91. Apollo O. Amoko, "The Resemblance of Colonial Mimicry: A Revisionary Reading of Nguigi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*," *Research in African Literatures* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 34–50. Diane Shoos, "Representing Domestic Violence: Ambivalence and Difference in *What's Love Got to Do with It*," *NWSA Journal* 15, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 57–75.
20. Karen J. Hossfeld, "Hiring Immigrant Women: Silicon Valley's 'Simple Formula,'" *Women of Color in U. S. Society*, ed. Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 71.

21. *Ibid.*, 72, 66.
22. *Ibid.*, 74
23. *Ibid.*, 75.
24. *Ibid.*, 65.
25. *Ibid.*, 74, quoting a male manager. Hossfeld's insert.
26. *Ibid.*, 75. Other interesting moral legitimations offered include that immigrant workers support their family on such meager incomes because their extended family lives abroad and the earnings in the US stretch much further in foreign countries; and giving these jobs to immigrants is permissible because white people do not desire these jobs. Hossfeld explains that neither of these beliefs is true (77).
27. *Ibid.*, 79, 81 and 85. I presume that the ambivalence of this last sentence said by a female hiring personnel is not worth commenting upon.
28. Actually, in my research on ambivalence, I found quite a few works, which confuse ambivalence and ambiguity. See Bruce Laperson, "Exploring Ambiguities in the Political Implications of Freud," *Ambiguity in the Western Mind*, ed. Craig J. N. dePaulo et al. (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 181–90. See also Gail Mason, "Fear and Hope: Author's Response," *Hypatia* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 196–206.
29. Merleau-Ponty, "Child's," 103.
30. *Ibid.*, 102–3.
31. *Ibid.*, 105.
32. *Ibid.*, 106.
33. *Ibid.*, 107–8.
34. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), 71. See also *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 12. Martin Dillon explains, "Clarity and distinctness . . . are incompatible with externality. What is external to me must, by that fact alone, transcend me in some degree. . . . But what is transcendent is, by definition, not fully known; it is attended by a modicum of opacity—that opacity being phenomenal evidence for its transcendence" (M. C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology* [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997], 18).
35. Renaud Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology* trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 142.
36. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 169. See also Henri Maldiney, "Flesh and Verb in the Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty," *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh* eds. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000). Maldiney writes, "Ambiguity is as essential to Being as transcendence. This ambiguity is the sign of a divergence" (61).
37. Hossfeld, "Hiring Immigrant Women," 74.
38. *Ibid.*, 85.
39. This is not a critique of her article.