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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

CHRISTOTECHTONICS: DILDONIC PROSTHETICITY IN THEOLOGICAL
FORMULATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN THEOLOGY
CONCENTRATION IN WOMEN'S STUDIES AND GENDER STUDIES

BY

EVAN TAYLOR MARSOLEK

CHICAGO, IL

MAY 2024

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To sexual and gender dissidents past, present, future, unnamed, and unknown.

“Queer Theory” conveys a double emphasis—on the conceptual and speculative work involved in discourse production, and on the necessary critical work of deconstructing our own discourses and their constructed silences.

—Teresa de Lauretis, “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities”

These discourses speak about us and claim to say the truth in an apolitical field, as if anything of that which signifies could escape the political in this moment of history, and as if, in what concerns us, politically insignificant signs could exist. These discourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking unless we speak in their terms.

—Monique Wittig, “The Straight Mind”

Sexualities are like languages: they are complex systems of communication and reproduction of life. As languages, sexualities are historical constructs with common genealogies and biocultural inscriptions. Like languages, sexualities can be learned.

—Paul B. Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*

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INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2009, I missed two weeks of my senior year of high school. This was not due to a serious medical emergency, nor a family vacation. I missed two weeks of school due to a flood.

I grew up in Fargo, North Dakota. Yes, the Fargo of Coen brothers fame. It is a city residing on Sioux (Dakota) Native lands. With a current metropolitan area hosting around 250,000 people, it may pale in comparison to my current home (Chicago) in terms of size, but it is the largest city in North Dakota. Strategically built for trading on the Red River, whose waters eventually empty into the Hudson Bay, Fargo also resides in a flood plain. Immense glaciers depressed the land during the last glaciation period, creating a very flat topography. Yearly flooding, therefore, is a normal occurrence.

You might be wondering, right about now, why on earth this text is opening with a conversation about Fargo and floods. Not only does it name some of my own social location in terms of geographic location of my upbringing, but it also functions as a conceptual metaphor for this project; the flood, that is. Allow me to set the stage.

The fall of 2008 was particularly wet, and the ground was in a state of super saturation when it froze for the winter. In other words, the water was still there, and it was now just frozen. Winter occurs; attendant with the usual cold temperatures, but also registering a top-5 snowiest winter. When such snowfall occurs, it is paramount (though the best we can achieve is simply hope) the spring melt is slow. It was not. Rather than an above freezing temperature in the day with a below freezing temperature overnight, the temperatures quickly rested above freezing

leading to a rapid melt. With the ground super saturated, there was nowhere for the water to go, and it flooded the banks of the Red River.

I missed nearly two weeks of school that spring. Nonetheless, the Fargo community is resilient, and many people traversed across the city to save houses with sandbags, help people evacuate homes that would be lost, and more. The public middle school at the end of my block had its soccer fields and green spaces dug up to construct a clay earthen dike through the middle of neighborhoods—some houses were simply just on the wrong side of the street. When a flood of this proportion occurs in a flat area the water only spreads. It pours over its banks and creeps along the flat land, all the while maintaining its northerly flow. In time, the waters always recede.

What does this have to do with Theology?¹ Indulge me for a moment and allow me to stretch this metaphor. First, for this flood—any flood—to occur myriad factors must align. Sure, a different arrangement of factors could have resulted in a flood, but in 2009 in Fargo, this was the formula.

¹ Throughout this project, I will use both “Theology” and “theology” to denote a distinction from Mark Lewis Taylor, whose work is explored in chapter two. Theology (capitalized) refers to what Taylor describes as the guild discipline, the body of knowledge comprised of academic and ecclesial authority that produces what we know to be Theology in the contemporary time. Taylor will often swap between the language of “guild theology,” “the guild,” “guild discipline,” or just “Theology” as a capitalized notion. With this project’s distinct queer flavor, this should not be confused with Marcella Althaus-Reid’s “Totalitarian Theology” (T-Theology). While these theorizations can converse, they should not be considered synonymous. In contrast to Theology, Taylor will theorize “the theological.” The theological escapes the auspices of the guild discipline, and while Taylor draws upon transnational geopolitical examples of carceral mechanisms, the pervading theoretical insight is how bodies that are impinged by structuring realities (be it the state, medico-juridical science, or even Theology) possess—or draw upon—the theological to “weigh in” through poetic, artistic, and activist manners. This weighted existence haunts Theology. Part of this project is asking to consider queer and trans theories as modes of weighted thought, which escape the disciplinarity of Theology, yet still ask questions, or comment upon, Theology—they weigh in. As such, these insights—or in this case theorized hermeneutical lens—interrogate Theology, or perhaps function as a mode of critical reflexivity of Theology. To describe such theological production, I opted to utilize “theology” (lowercase) for instances of theology—the hauntings of queer and trans thought and life—that arise in this project. This is for two reasons. One, philosophical texts are already laborious enough, and contorting the sentence structure to always reflect “the theological” is perhaps unduly burdensome for readers. Two, this project—as an intellectual, academic exercise—is Theology, and I seek to denote moments where theology stirs within the hauntings. Pursuant to queer theoretical impulses, I do not seek to positivize this reality *as* Theology but seek to let it remain a force that haunts Theology. In other words, I do want to domesticate queer and trans theories for the ends of Theology.

Currently, amidst growing climate disruption, my past three summers in Chicago have seen summer storms that drench the city. With inadequate sewers and rainwater diversion tunnels, the streets flood. In the summer of 2023, Chicago received so much rain over the 4th of July weekend, the reengineered Chicago River (redesigned to flow *away* from Lake Michigan), reversed and took its natural course. Beaches were closed for a week due to high levels of bacteria in the water. Again, the right conditions, in however they are arranged, must occur just so. And we rarely are privy to when nature will flex its capacity to surprise.

Secondly, rivers and floods—natural phenomena in general—change the land; despite the efforts of us humans to fabricate a stability in nature that simply does not exist. While waters recede, sediment from downstream has been transported and deposited, shorelines have been eroded from the sheer force of the current, trees have been uprooted and carried downstream or so inundated with water they drowned, what was once an oxbow is now an oxbow lake, businesses lost, homes unsalvageable, infrastructure in need of repair, and so much more. Some impacts may not be felt for years, even while some impacts are keenly visceral in the moment.

I want to play upon these two stretchings of this metaphor as it relates to Theology. First any theological articulation is a result of myriad factors, from current theological discourse, the history of the discipline, its conversation with other disciplines, its own crisis as a legitimate discipline in the US academy, and more. In recent years, it is usually a matter of scholars *not* noting the myriad factors that have led to a theological articulation that spur new articulations from the underside of history or the discipline. With the rise of so-called contextual theologies, scholars have named the markers of Theology, yet far too often these contextual theologies fail to provide lasting impact concerning Theology. For clarity, this is in relation to its circulation

within Theology and not the “contextual” communities that create dikes with these works to protect their very bodies from the violence of Theology.

Second, it is my hope there will be a viability for Theology going forward. Naturally, it is an academic discipline, as well as lived out in communities, so it will continue regardless of this project. Therefore, I want this project to serve as a critically reflexive mode of doing Theology. As such, it is less concerned with a content of Theology and more concerned with what could be called a performative analysis, interrogating what Theology is doing. Rather than it functioning to understand creation’s place in the cosmos in relation to divinity, Theology has been utilized to understand and justify the positioning of some populations of people over others, in addition to the rest of non-anthropocentric creation. Put simple, I aim for this project to short-circuit theological thought.

This arguably could have been a project which reclaims a past tradition to reaffirm the one we have now. However, I take trans and queer theory as the epistemic starting point for this work, so this project will look a little different. The task, then, of this project is a contemporary deconstruction through the positing of a theological hermeneutic. This project limits its analysis and interrogation to the contemporary moment, and I name this limitation, here, at the outset. Perhaps, in time, this hermeneutic will be utilized in more *longue durée* analysis of Christianity, but concessions must be made at the present moment to, first, articulate such a hermeneutic.

This discernment of a contemporary moment occurring within Theology is asking different questions for different reasons. In contrast to positions to reclaim and affirm, I emphasize restructure (or reform) as it defers to articulating that something has gone awry concerning our formulations of Theology. This pathway can also lead to a rejection, as some

things will need to go away. I highlight this emphasis, for, in time, reformation and rejection may circle thought all the way back to reclamation and affirmation. In this regard, I riff on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's axiom 3: there can't be an a priori decision about how far it will make sense to conceptualize reclamation and affirmation and reformation and rejection together. Or separately.² Thus, while I position the current study in the vein of reformation and rejection, it does not wholly foreclose options of reclamation and affirmation (though these routes will receive particular attention in chapter two).

A flood does not reaffirm a river, or perhaps, it does not reaffirm a river in how we like to think of affirmation. Sure, a river may settle into its familiar tract, yet banks have shifted, trees have died, animals have been displaced. To affirm a stability is to deny a living and breathing reality. Thus, affirmation that is more fluid from an ecological sense may engender something more akin to reformation (see, we cannot rule out how these categories diverge and converge). Restructuring or reforming alludes to a response. We are responding to the question and quest that is divinity. How does the change in terrain impact our response? The so-called contextual theologies are the super-saturated ground. By not attending to the reality of the situation, Theology is near-constantly facing a crisis of legitimacy when it perpetually fails to account for these lives and realities. In this regard, the hermeneutical construction in this project is less a positivized theology, and more a tool to survey a contemporary topography. Nonetheless, the epistemological shift central to this hermeneutic is derived from a quotidian reality and object in the sex lives of queers.

² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, updated (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008 [1990]), 36.

Setting Ourselves Adrift

In this survey of the theological flood, I set us adrift with Marcella Althaus-Reid and Paul B. Preciado. This project will facilitate the conversation of Preciado's trans theories surrounding the dildo with continental philosophies of religion. Marcella Althaus-Reid, publishing *The Queer God* a few years after the publication of Preciado's *Countersexual Manifesto* (wherein we locate the theories of the dildo) will gesture toward prostheses, in general:

Theological prostheses form a restless body in movement challenging the contextual limitations of political and divine character, while at the same time surpassing them. They also form the unbeliever's body, that is, a body which has stopped believing in divine sexual grand narratives, or the atheists of heterosexually based theologies. They bring impatience, irony, and a capacity to destroy by imitation.³

My overall goal is not nearly as bold as the entirety of *The Queer God*, but I locate this project as existing in a current of this flood. We are restless bodies, pushed and pulled by the current, challenging our contextual limits. It is a form of nomadism. Within chapter three, I will reference the concept of abyssal expanse through Jean-Luc Nancy and Irving Goh, to elucidate how this nomadism is not a chasm of negativity that completely obliterates the self. It is an abyss, an enveloping negativity that continually challenges our expansion. I cannot stress this prior statement enough. This expansion is still a negation.⁴

This expansion of the limitations of political and divine character also implicates the construction of the self in our relation to divinity. Preciado's dildo, as prosthetic object, rejects a sense of ownership regarding whosoever wields it. In other words, the dildo modifies whosoever

³ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (London, UK: Routledge, 2003), 30–31.

⁴ Future work may yet explore this form of negation through “nonsovereignty” as discerned in the debate between Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, in *Sex, or the Unbearable* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

wields it, challenging how we conceive the construction of the self. This is where the hermeneutical lens of the project comes to the fore (with the argument laid out in greater detail below). This project is concerned with how certain contemporary strands of Theology function as a dildo, modifying the sexual subject.

Preciado chimes with Althaus-Reid's thought (or, chronologically speaking, Althaus-Reid chimes with Preciado's conception of the dildo). Preciado conceives of the dildo, the sexual object often found in the drawers of queer peoples' nightstands (but also heterosexuals), as both a heuristic and hermeneutical intervention. He is also adamant that the logic of the dildo is already the logic of heterosexuality (more on this in chapter four), where one thing, in this case the penis, has arbitrarily been determined to demarcate sexual difference. The penis, serving this role of sexual arbitration, is a dildonic fabrication.

Althaus-Reid will reference Derrida alongside the theological theme of the *via rupta* to note: "This is the *via rupta* (road without repetitions and return) which Queer Theology may take in order to be able, paraphrasing Derrida, to 'reinvent without an itinerary.'"⁵ This project takes this path, carried along down the current of the flood, with no itinerary concerning the reinvention. As Preciado states: "transit, not essence."⁶ Pursuant to the theorizations of gender and/or queer (following thinkers like Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, José Esteban Muñoz, among others) there is a certain uselessness to "queer." Per Edelman, "Queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one."⁷ The hermeneutical lens of this project is the abyssal

⁵ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 31.

⁶ Paul B. Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, trans. Kevin Gerry Dunn (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2018), 70; Paul B. Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, trans. Julio Díaz and Carolina Meloni, 20th anniversary edition (Barcelona, ES: Anagrama, 2020), 107.

⁷ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 17.

deconstruction that is queerness, disturbing an identity without providing something in its stead; or rather, asserting that if anything is facilitated by prosthesis, it is only temporary, ephemeral, and not to be mistaken for an arrival. It is not the concern of this project (for it would easily double its length) to provide the reinvention, but it is my hope such a deconstruction brings us to a space where such reinvention may occur, yet, per Althaus-Reid's usage of Derrida, we must discern, at that moment, how to reinvent without itinerary.

In this regard, and as I will explore in chapter two, this project finds itself on the critical side of the liberal progress narrative. Queer, also contemporarily used as an umbrella positive identity category to subsume LBGTQIA2+ (with letters and symbols expanding and contracting by the year), can function within projects of liberal progress narratives. Linn Tonstad frames this, in more theological spaces, through the language of apologetics (crucially *queer* apologetics and not simply apologetics). Here, the concern is that “queer” is simply stirred into the neoliberal assimilative politics of liberal progress narratives. This is not an new phenomenon. From the docile (often white) woman embraced into the liberal progress narrative we also encounter the “nasty” woman of Donald Trump, or the emotionless city-dwelling bitch of corporate US America; the exceptional Black person with the uppity Black person; the model minority with the minorities that are seeking to destroy the US American way of life; the nice, positimized queer (here we can note the criticism this queer is often white gay men and the homonormative as articulated by Lisa Duggan⁸) with the revolutionary faggot.⁹

⁸ See Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, eds. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 175–194.

⁹ Furthermore, this conceptual framing is nothing new, and we see these distinctions playing out in literature in 1977. See Larry Mitchell, *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* (New York, NY: Nightboat Books, 2023 [1977])

Per Tonstad, “apologetics” is contrasted with “beyond apologetics,” the realm when we consider “queer” outside the projects of, what I am framing here as, liberal progress narratives (perhaps liberal progress *theological* narratives). Marcella Althaus-Reid is the paragon of this mode of work. Within Althaus-Reid, we can discern a concerted effort to radically rethink Theology through new avenues, through different forms and economies of desire. It is not a simple matter of, “add queer, then stir.” When “queer” enters the mix, *both* hegemonic understandings of gender, sex, and sexuality (binary, same-sex, order toward heterosexual desire, etc.) *and* hegemonic understandings of Theology (Trinity, God, *kenosis*, etc.) are challenged.

It is important to understand that Tonstad is presenting a disciplinary distinction at a time when “queer theology” is undergoing forms of concretization in the academy. I contend Tonstad is not inviting readers to assign moral valence to apologetics and beyond apologetics (i.e. one mode is bad, and the other mode is good). This only recreates power struggles of binary relationship. Rather, this rhetoric allows for conceptual specificity of what we are making Theology do. In other words, definitional distinction does not necessarily entail binary opposition.

Despite these tensions, I will maintain we need both apologetics and beyond apologetics (just as politically we need both what could be considered assimilationist and anti-assimilation perspectives—it helps ensure that politics does not become stagnant, yet still ensures the protections of (some) life amidst the process.) What I need to make clear now, though, is how this project is *not a mediation* of this tension. This project, like other queer projects noted above, resides with people who have been categorized as social contagion, the bodies that are framed

outside the law; the bodies that continue—despite the liberal progress narrative—to disrupt a socio-juridical hegemon, which is inextricably entwined with Theology.

Therefore, I consider a beyond apologetics avenue offers more transformative work in relation to the *theorization of queer*. In this regard, it is less the black and white of good/bad and more so the grey of better/worse. While I will be arguing from the position that decidedly rests in a beyond apologetics categorization from a perspective of “better” leaning on queer theory, an argument could also be constructed from the position of apologetics that understands queer to be an identity. In other words, we can make various better/worse arguments from these positions, and this is the one I am choosing. This is a decided position that rests this argument in other arguments that challenge a positive identity of “queer,” which shapes how we consider and conduct Theology. Nonetheless, for sake of a smoother reading experience, I do use “queer” in relation to people (i.e., queer and trans people). As will be made clearer in chapter two, this usage of queer should not be misconstrued as synonymous with gay and lesbian (both in sense of identity and politics).

This is the current of the flood we float in. In 2009, I missed two weeks of school. In the present day, some Theology is missing the past 100 years of civil rights activism, anthropological research, and more.

Positioning Myself

I come to this project as a multiracial (Filipino+Black+Polish) “queer.” Born and raised as Roman Catholic and even having attended a K-12 Catholic school system, I no longer identify with the tradition. While coming from a working-class upbringing, I—like most of my generational peers—now face economic precarity due to the burden of student loans, exorbitant

costs of healthcare, rising rent that exceeds 30% of my income, and a general wage stagnation. I experience the occasional bigoted epithets, and the usual microaggressions toward multiracial people. While not ideal, I can safely say that I am one of the lucky ones. This comes with, in my opinion, a certain level of responsibility to do work.

I am a millennial, a member of the generation that purportedly kills various industries (from napkins to diamonds) and will never likely be able to buy a home due to our insatiable desire for avocado toast and specialty coffee. According to a recent Gallup poll¹⁰, 10.5% of millennials identify as LGBT. For the poll, it should be noted they utilize the four-letter acronym, but add the category of “Something Other than Heterosexual.” (It is worth noting “queer” is not captured in the acronym as a positive identity category.) This identity affiliation jumps to 20.8% for Generation Z. And overall, the poll articulates that 7.1% of the US population self-identifies as LGBT or something other than heterosexual, the most common being bisexual at just over 50% of respondents identifying at LGBT or something other than heterosexual. It should be noted this identity affiliation does not exceed 5% for Traditionalists, Boomers, and Generation X.

While data like the above can often be used to tout a generational divide between the young and the old, there is no reference that acknowledges lower rates of identification from older generations due to the impacts of HIV/AIDS. Per the listed survey methods, it was conducted by phone and there are missing historical factors that could impact this data. While social mores appear to have shifted on many fronts within generational categories, there still appear to be struggles cross-generationally concerned with the social mores of the US (access to

¹⁰ Jeffrey M. Jones, “LGBT Identification in the U.S. Ticks Up to 7.1%,” Washington, D.C.: Gallup Organization, 2022: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/389792/lgbt-identification-ticks-up.aspx>.

reproductive healthcare, status and rights of LGBTQIA+ people, police brutality toward Black people, and more).

I am reminded of a mural in Minneapolis, MN. It is the title of the 1964 Bob Dylan (who was born in Duluth, MN) album: “The Times They Are a-Changin.” Indeed. I am also a teacher, and in just the few semesters I have had the privilege of teaching Gen Z students, I have been awestruck by both their resilience (as I started teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic) and their ability to understand connections quickly. Noted as being the most technologically connected generation, Gen Z has also been noted as often the most distracted generation who are generally unable to focus. Just wait until Gen Alpha hits college campuses in a few years.

While distraction has always been a human phenomenon and technological connection certainly presents its own form of distraction, I have been blindsided on more than one occasion when what I consider a groundbreaking and foundational theory of gender and sexuality is met with a resounding “meh” or “yeah, no kidding.” In perhaps the most fascinating form of trickle-down academic knowledge, the idea of gender being socially constructed is so second-nature to Gen Z, that we can quickly progress to intersectional analysis. I can hear students say how the enveloping environmental crisis is the most pressing contemporary concern, but then we can also connect it to gender, racism, capitalism, nationalism, and yes, even Theology. Needless to say, the conversations I have had with many students have shaped this project.

Practically, as it concerns this project, I am working toward earning a PhD (another instance where Theology is side-stepped at institutional level, where a ThD offering is growing rarer by the day) in a joint program, Integrative Studies in Ethics and Theology, and while I was at it I decided to pick up a concentration in Women’s Studies and Gender Studies. Put bluntly,

this is derived from an academic exercise, impinged by the need to display an expertise niche, being mindful of university policies, and navigating committee politics. All of this, of course, is in hopes that I will have a future with gainful employment (another historically elusive prospect). While I engage queer theory and continental philosophies of religion, I must be forthright that the intended audience of this work is not the average layperson. It is an academic project concerning academic conversations for a niche group of academics. While my joint degree is technically on the side of Theology, I have found over the years that queer and trans theory broaches ethics far more often than Theology.

Furthermore, the textual case study that undergirds part II of this project (“*Male and Female He Created Them*”) is quite devoid of Theology as one might commonly think of it (such as grace, salvation, or forgiveness) and favors anthropological constructions (which are not absent in Theology, but certainly are not the first components that come to mind when someone says “Theology”). While Vatican documents typically fall outside “more” academic pursuits of Systematic Theology, I leverage the reality that “*Male and Female He Created Them*” is already being deployed in the lives of Catholic communities.¹¹ I am concerned about how these textual documents hold ramifications for intersex, trans, and queer people. As much as I would love to

¹¹ See *Compassion and Challenge: Reflections on Gender Ideology from Archbishop Robert J. Carlson* (Archdiocese of St. Louis: 2020); *Theological Guide: The Human Person and Gender Dysphoria* (Diocese of Lansing: 2021); “Catechesis and Policy on Questions Concerning Gender Theory (Archdioceses of Milwaukee: 2022); USCCB, “A Doctrinal Note on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body,” March 20, 2023: <https://www.usccb.org/resources/doctrinal-note-moral-limits-technological-manipulation-human-body>. These sentiments could also be explored in relation to catechism. While most trained theologians would reject the claim that the catechism *is* Theology, they would be remiss to say the catechism is devoid of theological content. Simultaneously, despite academics’ best efforts to write in a relatable way to the average layperson, more academic treatments of Theology remain unexamined by most. To fill this void, more accessible documents (like Vatican documents and the catechism) can enter into the lives of lived communities. As the sources above indicate, these theological texts are then *used* in specific ways. Therefore, I personally place more emphasis on the documents that are actively being used that impinge upon queer, trans, and intersex life.

wax poetic on classical theological doctrine, these ethical gambits of anthropology position themselves to the forefront of analysis, and I interrogate their consequences through the register of queer and trans theory. This project is a result of this disciplinary relationship.

While I consider it important that the theorizations of queer continually eschew disciplinary categorization, I will concede ground here to, again, state this is a project of queering aspects of continental philosophies of religion. This is, perhaps to some, queer theory of religion more so than a project of queer theology, but such distinctions risk re-trenching disciplinary silos and norms. Nonetheless, I will contend, the hermeneutical lens of christotectonics has implications for Theology, functioning as a deconstructive lens that chips away at concretized notions of the human subject. Additionally, it will interrogate how—within a contemporary document—recourse to Christ is being used in a highly strategic manner.

My secondary training in ethics and my work with queer and trans theory has pulled me more toward exploring the ethical implications of Theology. It is not quite theological ethics, as this work still is indicative of a deconstructive flare I am working through, and I side-step a wide swath of traditional theological topics. Rather, I would say this project's biggest impact to the field is articulating a new theological hermeneutic that privileges a theo-ethical aesthetic analysis rooted in trans and queer theory. This hermeneutic focuses its scrutiny on the theological function of Christ.

Some Questions and Concerns

The overarching research question for the project was the following: how does queer and trans theory impact Theology? Most definitely a broad question, as all larger projects must start with something broader. Over time, this was refined to a smaller, yet still broad question: how does

the work of Paul B. Preciado impact Theology? The kernel of this project aims at a yet more specific question: how does Paul B. Preciado's theorizations of the dildo impact how we conduct theological studies concerning Christ? The result of this question will be the positing of a hermeneutical lens, which will be elaborated below. While this specificity concerns two chapters of the following text, I do tarry with the broader questions in various ways.

Crucially, I am not concerned with how Theology may accommodate queer and trans people, as this assumes that queer and trans people are not already present within Theology. This is far from true. Nor do I contend that queer and trans people are absent in this work. Queer and trans theory has carved out a distinction in relation to queer and trans studies (often positioned as a subdiscipline of the studies) that is more concerned with a particular disposition regarding textual analysis and philosophy as it concerns the construction of gender, sex, and sexuality. It is both concerned and not concerned with queer and trans people, for it discerns and interrogates structuring mechanisms that produce queer and trans life as such.

The task, resultingly, becomes shifting an epistemic foundation that is not responding to the presence of queer and trans people by employing queer and trans theory as the foundational conversation partner as we conduct the research. To be clear, Theology has always made recourse to contemporary philosophy in circulation; whether it was Augustine unable to truly break free from Manichaeism, Hellenistic philosophy informing Paul, a retrieval of Greek philosophy in conversation with Augustine when we encounter Thomas Aquinas, or Martin Heidegger shaping the thought of Karl Rahner. Furthermore, this is only in relation to the formation of Christianity. There are schools of ancient near-Eastern philosophy that shaped the Hebrew Bible, as well as early Christian communities. Queer and trans theory, then, is serving as

this philosophical conversation partner in this contemporary moment for this project. Do not be mistaken, this is not a retrieval of a tradition, but a recognition of a timeless methodological pattern that occurs with Theology.

Liberation theologies will retrieve the concept of the quotidian, emphasizing qualities of everyday life that inflect theology. This quotidian shifts throughout time, so it is not surprising varying strands of philosophy and critical thought have found themselves stitched together with theological thinking. Sometimes, such stitching can yield monumental change (see Augustine and Aquinas). Pursuant to the deconstructive flair of this project, I do not contend such lasting impacts, but Preciado's theories surrounding the dildo derive from a quotidian object within queer sex lives. It functions, then, as a new angle of theological reflection.

Approaching Theology from this obtuse angle creates a level of deviancy; refusing to show up to Theology in a way that I am supposed to. But this is an academic project after all, so I will eventually arrive at a form of theology (offset in lowercase to be able to render a distinction for conversation, which I will elaborate on shortly), but it may look different, taste funny, or even sound weird in the mouth. Nonetheless, I think it is important to hope that this theology may come to be voiced easily by queer and trans people (and allies); just as the slurs and violence that form so effortlessly in bigots' mouths.

There are also concerns in this project. While I just finished noting a blurry distinction between queer and trans studies and queer and trans theory and then, generally, philosophy's relationship to Theology, I also need to be transparent about another factor. The foundational text for this project, *Countersexual Manifesto*, advocates a radical political agenda. As a manifesto, it dares to articulate utopic visions, but it also offers mechanisms to take steps toward that

direction, even if we can never arrive there (recalling are adrift-ness via Althaus-Reid).

Countersexual Manifesto is a two-fold process of rigorous theoretical explorations and audacious implementations of utopic dreaming in life. Naturally, there is a pervading social component to this project. Here, then, queer and trans politics oscillates between the sensibilities of *both* queer and trans studies and queer and trans theory.

As it concerns Theology, I am more interested in the social and juridical implications Theology can have, what I will frame as Theology that restricts the politicality of human lives. Social in the sense that it impacts populations, and juridical in the sense it both articulates a theological law (as articulated in ways that allude to the sovereignty of Theology), but also aims to influence black letter law—the consolidation of the laws that appear to be indisputable—in general. This will come to the fore most forcefully through the framings of “nature,” “natural,” and/or “natural law.” I play upon these produced effects of Theology to formulate a countertheological position. “Countertheology” or “countertheological” owes its framing to Preciado, Michel Foucault, and Lisa Isherwood. Preciado’s manifesto aims are toward the goal of a countersexual society, drawing upon counter-conduct from Foucault. Within *Liberating Christ*, Isherwood will catalogue various strands within liberation theologies, expressing how liberation theologies are counters to the social ills of the world. Reading Isherwood’s assessments from the perspective of queer and trans theories as their own forms of second-level reflection of quotidian life, christotechtonics, then, might be considered as a counter to theology, or a countertheological position. As will be explored when we unpack *Countersexual Manifesto* in the latter chapters, I was drawn to Preciado’s work because he did not consider Theology untouchable. Rather, it was

another area of analysis that required attention from theories of gender and sexuality. This project, in relation to Preciado, shores up some of those gaps.

Framing of the Argument

The claim of this project can be summarized in four words: Christ is a dildo. In the tradition of Martin Luther's small catechism, I must ask a follow-up question: what does this mean?

I argue this phrase ("Christ is a dildo") is a performative claim in relation to Christ, articulated through the register of critical trans and queer theory and politics. Following a Butlerian foundation, "Christ is a dildo" names the function of Christ, thus rendering Christ empty of meaning in relation to identity politics (the phrase Preciado will use is "somatic techniques"). Christ, then, is the void that holds no meaning other than the meaning that has been overlaid upon it by those possessing hegemonic power. In other words, Christ does not express anything, other than what humans say *Christ is to express*.

This void is assessed under scrutiny of catechesis, the mechanism that, at best, paradoxically and, at worst, deliberately misnames a "sense" of identity to represent the whole of this void (via synecdoche) that cannot be—woman, queer, Black, trans. Christ, then, theologically facilitates this void within Theology that paradoxically sediments "identities" while simultaneously delimiting the politicality or sociality of said "identities." In the language of Theology, Christ is less a noun and more a verb; Christ is not, yet Christ still does. Following the trajectory of Lisa Isherwood's claims in *Liberating Christ*, where she notes that Christ has historically functioned as a dense transfer point of power dynamics, this project affirms this statement and also posits that Christ, ultimately, is nothing. Yet within this nothing hinges the

potentiality, what Preciado will term *potentia gaudendi* or orgasmic force, of everything—for whosoever wields Christ.¹²

When Christ is nothing, “Christ is a dildo” names the failed messianism of Christ for Theology, as Christ has been co-opted for theological biopolitical ends (subjugation of women, justification of slavery, and, recently, the justification that transgender and intersex people are not legitimate humans). As such, Christ has no use or identity (despite the philosophical category’s relationship to Jesus) other than the use and identity that has been placed onto Christ, also resulting in the displaced identities noted above. Christ, then, is without content—without essence.

This “is” in “Christ is a dildo,” therefore, is an “is” which “is not”—an “is” as if it was. This “is” articulates the produced effects of the function of Christ. Following the argumentative claims concerning Butler and performativity, Edelman and queer, and Preciado and the dildo, this “is” *expresses nothing*. Within these constraints, we must contend that Christ does not exist, not really. Crucially, this does not mean the produced effects are not real.

Allow me a rephrasing through a slightly different angle for the sake of repetition. This distinction I am making plays upon the limitations of the English language in relation to the verb “to be.” This verb can be utilized in the predicative sense (i.e., Christ is a dildo) that articulates the function of Christ as prosthetic. This verb can also be utilized in an existential sense (i.e., there is no Christ) that challenges our assumptions or cluster of promises that we have invested into a particular identity formation of Christ. The existential Christ, then, does not exist (it is, at the end of the day, a theological construction that describes a privileged title assigned to

¹² See Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson (New York: NY, Feminist Press at City University of New York, 2013), 265–317.

someone—meaning that it modifies the supposed identity of whosoever wields it), even though the predicative Christ functions and is very real.

Admittedly, by retaining “Christ” I do cede to some theological grounds. To frame the argument properly, I must note that I am not exploring the historical development of Christ akin to a Foucauldian genealogy, nor a disciplinary trajectory of historical Theology. This eschewing of the historical trajectory is not to express a sense of irrelevancy, but to note that to reconstruct (to put it in stark terms) the anatomy of a dogmatic catastrophic flood is beyond the scope of a single volume. Rather, the project is a (perhaps, hyper-) contemporary analysis of a portion of this flood, because we cannot help but keep returning to the scene of catastrophe: in this case, Christ.

“Christ,” as a word, is retained for I do not consider it possible to leave this word—or concept—behind. Here, addressed in its relationship to Christian Theology, “Christ is a dildo” haunts the efforts of a guild discipline, an allusion to Mark Lewis Taylor’s assertion elucidated in chapter three: there is no anti-theological anti-space. Again, this sentiment, though expressed more in the rhetoric of continental philosophy is not unique to Taylor but finds its foundations in Foucault and Jacques Lacan, but even more contemporarily with thinkers like Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek, Gianni Vattimo, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Gil Anidjar, Jean-Luc Nancy, Janet R. Jakobsen, Jasbir K. Puar, Anne Pellegrini, among others. These thinkers float in the conversations concerning continental philosophy’s “turn to religion,” as well as secular studies, that seek to challenge the so-called break between religion and the secular. I have captured this distinction between guild discipline and quotidian expressions of the theological through the, admittedly, inelegant distinction between Theology (capitalized) and theology (lowercase).

Though used in word, The Word (riffing on The Gospel of John's Christic formation—arguably the most opposite of Christic formation than the one presented here) does not exist for it is determined to modify; it does not possess a divine identity *in se*. Nonetheless, this does not mean we cannot fuck with Christ. The modifying prosthesis of the dildo fucks the Christo-logics (logos) of Cis-tematic Theology. Prosthetic intervention breaks Christ, or the somatic techniques modified by Christ, in order to ascertain the minimal—yet powerful—function of Christ: Christ is nothing.

Perhaps controversially, I read queer and trans theory as the haunting force that facilitates a countertheology—however weak its claims may appear. Rather than a liberation model where Theology counters the social ills of this world, this project begins from the supposed site(s) of social contagion to counter Theology. Make no mistake, this is not toward the ends of producing a new Systematic Theology (or, if we want to be more tongue-in-cheek, un-Systematic Theology), but to articulate a particular critical political theological hermeneutic. While a countertheology names the failure of Christ, it also haunts and names the failure of some contemporary Theology. “Christ is a dildo,” or “Christ is nothing” are rather weak theological assertions on their own (even if they may engender a certain shocking rhetorical force) but can become powerful when put alongside a hegemonic Theology. If Christ is nothing, what exactly is Theology trying to make Christ do?

Queer and trans theory haunts Theology, even the forms that may embody a more apologetic tone. This theory unsettles the atmosphere, disturbs the soils, de-centers a standard *locus theologicus*, and lays bare the ruination of Theology. Especially in the auspices of the Euro-US academy—and the academic and privileged proliferations of “queer” and “trans” in

such spaces—this theory does not represent an anti-theological anti-space; it haunts. There is entanglement in this mesh of possibilities, a chaffing of visions concerning the politicality of life, mediated through the function of Christ. In this way, there is a mutual haunting. I hold onto both “Christ” and “dildo”, words and philosophical thoughts from seemingly disparate disciplines and consider them together. We cannot know in advance all the fruits of such an exercise, but I do maintain this task is not impossible.

Again, in checking my own academic hubris, I do not consider this work to be on par with Aquinas, but the consideration of Augustinian Christian thought with Greek “paganism” from Aristotle might have been considered impossible at one time too...until it wasn’t. What Marcella Althaus-Reid accomplished in *The Queer God* might have been considered impossible...until it wasn’t. And we are *still* trying to parse everything Althaus-Reid even did. The ease with which Greek philosophical categories roll out of Christian mouths without thought that they were once not part of Christian Theology is awesome—in this most literal sense of the word. Likewise, as noted before, I look forward to the day when the content of this current copulation may be considered just as second-nature as the thoughts of Aquinas. Although, if we are to understand the theoretical force of queer, we perhaps would be in a position where there would be a renewed need to queer once again.

A quick note on structure before I overview the organization of this project. The form of this text is indebted, indirectly (for this project is shaped by the projects that shape Paul B. Preciado), to Deleuze and Guattari and their articulation of the rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus* (which Marcella Althaus-Reid also drew upon). Also indirectly, because academic texts, especially ones labeled as more queer, tend to flout the rules of structural form, I am reminded of

the quote, “Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms yet to come.”¹³ Of course, for others to understand what you are trying to do in any given published exploration, there is still need to have *some* sense of form (in this case, we cannot run to the fictional structural assemblage of Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*—though Lacan’s *Sinthome* lecture is indebted to exploring this Joycean trail, and this lecture would prove formative for Edelman’s *No Future*) and various scholars eschew form in their own ways (e.g., Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley in *Ezili’s Mirrors* writing in three fonts that represent not only three forms of knowledge (academic, spirit, and Black feminist ancestor) but represent how these three forms of knowledge are not wholly interchangeable and no “form” of knowledge can capture everything; M. Jacqui Alexander in *Pedagogies of Crossing* playing with temporal enjambment along genealogical lines, thereby challenging the supposed process of learning via linear progression; or even Jacques Derrida in *Glas* (recently retranslated under the title *Clang*) where there is double analysis of Jean Genet and G.W.F. Hegel, curling around quotations and side notes by Derrida).

Here, I do not have the energy to embark on the creative tasks noted above, but will still put forward an assemblage, the rhizomatic structure of things (scholars, concepts, lived realities, discourse and more) to point toward the material sociality and restricted politicality of life in part I that shapes the hermeneutical lens put forward in part II. This network of things is but one mapping from one vantage point (the current we ride in this flood). A differing vantage point will result in a different mapping and even a different understanding of the assemblage. The process may look cut-up, reflective of the style of William Burroughs referenced by Deleuze and

¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 4-5.

Guattari, and a methodological disposition Preciado will embrace in *Dysphoria mundi: le son du monde qui s'écroule*. For me, I read assemblage also like a flood; the fluidity of rapidly flowing water representing multiple multiplicities, and the rupture of order (you can sandbag, but the force will gouge a new route), yet also revealing a map to its constant becoming (the “right” conditions).

Preview of Chapters

Structurally informed by the rhizome, the project plays out across two parts. Part I, Transdisciplinary Method, can be considered the articulation of the assemblage and traversings of the various disciplinary terrains of this project. Part II, Dildonic Prostheticity in Theological Formulation, can be understood as chasing a pathway in this assemblage, getting “lost” in a current as it courses through the flood. Allow me to unpack these parts further.

Part I, Transdisciplinary Method, will tarry in the messiness of lived lives. As I just noted, the produced effects of Christ are very much real, even if the essence does not exist. Following Butler’s assertions in *Gender Trouble*, the concern is not getting lost in identity politics, but understanding that bodies are constricted by structural inequalities that produce the very identities that often become embroiled in identity politics. Therefore, part I is a mapping (of course, always incomplete) of a queer and trans existence in relation to politicality and Theology (framed through a continental philosophy of religion argument). Again, in relation to Althaus-Reid and Derrida, the goal is not necessarily to chart an itinerary but to provide a snapshot of a contemporary landscape.

Of important note: I do not use the term “transdisciplinary” in some tongue-in-cheek manner where I am trying to slip “trans” into rhetoric instead of using the term

“interdisciplinary.” I follow the collected insights from Melissa Wilcox in *Queer Religiosities* to note this distinction:

But some fields of study, such as ethnic studies, cultural studies, and the like, draw from across these disciplinary boundaries in their methods and sometimes in their focus. When these fields first developed, they were called interdisciplinary, meaning they worked between the disciplines. Many people still use that word today. Often, though, the word *interdisciplinary* refers to research done by multiple researchers who have each been trained in a different discipline. The researchers themselves aren’t interdisciplinary; their collaborative research is. So what should call entire fields of study that weave together multiple disciplines, in which many scholars are trained in multiple methods? Some people have suggested the word *transdisciplinary*, which implies bridging across or transcending disciplines, might be a better word for such fields.¹⁴

Though I disagree with the usage of the word “transcend” by Wilcox (more on this word in chapter three), I nonetheless consider this project to be doing something different than interdisciplinary conversations. Part I, in its assemblage, is arranging the tableau of the methods, veins of discourse, and thinkers that shape a transdisciplinary matrix of thought. There is literary affect theory of Lauren Berlant, political and critical race theory of Eric A. Stanley, critical trans politics and legal theory of Dean Spade, the socio-ethnographic, art criticism, and continental philosophy of religion from Mark Lewis Taylor, and more. Furthermore, these are all veins of discourse that are impacted by the dildo, which we will see play out in part II.

With so many forms of method and discourse, I reframe transdisciplinary not so much as a transcending of disciplinarity, but more—as we will explore with Mark Lewis Taylor—as a transimmanence of disciplinarity. There is a constant movement back and forth *into* and not necessarily out of various disciplines, with a refusal to *neatly* settle into one, even though there

¹⁴ Melissa M. Wilcox, *Queer Religiosities: An Introduction to Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 16.

potentially may be more comfort in queer theory and continental philosophy of religion, for these are facets where I find a lot of personal resonance concerning my own methodological trainings.

Recall from earlier, reinventing without itinerary. This is not to say there is no “plan” for this project; rather, this is saying that I did not limit this project to an *a priori* structure of what this project is “supposed” to be. There is a calculating incoherency of queer and trans life that does not lend itself to straightforward method. A quick example: while queer and trans politics can point toward the consumer cash grabs of astronomical pharmaceutical prices of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and chemoprophylaxis (such as PrEP) and advocate for depathologization of these identities that require a doctor’s prescription in favor of simple access to the medical care they desire, we must simultaneously acknowledge that this structure *has* provided life-affirming and life-saving care, but at the cost of pathologization. There is no straightforward way out of the quagmire, and this is but a sliver of the incoherent desires of queer and trans life—wanting to be free of medico-judicial pathologization, yet simultaneously needing it, in some cases, to survive. There is not going to be easy movement through and within these various methods. While it may feel too queer to some theologians, I arguably cede far too much with the framing of counternormativity which reeks of normative ethics and Theology in relation to the bastion of antinormativity in queer and trans theory. Conversely, while it may feel too theological for some queer and trans scholars, I arguably do not treat theological doctrine with the historical or systematic care that, perhaps, should be given to such ideas. Nonetheless, the reinvention without itinerary entails I let go of those (false) allegiances and explore what might be when we are open to new cartographies—of gender, sex, sexuality, but also theology, ethics, and more.

I will also employ some delayed gratification, throwing the reader into the affective turmoil of queer and trans life. While *Countersexual Manifesto* (where we find the theories of the dildo) was originally published in French in 2000, it did not find its way into English until 2018. This could have been a project that presented *Countersexual Manifesto* in a time capsule, yet each time *Countersexual Manifesto* has undergone translation it has also been modified. Therefore, while translated from a document originally published in 2000, the 2018 translation arrived in English still positioned within relevant conversations. Due to this temporal delay, part I delays this crucial text for christotechtonics until part II; opting, instead, to present a contemporary affective assemblage, setting the stage for how the dildo will hermeneutically intervene.

Chapter one can be best understood as a primer to the Foucault that is necessary to understand what is going on in this project, from the perspective that Foucault finds interlocutors in both gender and sexuality studies, but also in religious studies (especially religious studies that broach theology—think along the lines of Mark D. Jordan). This chapter is less about naming a haunting and more so overviewing a background operative valuable presence. Foucault has been (and still is) integral to queer and trans scholarship (in addition to Lacan—though those routes remain unexplored in this project). There is still recourse to medico-juridical structures (central to Butler in *Gender Trouble*, but still threading its way through theory), conceptions of ab/normality, power analysis, and, more. These concepts do not necessarily haunt, as there is not a desire nor composure to disappear Foucault. It is an active presence that interfaces (sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly) within scholarship. But everything from Foucault does not need to be foregrounded here. Concepts integral to this chapter include Foucault's conceptualization of

power and counter-conduct, the term *dispositif*, and the general shift concerning the discourse of truth from the confessional to the psychiatric couch. While I simply collect various selections of Foucault's work, the section dedicated to *dispositif* does extend briefly into contemporary Foucauldian scholarship.

Foucault, rather than being the end of the methodological framing, functions as the first building block of this assemblage. As it concerns this project, there are many scholars who overlook or deliberately ignore the role Christianity played in Foucault's theories (something that also occurs with Lacan which is actively being explored in the work of Kris Trujillo). One is hard-pressed to *not* find a reference to Christian connections in Foucault's expansive work—whether we determine these references as valid is another question for another time. Rather than interpret this to represent a primacy of Christianity, it is helpful to remember that religion should also be included in intersectional analysis. Recourse to religion, in this case Christianity, certainly does *not* explain everything, but it does explain why Foucault is making an appearance. Retaining the background presence of Foucault in relation to these Christian connections aids the analysis (by retaining what is often jettisoned) by alluding, at critical points throughout the project, to dense points of friction between religious (in this case Christian theological) formation and seemingly non-religious formation. This will be most forcefully understood when the case-study text of "*Male and Female He Created Them*" writes from the religious enclosure of Roman Catholicism yet proposes a fundamental human nature (through recourse to natural law) that impinges upon all people, not just religious Catholics.

Chapter two will then be positioned at a more obtuse angle. Since this project is not about Foucault, this transition may, at first, seem jarring. However, as the chapter progresses,

Foucauldian concepts will crop up from time to time. In many ways, chapter two mediates Foucauldian conceptions of power—the translation of sovereignty into the juridical model and the complex relations of interlocking and networking relations of power, grouped under governmentality, but indicating a biopolitical model. Rather than taking these as two separate models of power, I reframe them through critical trans politics to articulate the socio-juridical, which more adequately expresses a disposition to the law for queer and trans politics. This political edge gives nuance to ways theory is expressed in this project. While dalliances with negativity are par for the course in queer and trans theory, critical trans and queer politics recognize the need to live in the present messiness of our lived lives, amidst socio-juridical conditions.

Chapter two also establishes a critical distance from what Mark Lewis Taylor calls *guild Theology*, which is explored in chapter three. Within chapter two, a critical trans and queer politics allows incisive analysis of socio-juridical structures and can aid in political attunement. This will be explored through entanglements with the affect theory of Lauren Berlant. Rights expansion models receive the greatest analysis in this chapter, aligning these models with what I call openness arguments within *Theology*—what Linn Marie Tonstad might call *apologetics*.¹⁵ Making clear that I have no intention to erase this type of *Theology*, it is necessary in such a project to name where my own work is positioned.

In short, this chapter is concerned with apprehending queer and trans politicality. I operate with Mark Lewis Taylor's conception of the political, as "A mode of being affected by

¹⁵ Linn Marie Tonstad, *Queer Theology: Beyond Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 1–15.

our sociality and historically mediated ontological constitution.”¹⁶ Here, I will bring into the conversation another work by Preciado, *Can The Monster Speak?*, to highlight how a socio-juridical analysis that helps attune queer and trans politicality can point toward desiring the need to find a way out, which challenges a socio-juridical regime that facilitates this politicality. In this regard, the way out cannot be given to us, but must be seized. Political motivations chime with Preciado’s *Countersexual Manifesto*. This rupture striving for a way out will be most apparent in chapter four’s initial articulation of christotechnics as hermeneutical lens and chapter seven’s heuristic intervention. Such political attunement fosters dispositions that seek to ghost the system, yet, unlike the flights of negativity in most queer and trans theory projects, Preciado gestures toward utopic horizons.

Chapter three, then, further articulates this project’s position and rounds out the methodological footholds across a few disciplines and veins of discourse. This chapter utilizes Mark Lewis Taylor as the primary theological springboard, drawing upon his distinction between guild Theology and the theological. Here, guild Theology is a disciplinary disposition that is more aligned with academic interests and an imperio-colonial project that asserts its own transcendent sovereignty. The theological is a force comprised of marginalized and exploited bodies that haunt guild Theology; a force that weighs in through theo-ethical poetic and artistic gestures. Important to Taylor’s formulation of the theological is that he is seeking to name something that is occurring outside the expertise of the disciplinary niche of Theology. While Taylor is a trained theologian, he is turning toward continental political philosophy, most importantly Jean-Luc Nancy, to construct the theological.

¹⁶ Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2011), 6.

This project, resultingly, takes the framing of the theological and applies it to the growing conversation. If guild Theology (Theology set apart through its capitalization) shapes an imperio-colonial sense coupled with sovereign transcendence, I align it with the articulation of law from the previous chapter. Crucially for this project, it is important to note that political struggle—even within the framing of the socio-juridical—does not erase a prior model. Here, we see the recurrence of counter-conduct as an integral factor. Therefore, the second half of this chapter stitches the socio-juridical into this framework of the theological.

Chapter three allows us to conceive of queer and trans theory through this theological capacity (without necessarily saying queer and trans theory *is* theology). The result is queer and trans theory offering itself as a counter to theology, a countertheology. While “theology” may be the terminological name, countertheology is far more descriptive than definitive; recalling the ways in which queer chaffs the distinctions of function and produced effects. Countertheology is a function, and this function will be elaborated through christotechtonics, as one example of countertheology, in part II. It bears repeating, the goal is not the articulation of a positivized theology, but the positing of a hermeneutical lens that interrogates theological function.

As noted, part I of the project sets the stage for part II; fittingly, as it describes transdisciplinary methodological choices. As a result, the forthcoming theological hermeneutic articulated is less concerned with fitting itself into existing discourse within guild Theology or even queer and trans theory. Rather, this hermeneutic utilizes queer and trans theory akin to how Taylor has conceptualized the theological. This offers powerful insights and critiques in relation to hegemonic forms of Theology. Without devaluing the affective assemblage in part I of the project, there are some readers who may be more primed to dig into the content of part II

immediately. Succinctly, part I of the project will point toward the following: queer and trans theory informs the ethical implications of theological assertions that delimit the politicality of intentionally exploited people and can function as powerful modes of theological discernment and intervention. This method is put in action in part II, where I engage comparative intertextual analysis (the bread and butter of queer and trans theory) in relation to the Vatican document “*Male and Female He Created Them*”.

Part II, *Dildonic Prostheticity in Theological Formulation*, is the constructive portion of this work. Conceptually dense at times, part II will articulate that Christ is a dildo. While this claim will first appear in chapter four, this argument traces its way across all four chapters of part II, with each chapter contributing a new facet to this claim. In other words, the scope I am wishing to articulate with christotechtonics is not fully present within just one chapter. Part II is the argumentative force noted above, which is now positioned within the affective constellation of impinged politicality with avenues of theo-ethical intervention being viable options for intentionally exploited peoples. In this case, the “constructive” portion is the hermeneutical lens of christotechtonics, the title of this project.

Chapter four, “Christotechtonics,” is arguably the most conceptually dense chapter of this book. Here, Paul B. Preciado’s text, *Countersexual Manifesto*, is employed as the foundation for the theological insights in this constructed hermeneutic. *Countersexual Manifesto*, on its own, is dense, intervening in various veins of discourse—in sometimes obtuse ways. At its heart, *Countersexual Manifesto* advocates for the dildo to shutter the mechanisms of the heterocentric regime (heterosexualism, heterosexuality) by revealing the fabrication of heterosexuality. Pursuant to post-structural analysis, the shuttering of the mechanisms of the heterocentric regime

would mutually challenge (thinking in the idealized theoretical landscape) heterosexuality and homosexuality.¹⁷ Therefore, simply noting binaries is not enough; queer *does* something with it.¹⁸

¹⁷ Cf. Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 59.

¹⁸ Lee Edelman's *No Future* displays this tension in between the lines. He contends the apoliticality of this work, which challenges both sides of the binarism. While Edelman is certainly not exempt from critiques (most of them trending toward *ad hominem* references to him being a white gay male), he still has provided some of the most rigorous theorizations of queer that embody a non-surface-level deployment of challenging binary thinking. To challenge binary thinking is to destroy the symbolic, *à la* Lacan. This is why it is so crucial for Edelman to always contend how queerness can never be an identity (just as Butler theorized gender as without essence). Queer is the excess of a symbolic regime. We could conceive this within a secular space or even a theological space. Yet queer can only disturb identity. Therefore, a queering does not represent a pie-in-the-sky embrace of exclusion and the reconciliation of community. From a more theological perspective, what is contended by a position like Edelman would be akin to James Alison's double exegesis of the Gerasene demoniac (both biblical exegesis and Girardian exegesis). Excluding the more psycho-social components of Girardian mimetic theory, the role of the scapegoat as an internal function of exclusion becomes important. Within the passage, Jesus heals the demoniac who functions as the excess of the society. However, this healing actually facilitates the negation that collapses a symbolic identity. Even while a healing has occurred, a loss of identity has also occurred. Who is the demoniac without the supposed demon that alleged caused the communal expulsion? Who is the community who defined their being in relationship to the demoniac? The collapse of the binary is not the embrace of the newly healed demoniac (the queerly coded character) into the community; the collapse of the binary comes through the healing of the demoniac that *spoils both identities* (to reference recent linguistic returns to deviance studies by Heather Love).

This is why, for me, the conversation of binary (while important) is often the more surface-level form of queer, which, as I note, you don't *need* queer to get there, as this is basic post-structuralism. The above example also gestures towards Linn Tonstad's concerns regarding apologetics. This is not to say that the embracing of queer identity is bad from a personal lived experience; rather, there is a disconnect when this transitions into how queer has been *theorized*. While we can say the embrace of queerness closes a binary, we must attend to the reality that this embrace usually is by the hand of one side of the binary opposition. This, therefore, actually then becomes apologetics, for one is seeking to justify queerness within a pre-existing system, place, idea that has, until this moment, not justified queerness. This is apologetics because it *favors one side of the binary*, it does not actually collapse it. From the political register, this favoring of one side of the binary is the liberal progress narrative. First, we expand to include women, but only an acceptable form of women, then Black men, then Black women, then the homosexuals, and now transgender people. Again, while progress is certainly a good, queerness challenges the basis of these inclusionary and/or assimilationist mechanisms, for they will always produce a remainder of the very category of human the law is seeking to incorporate. Only the docile white married woman will find enfranchisement, but we must frame the single politically independent woman as deviant.

The dildo, here in christotechnics, is breaking both the categorization of gender and sexuality, but also the theological usage of Christ. It is not choosing to keep gender and sexuality as we know it and break theology, nor is it choosing to keep theology as we know it and break gender and sexuality. It is challenging—breaking—both sides of this binary. This action undermines the authority of both. Here is where the queer and trans contention may reside. Preciado is interested in exploring how queerness, as a produced reality of living human beings, embodies its own unique epistemology. Therefore, the dildo is a philosophical tool like Nietzsche's philosophical hammer; yet the abjection of queerness is on display when the reaction to a dildo being a viable philosophical tool is immediately rejected simply on the basis that the aforementioned uniqueness of this position has been deliberated misinterpreted to mean the better or right epistemology. Queer and trans life may not have experience of wielding the hammer, but we might have experience in wielding the dildo, which challenges our somatic limitations and foundations.

The first part of this chapter unpacks the dildo, and its presumptions of being a bad object for trans theory, due to its facsimile of the penis. Crucial to Preciado's argument, and for this project, the dildo's origins reside in its usage within queer and trans sex lives (both penis shaped dildos and ergonomic dildos). Rather than exoticize the sex practices of queer and trans people, the dildo becomes a conceptual tool derived from this epistemic location to interrogate cisgender heteropatriarchy. Per the initial framings of Foucault, the dildo makes visible the invisibility of cisgender heteropatriarchy as Preciado will show how even the cisgender penis—the appendage that has been “bestowed” signifying power—is an arbitrarily determined position concerning sexual difference. The dildo reveals this sexist and patriarchal position that often seeks to portray sexual dimorphism as determined by the penis as a natural fact of life as, in reality, a plastic—a dildonic—fabrication. The invisibility of this fabrication has been made visible.

The second half of the chapter positions the dildo alongside the theological function of Christ, which recall, does not exist, and does not express anything, save for what human determine Christ *is to express*. This will lead to the title of this project: christotechtonics. Christotechtonics—riffing off Preciado's dildotechtonics, which is the counterscience that studies the appearance, formation, and utilization of the dildo¹⁹—studies the appearance,

¹⁹ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 41; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 75. “Techne” is a conceptual tool that circulates throughout Preciado's works. From architecture in *Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboy's Architecture and Biopolitics* to conceptual psychoanalysis in *Can the Monster Speak?*, from the dildo in *Countersexual Manifesto* to the Pill or Testogel in *Testo Junkie*, all the way to the aesthetic in *Dysphoria mundi: le son du monde qui s'écroule* (Paris, FR: Grasset, 2022), in relation to the pétro-sexo-racial regime:

“Lorsque je parle d'«esthétique pétro-sexo- raciale», je n'entends pas le sens restreint que prend le mot «esthétique» dans le monde de l'art. Par esthétique, j'entends l'articulation entre l'organisation sociale de la vie, la structure de la perception et la configuration d'une expérience sensorielle partagée. L'esthétique dépend toujours d'une régulation politique de l'appareil sensoriel du corps vivant dans une société. L'esthétique est, pour reprendre les termes de Jacques Rancière, une manière spécifique d'habiter le monde sensible, une régulation sociale et politique des sens : de la vue, de l'ouïe, du toucher, de l'odorat, du goût et de la perception sensori-motrice, si l'on pense au découpage du sensible par lequel sont régies les sociétés occidentales, mais aussi d'autres sens qui apparaissent comme « supranaturels » selon la classification scientifique occidentale, mais qui sont pleinement présents dans d'autres

formation, and utilization of Christ. It is conceived as both a hermeneutic and heuristic.

Christotechtonics is a hermeneutic, as it becomes an interpretative lens to analyze how Christ is utilized to vivify or nullify life—in this case, nonnormative gender, sex, and sexuality (but further analysis could explore this more deeply in relation to race, class, ability, environmental precarity, and more). Christotechtonics is heuristic as it can be the counter-technique that short-circuits the somatic techniques of heterosexualism. This heuristic edge will be addressed in chapter seven. This results in being able to enact the following performative utterance: Christ is a dildo.

Additionally, this paragraph alluded to a phrase I will return to throughout this document: the theological function of Christ. But what does this mean? Retrieving the above argumentative overview, I am contending there is no essence to Christ. Christ, therefore, is a function. But, again, what does this mean? If Christ is only function, recourse to Christ only serves to highlight a (theological) void that we humans pour certain identity categories into to justify those

régimes sensoriels indigènes ou non occidentaux. Par esthétique, j'entends aussi, avec Félix Guattari et Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, une technologie de production de la conscience culturellement construite par une communauté humaine et non humaine. Une esthétique, c'est donc un monde sensoriel partagé, mais aussi une conscience subjective capable de le décoder et de le comprendre.

[When I speak of “petro-sexo-racial aesthetics”, I do not mean the restricted meaning that the word “aesthetics” takes on in the art world. By aesthetics, I mean the articulation between the social organization of life, the structure of perception and the configuration of a shared sensory experience. Aesthetics always depends on a political regulation of the sensory apparatus of the living body in a society. Aesthetics is, to use the terms of Jacques Rancière, a specific way of inhabiting the sensory world, a social and political regulation of the senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste, and sensory-motor perception, if we think of the division of the sensible by which Western societies are governed, but also of other senses which appear as “supranatural” according to Western scientific classification, but which are fully present in other indigenous or non-Western sensory regimes. By aesthetics, I also mean, with Félix Guattari and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, a technology for the production of consciousness culturally constructed by a human and non-human community. An aesthetic is therefore a shared sensory world, but also a subjective consciousness capable of decoding and understanding it]”, 42–43.

In this regard, *techne* and the relationship to aesthetics engender an epistemology.

identities. Christ, then, does not exist, but is real. Still, what does this mean? If Christ does not exist, we cannot articulate (seek to linguistically express) what Christ *is*, only what Christ produces. So, then, what is the theological function of Christ? The theological function of Christ is, perhaps frustratingly, dildonic.

If Christ has no essence, then Christ, as a theological category, does not possess nor can express, anything: a void of content. However, when Christ is emplaced onto human bodies a certain function of Christ is enacted. Within “*Male and Female He Created Them*” Christ is utilized to determine and form the appearance of legitimate and illegitimate human bodies. Here, it is helpful to already have in mind ideological framings of human bodies. Within “*Male and Female He Create Them*”, the writers will make it apparent that *Humanae Vitae* is still fully in play, thus cisgender heterosexual couples who cannot naturally conceive are framed outside the function of Christ that is emplaced onto heterosexuality (the ideological system). However, I will note this project privileges trans, intersex, and queer’s greater proximity to these ideological violences that call for manipulations of the human body or the ontological erasure of a human’s personhood (i.e., they are not “properly” human, and thus not human). Nonetheless, Christ has functioned in a dildonic manner, for there are some human bodies that “fit” perfectly into the ideological paradigm that is disappeared as natural. Yet, as christotechtonics studies the appearance, formation, and utilization of Christ, it interrogates how this ideological privileging through recourse to Christ is a completely arbitrary fabrication: it is dildonic.

Chapter five, then, transitions to a countersexual—in this case countertheological—reading exercise. Put another way, chapter five is the hermeneutic of christotechtonics in action. The text under scrutiny is the 2019 Vatican document “*Male and Female He Created Them*”:

Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education (MF). While it may seem facile to choose a Catholic document to show this hermeneutic in action, it has been an intentional choice for a couple of reasons. One, documents such as *MF*, which was written under the auspices of the specificity of the Catholic Church, express a function of catholic (universal) implications—it is a political document, working in a socio-juridical manner. In other words, while we may want to ignore the document, it perhaps is negligent to do so. Two, Christ is mentioned in only paragraph of this document. This may seem, again, a rather odd choice. Why not select a document where Christ abounds? Instead, I analyze how this one usage of Christ operates as a dense transfer point in *MF*, reverberating implications throughout. While this chapter does address violence enacted explicitly toward transgender and intersex people, I adopt the position of Preciado. What happens when the supposed stability of cisgender heterosexuality is interrogated? It is precisely the futile grasping for stability that demands violence must be enacted toward intersex and transgender people.

In relation to the dildo revealing the logics of heterosexuality—which are already the logics of the dildo—the force of this chapter is directed toward the fabrication of heterosexuality, and the necessary violence toward intersex and trans people that must facilitate this apotheosization of heterosexuality. In this regard, it is noted how heterosexuality—the supposed natural creation of humanity—is ideological *tout court*, as it is a fabrication that stakes its intelligibility on the arbitrary possession of a penis (facilitating sexual dimorphism) ordered toward biological reproduction (penis-in-vagina intercourse). Thus, the elephant in the room—or the crux of the document—becomes the rhetorical posture that the church is seeking to critique

the spectre of the ideology of “gender theory,” yet it does not interrogate its own understanding of gender, sex, and sexuality to already be ideological.

Chapter six is a continuation of both chapter four and five. An intersectional conversation concerning race is notably lacking within *Countersexual Manifesto*, and nearly absent within *MF* as well. Pursuant to early theorizations of “queer” by Teresa de Lauretis, we must understand that sexual subjectivity is shaped by both gender and race.²⁰ This chapter then expands Preciado’s thought with the work of Marquis Bey and deepens the analyze of *MF*. So as not to present a complete second reading of *MF*, this chapter features inflection points as we progress through Bey’s thought. These inflection points can be understood through socio-juridical framing. These inflections will broach the incoherencies of Black life in relation to gender, sex, and sexuality. This will range from the oversexualization and “adultification” of young Black girls as more sexually mature than their white peers, repeating racialized and sexualized logics of hypersexuality and promiscuity of Blackness to the reduction of Black women as medical objects that were the test subjects for medical procedures without anesthesia that, once perfected, would be administered to white women under anesthesia. In general, Bey will invoke the concept of thrownness engendered in Black bodies in relation to cisgender, white, heteropatriarchy. I tarry with these inflections, as not everyone who may read this text may be familiar with the incoherencies of inhabiting a body that has been racialized, and how these histories, still to this day, crisscross the everyday existence of Black bodies.

²⁰ Teresa de Lauretis, “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities,” in *differences* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1991): iii–xviii. De Lauretis famously rejected the notion of “queer theory” a few years after this publication, as it was failing to live up to its political and/or critical usage (as a mode of rigorous interrogation of gender, sex, sexuality, race, class, and more). With all things academic, once something has become published, it takes on a life of its own, so perhaps there is something queer in the un-tameability of these permutations. Despite these criticisms, de Lauretis would eventually re-affirm “queer theory” we it would retain greater intersectional analysis and criticism.

At its heart, this chapter interrogates cisgender by exploring cisgender's relationship to blackness and violence. Bey will use blackness (lowercase) to point toward the need for coalition building that extends beyond *just* Black bodies. Within his argument is also the assertion that Black bodies already trans gender, as gender categorization has historically been disallowed to Black people. In this regard, this chapter is also indebted to the scholarly insights of Hortense Spillers, C. Riley Snorton, Christina Sharpe, Stephen Best, Achille Mbembe, María Lugones, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, and more, though these crisscrossing conversations are not foregrounded in this chapter. Pursuant to the imperio-colonial sense of Theology articulated by Taylor in chapter three, blackness works alongside queerness as a haunting force. This investigation helps to unearth racist logics that also are in circulation between the lines in *MF*. And once again, Christ functions as the fulcrum that determines who is within the function of Christ and who is outside the function of Christ.

Recall, the force of *MF* is to extend via a universal little-c catholic way, despite its articulations occurring within a Catholic document. However, just like the previous chapter, there is need to interrogate hidden ideological mechanisms that are at play. Following Bey's arguments and the histories of denied and/or erased gender for Black bodies, Black bodies are outside the ideological framework of cisgender asserted within *MF*. The goal, once again, is to turn toward the dildo to interrogate how Christ, in its deployment in *MF*, has effectively ordained cisgender whiteness as the only legitimate anthropological formation. The dildo then reveals the fabricated logics of race in addition to the categories of gender, sex, and sexuality.

The final chapter will explore the performance "Personal Jesus" by drag artist Louisiana Purchase to note a heuristic technique of christotechtonics. Within *Countersexual Manifesto*,

Preciado introduces three countersexual reversal practices. Within these practices Preciado will articulate how the dildo is translated in various processes. In one reversal practice, the dildo is the sex toy in the likeness of a penis; however, within the second exercise we see the dildo translated onto the arm, and in the third the whole body becomes a dildo. These practices are also timed and parody a male ejaculation as completion to symbolize the fabrication of what a sex act even is. These reversal practices also serve a heuristic device, actions that short-circuit the logics of hegemonic sexuality, which, in turn, short-circuit logics of sex and gender. Just as Preciado notes these reversal practices do not foreclose other forms of reversal practices, I contend this one analysis is not the end, but a call to seek out other artistic and poetic expressions of christotechtonics. For this chapter, I turn to Louisiana Purchase's performance, which chime with Preciado's first countersexual reversal practice, and intend to highlight how this performance is also theologically charged.

Within this performance, Louisiana Purchase will fellate a cross, insert the cross in her ass, fellate the cross once more, and then snap the cross in half. A more in-depth overview of the performance occurs in the chapter, but this brief description serves to elaborate why this performance might suggest christotechtonics "in the wild." This of course concedes that I am *already* reading this performance as possessing the force of christotechtonics and not contending this performance *is* christotechtonics. It is an interpretation of the performance. Allow me to get to this distinction by another route.

I have highlighted this performance because this is a glimpse of what is occurring in queer spaces. Just as Althaus-Reid noted that there are queers going into bars with rosaries and

religious stamps in their pockets,²¹ I am revealing a *locus theologicus* where queers are sticking crosses in their asses and then breaking them in half. This performance was also selected as there is a certain force of the performed art that differs from more static pieces. We could look to the art of Humberto Reynoso's *Self Portrait* (a ceramic sculpture with a fire-engine-red wooden cross penetrating the anus reminiscent of Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*) or *With Liberty and Justice for Some* (a US flag fashioned out of ceramic dildos, in the likeness of penises, in red, white, and blue which Reynoso has paired with *Tired Pledge*, a counter pledge of allegiance that points toward inequalities within the US), which certainly convey their own affective force. However, I am interested in how Louisiana Purchase will identify the audience's vicarious enjoyment—their pleasure—in this performance.

This performance could be interpreted as a praxeological entrance point into christotechtonics. While this may be true, I will contend Preciado derives the whole force of dildotechtonics—this project of christotechtonics following suit—from the quotidian object of the dildo. The dildo is something that already shapes conduct and action within queer lives. Furthermore, the previous chapters of the project are more textually based, even though there is recourse to history that, in my opinion, points toward the need for heuristic interventions like “Personal Jesus.” I contend the prior chapters prime the reader to be able to encounter Louisiana Purchase without immediately running to charges of profanity and pornography, which are all too common assessments of queer art.

Integral to this chapter is noting how this is an art piece that has occurred. It is not something I am conjuring in my mind. In other words, queer and trans people are already

²¹ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 1.

weighing in as it concerns Theology and institutionalized structures like the Catholic Church. As will be revealed in the chapter, the conversation of dildos and theology has already been happening, though outside the auspices of academic codification. As much as this penning of the work represents a new expansion of academic thought, it concedes that it has learned from the community of queer and trans artists and activists who are constantly weighing in concerning Theology.

Concluding Remarks

This project traverses from affective assemblage of methodologies that seek to ascertain a snapshot of the incoherencies of queer and trans life to the construction of a hermeneutical lens to critically interrogate the fabrication of sex, gender, sexuality, and race within a contemporary deployment of Christ. But to what end?

This project does not take up the utopian political project of Preciado (it is already too long as it is) through the articulation of a positivized theological system. Rather, this project nestles within the vein of queer works that reject the demand of a use value to its work. While I contend the addition of another hermeneutical lens is always beneficial, it is not up to me if such a lens will be adopted. Furthermore, the trend of use value only serves to retrench the commodification of intellectual labor and, in this case, the commodification and continued objectification of queerness. This project, with hopes of being beneficial, is an intellectual exercise, one rarely allowed to occur by the hands and minds of racialized queer and trans people. In other words, I am rejecting a pre-ordained itinerary for the afterlife of this project; reinventing without an itinerary; transit, not essence.

Some final finesse must be noted. While I employ Preciado's dildo for the deconstructive flair of this project, I would be remiss if I did not mention this project's indebtedness to Edelman in relation to a sense of use value. Edelman, known for his rigorous theorizations of queer, sought to unearth a counterpedagogy indicative to queer. The subtitle of his latest text, *Bad Education*, is quite funny: why queer theory teaches us nothing. As noted scantily in the above text, Edelman does not employ queer to refer to a positive identity construction (i.e., I am a queer person), though he does concede this is a colloquial usage of this term in contemporary times (scholars like Matt Brim also note how "queer" is a term still associated with white, affluent, academia²²). Instead, queer functions as the catechresis (the misnaming) of the ontological void that is at the center of a symbolic structuring logic. "Queer," then, names this void, but this void is nothing. Queer cannot be something; it can only gesture toward the nothing it has been determined to be. Writes Edelman, "Insofar as queerness pertains to ab-sens [outside meaning], it argues that nothing 'is' queer, while maintaining that *nothing*, the ontological negation figured by queerness, *is*."²³

The subtitle is funny, because it is telling us, the reader, that it will teach us nothing, other than the nothingness that queer is. Just as in *No Future*, where queerness more so gestured to a certain uselessness, *Bad Education* is challenging us to, once again, ask what we are asking queer to do from the theoretical perspective. Furthermore, following de Lauretis, Edelman maintains a relentless critique of the structuring logics of racialized gender, sex, and sexuality

²² See Matt Brim, *Poor Queer Studies: Confronting Elitism in the University* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

²³ Lee Edelman, *Bad Education: Why Queer Theory Teaches Us Nothing* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), 43.

formation. But to what end? To the end of deconstructing, perhaps, an affective regime that impinges upon queer peoples' lives (positive identity construction used intentionally).

Here, I am holding the tension of “Christ” and “dildo” together—each word a vestige from seemingly opposing disciplines. I hold this tension to break binaries. I will be honest, at this point in queer work, the fixation on binaries is quite passé, and frankly, it is arguably just post-structuralism and there is nothing inherently “queer” about pointing out binaries (Levi-Strauss already happened!). But if we are to embark on deconstructionism (a permutation of post-structuralism) we must challenge both sides of this tension. As noted before, I am doing work with “queer” that queers probably would hate, and likewise concerning theologians and Theology. But this is precisely the point.

I am attuned to my own critical reading of queer theologies. I follow Tonstad's framing of apologetics. What I see occurring in these works is often the naming of the binary opposition (often of homo vs hetero) *within* Theology, and then the resolution of this binary *within* Theology. I am contending this does not address the other binary of sexuality, sex, and gender theories versus Theology (though again, post-structuralism will tell us these binary positions do not actually exist, yet they are real, etc.). Here, the apologetic strategy actually reinforces binarism by simply subsuming one aspect of the binary into the other. Conversely, within gender and sexuality, there is strong tendency to work toward the destitution of religion (going one step further than the second-level reflections of religion in Theology), which again, serves to simply flatten the binary to one side. Per Levi-Strauss, this binary opposition adds plot and drama to our lives, but it nonetheless needs resolution. But why must that resolution, as we most often see from both disciplines, fall on one side or the other?

What this project is attempting to do, amidst these assertions of “Christ is a dildo” (which may appear as a positive identity statement), is to embark on a process of mutual deconstruction of sexuality, sex, and gender *and* the Theology that foments these categories. This is why Edelman is so forceful in his theorizations of queer because it is not done to assert a primacy of the queer person; such a person does not exist. The force of the deconstruction chips away at both hetero- and homo-, following Althaus-Reid concerning the idea of same-sex relationships becoming meaningless if we truly understand the endless multiplicities of sex that reframe “same-sex” relationships as a secondary fabrication of heterosexuality,²⁴ and finally, following Preciado, the dildo reveals the fabrication of sexuality, sex, and gender. From here, there is no process of constructing a new Theology, but resting in the deconstruction, imploring the discernment of the ethical implications of Theology.

I will end the introduction through reference to the epigraph of this project from de Lauretis’ foundational forward in *differences* in relation to “Queer Theory.” This project is conceptual and speculative work as it concerns discourse production. Well, I at least find “Christ the dildo” to be conceptual and speculative. But there is the second angle that works to deconstruct our discourses, but also our silences. In this regard, there is some reading in between the lines, me trying to write the quiet part out loud, but also simultaneously deconstructing this discourse altogether.

Now, you might be thinking, especially as this project finds itself 30 years beyond the publication of de Lauretis’ work, that by critiquing Theology so much I, too, have chosen the side of queer in reference to the above conversation of binaries. I contend this is not the case.

²⁴ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 59.

Pursuant to de Lauretis, queer work deconstructs the discourse around gender, sex, sexuality, race, and other intersecting analysis. I will note though, this project may affectively *feel* like I am privileging one side of the binary with the textual case study interrogating “*Male and Female*”, though I also contend I take aim at neoliberal gay and lesbian politics just as much. To this I can say that as much as the hermeneutic of christotechnics is a lens to read how Christ is trafficking across a document, it is *also* a lens that is reading how heterosexuality (and interlocking racism and cisgender intermixed in politics) is trafficking across a document, thus it is deconstructing *both* sides of binary. This, per de Lauretis, is why it may be considered “queer theory.”

As indicative in my previewed chapters, the constructive portions of this project are rather modest. As noted, I am constructing a hermeneutic, a lens that might be used that leans upon aspects of social construction (in terms of sexuality, sex, gender, race but also Theology). This is conceptual and speculative work, and this was the work of Preciado. I will note in the conclusion potential future avenues that explore this conceptual and speculative work beyond the level of discourse and into embodiment. But for now, we are in the mode of critical deconstruction.

We float on this current of exploration in this flood. We do not know in advance where it may take us, but along the way we can survey with scrutiny how we got here. Let’s get started, shall we?

CHAPTER ONE

LEAVING THEOLOGY BEHIND: FRAMINGS THROUGH FOUCAULT

This project begins with a departure: a walking away from Theology. It may be considered a queer theology project; it may be considered a political theology project; it may be considered a gender theory project; it may be considered a cultural studies project; it may be considered none of these projects, not really. *Christotechtonics: Dildonic Prostheticity in Theological Formulations* is a transdisciplinary project—seeking to pull together two, three, multiple disciplines and varieties of theoretical discourse to arrive at something new, something that perhaps will never quite sit right within any of the given disciplines employed. There is, I hope, a certain aspect of ungovernability or undisciplinarity which runs through this text, a truancy to arrive in any location the way I am supposed to. In this departure, however, I show how we may yet “arrive” at someplace un/familiar that we did not expect.¹

I will be forthright: this chapter holds no shiny thesis but serves to highlight the necessary components of Foucault that, I think, help frame this overall project. The primary aim of this overall project is to discern a theological hermeneutic through Paul B. Preciado’s *Countersexual*

¹ Here I am borrowing the wordplay from Susannah Cornwall, *Un/familiar Theology: Reconceiving Sex, Reproduction and Generativity* (London, UK: T&T Clark, 2017): “My thesis is that un/familiar theology is, then, theology which acknowledges its genealogy, its ‘family history,’ but which is also well aware that genealogy is an arbitrary and constructed science ... The Christian tradition has just as many silent, forgotten and embarrassing progenitors as any biological family does, yet it is too often the same old stories of the same old great-great-grandfathers and aunts and cousins sixteen times removed that get trotted out on occasion. Queer, postcolonial, feminist, womanist and other hermeneutics of retrieval have done well at highlighting some of the voices which are missing, even if they can never adequately be reconstructed ... Un/familiar theology, then, is about acknowledging that both the familiar and the unfamiliar—and both the familial and what we might prefer were *not* the familial—are part of the tradition ... Un/familiar theology is also theology which is circumspect about the apotheosizations of some forms of family which have taken place within parts of Christianity,” 14–15.

Manifesto. What follows represents the swerves and curves such a project entails: diving into critical political theories, ascertaining trajectories of queer and trans theologies, exploring literary studies, questioning the validity of Theology, and most importantly, navigating the dynamics of privileging and de-privileging disciplinary discourses. Various departures, and some arrivals, however brief, will shape this project. Rarely, departures just happen; they have beginnings.

We begin with Foucault. This is not because Foucault is some pinnacle of thought, but because Foucault marks a certain transition regarding our understanding of the discourse of truth, especially as it concerns his history of sexuality.² It also is worth noting that despite temporal distance, Foucault still holds significance for gender and sexual theory reflections; just as Lacan and Freud remain important if only, sometimes, to highlight the ridiculous amount of anti-trans and anti-queer violence that remains as a collective consciousness within heterosexualism.³ Put another way, based upon their impact (whether good or bad) queer and trans people are left to deal with the mess while heterosexualism can simply progress to the next glistening theoretical concept with which to categorize humanity. Deliberate tarrying with the recent past can still aid critical histories of the present. To that end, beginning with Foucault highlights the still-relevant nature of these concepts when the ideology of heterosexualism is critiqued.

² Additionally, the semi-recent publication of the 4th volume of sexuality has relaunched Foucault into the spotlight. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol IV: Confessions of the Flesh*, trans. Robert Hurley, ed. Frédéric Gros (New York, NY: Pantheon, 2021). See also, as a reintroduction of Foucault for scholars today, Niki Kasumi Clements, “Foucault’s Christianities,” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 89, no. 1 (March 2021): 1-40.

³ Terminological note: heterosexuality, heterosexualism, and heterocentric regime all point to the same mechanism. While some may question heterosexuality in this group, this will be unpacked more in chapter four.

While Foucault provided us many insights before succumbing to AIDS in 1984, we do not have the time to outline each of the concepts present within his oeuvre. As noted, I have sought to provide glimpses—not nearly an exhaustive account—of a few concepts that I assessed as crucial to understand what is going on throughout the rest of the project. The theories most pertinent are Foucault’s understanding of power dynamics—with notes toward biopower, biopolitics, and their relationship to the sovereign and drawing connection to Butler—as they relate to counter-conduct; the (frustratingly) obscure articulations of *dispositif*, especially regarding sexuality and the mechanisms of visibility and invisibility; and the translation of the discourse of truth from the confessional to the psychiatric couch.

Crucially, I emphasize the importance that Foucault is a touchstone. The scholars that appear in the following project all use Foucault for their own specific ends, so the concern is not to present a new and/or definitive understanding of Foucault (I will leave that to the Foucault scholars). From Butler, we receive the concern of medico-judicial structures, from Taylor we receive a similar mediation present in chapter two concerning juridical and biopolitical forms of power, from Preciado we receive the framing of counter-conduct. Elsewhere in queer scholarship, Jack Halberstam will draw upon subjugated knowledges, Mark D. Jordan will draw forms of resistance and power, and David Halperin will extend genealogical methods. None of these projects represent a totality of Foucault, yet they are all hedged on *some* understanding of Foucault’s published works (historical this have been *Discipline and Punish*, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and *The History of Sexuality* (most often only volume I)).

Other scholars have furthered Foucault in other directions. Giorgio Agamben, in my opinion, has made strides most forcefully in contemporary political philosophy, providing us

contemporary deep cuts of Foucauldian concepts like *dispositif* (explored below). I also see Agamben's work coalescing with Foucault's lectures at Collège de France, where we received more genealogical trails concerning translations of religious power into secular power, but I also assess Foucault to chart stronger pathways with Ernst Kantorowicz and his work in medieval studies than with Carl Schmitt's political theology. Achille Mbembe has furthered projects of necropolitics, drawing connections and highlighting a shadow-side, so to speak, of biopolitics. In a vastly shorthand manner, instead of biopower, where a state exerts its power to make someone live or allow them to die, necropower is where a state exerts its power to make someone die or allow them to live. Jasbir K. Puar has sought to theorize a middle space of operative power through the concept of maiming in *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*.

Needless to say, the paths one can take with Foucault are myriad and intersecting. As noted in the introduction, Part I is establishing an affective matrix of sorts, a rhizomatic mapping of a snapshot of the present moment. Foucault is the first nodule of the rhizome we are exploring.

Power

Power, and how it should be conceived, weaves its way throughout Foucault's oeuvre, so it is beyond the scope to highlight every notion here. What is necessary to bring forward right now is how Foucault does not understand power as something that is possessed by any institution or any sovereign figure, nor as finite. Put another way, power is not a zero-sum game to be won by any one person, collective, or institution. Rather, "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere ... power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to

a complex strategical situation in a particular society.”⁴ As will be explored shortly, power and *dispositif* are related. Nonetheless, *disciplinary* power, in its coercive manifestation, often makes it easier to perceive that one is being impinged by some external force to conduct their bodies in a certain way—what occurs is an aestheticization of bodily comportment.

Let us take up Bentham’s Panopticon, as it is a classic within Foucauldian literature, for it becomes a conceptually dense touchstone. The following is a brief overview to those unfamiliar, and perhaps a referential shorthand for those who are. Not only do we get insights into Foucault’s conception of power, but we also get insights into *dispositif*, docile bodies, surveillance society, biopower, and more. Mention of Bentham’s Panopticon is referenced in *Psychiatric Power* and would be explained in more extended analysis in *Discipline and Punish*.⁵ Within *Psychiatric Power*, Foucault remarks, “Bentham’s Panopticon is not a model of a prison, or it is not only a model of a prison; it is a model, and Bentham is quite clear about this, for a prison, but also for a hospital, for a school, workshop, orphanage, and so on.”⁶ At this moment in the lecture, Foucault stops just short of the explicit utterance of “any general institution” and opts for “and so on.” Foucault notes that it could apply to a certain *type* of institution, a total institution.

⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol I: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Vintage, 1990 [trans. 1978]), 93.

⁵ See Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France 1973-1974*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Jacques Lagrange (New York, NY: Picador, 2006), 63–91. Panopticism will form the bulk of the November 28, 1973, lecture, receiving foreshadowing and review in the surrounding lectures. Future publication would reveal this conceptual framing was worthwhile to continue to explore. See also Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Vintage, 1995 [trans. 1977]), 195–228.

⁶ Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 73–74; Michel Foucault, *Le pouvoir psychiatrique: Cours au Collège de France 1974–1974* (Paris, FR: Gallimard Seuil, 2003), 75.

Foucault, for his part, will utilize the phrase “complete and austere institutions” instead of total institutions, but these are institutions that functionally create a complete separation and totality of existence apart from other life. Foucault will look to prisons, but scholars have also pointed toward boarding schools, asylums (see Foucault’s own exploration in *History of Madness*), monasteries, and concentration camps. The concern of these institutions is the total regulation of life. This can be in relation to imprisonment, but also education, the schedule of prayer, the schedule of meals, specific interactions with specific people, and, as will we see below, in relation to surveillance.⁷

The syntax and its implication between “total institution” and “complete and austere institutions,” of course, are up for debate, but as much as Foucault analyzes the panopticon, he describes the *mechanisms* at work that enable the reader (or hearer, in the case of the original

⁷ See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 231–256. Foucault will lean upon Baltard as he shifted the discourse of Goffman’s total institutions. Additionally, just as *The History of Sexuality* is more about the mechanisms of sexuality in relation to biopower, so too does *Discipline and Punish* look toward prisons, but the text itself goes beyond merely physical prison, but the mechanisms of prison that extend outward into society through various means and forms. With the prison as the case study, Foucault defines complete and austere institutions: “In several respects, the prison must be an exhaustive disciplinary apparatus: it must assume responsibility for all aspects of the individual, his physical training, his aptitude to work, his everyday conduct, his moral attitude, his state of mind; the prison, much more than the school, the workshop of the army, which always involved a certain specialization, is ‘omni-disciplinary.’ Moreover, the prison has neither exterior nor gap; it cannot be interrupted, except when its task is totally completed; its action on the individual must be uninterrupted: an unceasing discipline. It carries to their greatest intensity all the procedures to be found in the other disciplinary mechanisms. It must be the most powerful machinery for imposing a new form on the perverted individual; its mode of action is the constraint of total education: ‘In prison the government may dispose of the liberty of the person and of the time of the prisoner; from then on, one can imagine the power of education which, not only in a day, but in the succession of days and even years, may regulate for man the time of waking and sleeping, of activity and rest, the number and duration of meals, the quality and ration of food, the nature and product of labour, the time of prayer, the use of speech and even, so to speak, that of thought, that education which, in the short, simple journeys from refectory to workshop, from workshop to the cell, regulates the movements of the body, and even in moments of rest, determines the use of time, the time-table, this education, which, in short, takes possession of man as a whole, of all the physical and moral faculties that are in him and of the time in which he is himself.’ This complete ‘reformatory’ lays down a recoding of existence very different from the mere juridical deprivation of liberty and very different, too, from the simple mechanism of exempla imagined by the reformers at the time of the *ideologues*,” 235–236.

lecture) to understand a more abstract general schema of an institution. Foucault continues his

lecture:

There is a circular building, the periphery of the Panopticon, within which cells are set, opening both onto the inner side of the ring through an iron grate door and onto the outside through a window. Around the inner circumference of this ring is a gallery, allowing one to walk around the building, passing each cell. Then there is an empty space and, at its center, a tower, a kind of cylindrical construction of several levels at the top of which is a sort of lantern, that is to say, a large open room, which is such that from this central site one can observe everything happening in each cell, just by turning around. This is the schema.⁸

There is a subtle shift that occurs. As noted, while Foucault is concerned with the actual structure of the building, as described above, he is also concerned by *how the building functions and to what ends it is deployed*. Once Foucault can extract a more abstract operation of what is revealed through his analysis of the panopticon, he is able to translate this formulation over other veins of discourse.⁹ Arguably, within *The History of Sexuality* we read Foucault's expansion of the concept of institution in relation to sexuality—expanding on portions from *Abnormal*, delivered the year prior (after *Psychiatric Power*). This follows the understanding that institutions cannot be reduced to merely physical structures but can take shape through conceptual or ideological structures. While Foucault voiced hesitancy to embrace the rhetorical and historical structure of ideological critique¹⁰ in favor of his analyses concerning the circulation of power, queer theory has often brought these two modes of analysis together when framing their own critiques.

⁸ Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 74–75; Foucault, *Le pouvoir psychiatrique*, 76.

⁹ Without directly proceeding to the next section right now, I will note there already is a gathering together of *dispositifs* that are isotopic which operate within this schema described. This notion of *dispositif*, the arrangement of bodies via the schema of the panopticon, and a more general turn toward sexuality are setting the stage for Foucault's 1974-1975 lecture, which will be collected under the title *Abnormal*, which will go on to provide the foundation of *The Will to Knowledge*; in particular, 77–131.

¹⁰ See Michel Foucault, 'Society Must Be Defended': *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976*, trans. David Macey, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (New York, NY: Picador, 2003), 33–34.

Without detouring through extensive archives of gender and sexuality studies, I will point to a few permutations of how physical institutions translate into ideological institutions. Both Adrienne Rich and Monique Wittig wrote in 1980 their concerns of the heterosexual contract as an ideological apparatus and delimits lesbian politicality; Rich in “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,”¹¹ and Wittig in “The Straight Mind.”¹² Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, takes a stand against biological essentialism in the sense that one’s sex is one’s gender, or that sex precedes gender; for Butler it is the opposite, gender precedes sex (it should also be noted that *both* Butler and Preciado are informed by Wittig’s “The Straight Mind”).¹³ And we could look toward Edelman and reproductive futurism, that demands the self-policing and comportment of one’s body toward the fantasy of a forever-deferred future which he captures under the figure of the Child.¹⁴ These are all conceptual frameworks of bodily comportment that pass beyond the walls of a physical structure along the lines of Foucault, and have transitioned into the more ideological realm. Nonetheless, despite not possessing a physical location, other than the sites of our very bodies, these functions form an institution.

Now with a conceptual idea of how an institution functions, I want to turn toward Foucault’s statements regarding visibility noted in the above quotation and which also becomes present in *The History of Sexuality* through the *dispositif* of sexuality.¹⁵ Notice how an ability to

¹¹ Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 631–660.

¹² Monique Wittig, “The Straight Mind,” *Feminist Issues* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1980): 103–111.

¹³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: UK: Routledge, 2007 [1990]), 151–193.

¹⁴ Edelman, *No Future*, 1–31.

¹⁵ The section in *The Will to Knowledge* has been translated as “deployment of sexuality,” a common translation of the term *dispositif*.

view, or surveil, is integral to the construction of the physical panopticon, and how, when the physicality of the building is removed, the abstraction continues this ability of surveillance.¹⁶ In our bodily comportment, what occurs, is the production of normalizing effects. This will lead Foucault to articulate:

Panopticon means two things. It means that everything is seen all the time, but it also means that the power exercised is only ever an optical effect. The power is without materiality; it has no need of all that symbolic and real armature of sovereign power; it does not need to hold the scepter in its hand or wield the sword to punish; it does not need to intervene like a bolt of lightning in the manner of the sovereign. This power belongs rather to the realm of the sun, of never ending light; it is the non-material illumination that falls equally on all those on whom it is exercised.¹⁷

Concerning visibility, this will become most apparent for this research when we explore mechanisms of optimism in the next chapter, as well as how visual regimes enforce a particular

¹⁶ See also the 1999 Preface from Butler's *Gender Trouble*: "But what is the link between gender and sexuality that I sought to underscore? Certainly, I do not mean to claim that forms of sexual practice produce certain genders, but only that under conditions of normative heterosexuality, policing gender is sometimes used as a way of securing heterosexuality," xii; in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London, UK: Routledge, 2011), in relation to the concern of identity politics as primary political policy: "When the articulation of coherent identity becomes its own policy, then the policing of identity takes the place of a politics in which identity works dynamically in the service of a broader cultural struggle toward the rearticulation and empowerment of groups that seeks to overcome the dynamic of repudiation and exclusion by which 'coherent subjects' are constituted," 79; in more psychoanalytic gesture, Butlers notes toward the unraveling of the symbolic and resulting precautionary foreclosure of signification for some: "The notion of foreclosure offered here implies that what is foreclosed is a signifier, namely, that which has been symbolized, and that the mechanism of that repudiation takes place within the symbolic order as a policing of the borders of intelligibility," 154; and, perhaps, most famously in the "Critically Queer" chapter: "it is important to emphasize that although heterosexuality operates in part through the stabilization of gender norms, gender designates a dense site of significations that contain and exceed the heterosexual matrix. Although forms of sexuality do not unilaterally determine gender, a non-causal and non-reductive connection between sexuality and gender is nevertheless crucial to maintain. Precisely because homophobia often operates through the attribution of a damaged, failed, or otherwise abject gender to homosexuals, that is, calling gay men 'feminine' or call lesbians 'masculine,' and because the homophobic terror over performing homosexual acts, where it exists, is often also a terror over losing proper gender ('no longer being a real or proper man' or 'no longer being a real or proper woman'), it seems crucial to retain a theoretical apparatus that will account for how sexuality is regulated through the policing and the shaming of gender," 182.

¹⁷ Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 77. Keep in mind, within *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault is more concerned with severing the power-law and power-sovereign relationships. This does not mean the sovereignty and law leave the stage, but are able to be analyzed to new circulations, 89–90.

morphology of the human. By way of preview, the intersex body will pose quite the conundrum for the writers of “*Male and Female He Created Them*”. In an instance where someone has been subjected to the scrutiny—the visibility—of another person, the intersex body represents a challenge to sexual dimorphism. Nonetheless, despite being visible, the authors of the document will advocate for surgical intervention to bring the intersex person into “proper” alignment with sexual dimorphism. Writes Preciado, “A body outside of a heterocentric regime of sexual difference simply can’t be seen. There is no visual regime where it can look like anything other than a monster or a mistake. Thus, we could say that the intersex anatomy is (in what seems a contradiction in terms) invisible.”¹⁸ In these instances, it is not clear where sovereignty is, for it is not located within one single person. Rather, in the case of *MF*, it has been subsumed under nature.

In addition to the concept of visibility, the panopticon also raises questions of sovereign power and disciplinary power. Foucault is not necessarily outright rejecting sovereign power, but he does question its function in the contemporary era, particularly a juridical model of sovereignty as it relates to the people.¹⁹ This matters to Foucault, because the panopticon does not need a guard in the central tower to distribute a juridical form of power; rather, it circulates among the people. The panopticon, “Automates and deindividualizes power. Power has as its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up. The ceremonies, the rituals, the marks by which the sovereign’s surplus power

¹⁸ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 112; Preciado, *Manifesto contrasexual*, 160.

¹⁹ See Foucault, ‘*Society Must Be Defended*’, 167–187.

was manifested are useless.”²⁰ This restructuring concerning the position of the sovereign—not to be understood as an imaginary construct—in relation to juridical pressures and mechanisms does not mean the juridical disappears.

What occurs, regarding juridical pressure, is a translation of the sovereign into the body of the people under the mechanism of the panopticon—what Preciado will refer to as the visual regime. Already within ‘*Society Must Be Defended*’, Foucault is making the turn toward the rhetoric of biopower, which functions slightly different than disciplinary power. In disciplinary power, the individual becomes the site where power is exerted.²¹ As the term suggests, it is a disciplining power, one that demands and cultivates a particular bodily comportment. Biopower, describing how biopolitics is put into effect at the level of society, reclaims some components of the sovereign, but they are now exercised at a socio-juridical level (which will be explored in the next chapter)—and it is involved with matters of life and death.²² Bodily comportment is still involved, but the construction has occurred in a more positive process of subjectification. It is important not to think of biopower as opposite of disciplinary power, but as a permutation and different expression of disciplinary power that demanded new conceptual framing and nomenclature.

²⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 202.

²¹ See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*: “The efficiency of power, its constraining force have, in a sense, passed over to the other side—to the side of its surface of application. He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight; it tends to the non-corporal; and, the more it approaches this limit, the more constant, profound and permanent are its effects: it is a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation and which is always decided in advance,” 202–203.

²² See Foucault, ‘*Society Must Be Defended*’, 239-249.

All this writing on power—and such a dive into a small snapshot of years—up to this point is for a couple of salient reasons. As it concerns matters of sexuality, there is a noticeable gap in Foucault’s monograph publications. While Foucault never stopped working on *The History of Sexuality*, there is a perceptible shift in perspective from *The Will to Knowledge* (1976) and then *The Use of Pleasure* (1984) and *The Care of the Self* (1984), much of which can be filled in by his lectures at the Collège de France, where his construction of biopower gave way toward understanding conduct, which we will turn to in a moment. During this eight-year time span, *The History of Sexuality* will become reworked into the present form we have received.

Counter-Conduct

This ambulation through power gives way to the conversation regarding conduct, particularly counter-conduct, which received attention in Foucault’s lectures and would go on to be published in *Security, Territory, Population*.²³ Foucault describes counter-conduct in the following way: “what I will propose to you is the doubtless badly constructed word ‘counter -conduct’—the latter having the sole advantage of allowing reference to the active sense of the word ‘conduct’—counter-conduct in the sense of struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others.”²⁴ While Foucault notes a contemporary political impact of counter-conduct, he still returns to the Middle Ages and Christianity to draw the connections between the pastorate and governmentality (or the conduct of conduct), that bring people into a positive construction of

²³ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Michel Senellart (New York, NY: Picador, 2007), 191–226.

²⁴ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 201.

power that allows them to become governable bodies. Although no longer framed and adjudicated through the sovereign figure, the reaches of the juridical (and how the juridical functions) remain a factor; here, we should recall the panopticon and the mechanisms of self-surveillance.

What perhaps is the most interesting move with this lecture is when Foucault determines five forms of counter-conduct that arose in the Middle Ages. These functioned to “redistribute, reverse, nullify, and partially or totally discredit pastoral power in the systems of salvation obedience, and truth.”²⁵ These forms include asceticism, communities, mysticism, scripture, and eschatological beliefs.²⁶ Concerning counter-conduct, the present concern is not necessarily *what* these forms are (only being addressed over a few pages of the lecture), but *how* counter-conduct works and how it has been revealed in Christianity through these five forms. The rhetoric of “short-circuit” appears a few times, noting the ways in which the pastorate becomes bypassed. Mysticism bypasses certain hierarchical teachings regarding “the slow circulation of the truths of teaching.”²⁷ Returning to the biblical texts in their original language and then the language of the people, once again, short-circuited the pastorate.²⁸ And so on.

Cataloguing these movements of counter-conduct leaves Foucault with the following:

“Christianity in its real pastoral organization is not an ascetic religion, it is not a religion of the

²⁵ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 204.

²⁶ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 204–214.

²⁷ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 212. For example, a reading exercise could be conducted with Judith C. Brown’s *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986), with Foucault’s concepts being employed to analyze the mechanisms present within the context of Benedetta Carlini and the Convent of the Mother of God.

²⁸ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 213.

community, it is not a mystical religion, it is not a religion of Scripture, and, of course, it is not an eschatological religion.”²⁹ In these articulations of counter-conduct, it becomes apparent that it is not necessarily Christianity (as a general religious belief) that is a problem for Foucault—the often noted obsession with Christianity due to his Catholic upbringing. Rather, what has come forward is the specific expression of Christianity that is rooted within the pastoral organization—we will see later in *The History of Sexuality* that this pastoral organization also leads to orderings and proper economies of desire.

Put another way, Foucault appears to take more issue with—or to analyze with greater scrutiny—the institution that is Christianity more so than the general conceptual belief of Christianity.³⁰ Certainly, as it pertains to his political formulations, the institution—more so than any general belief—facilitates the translatability of the religious pastorate into governmentality and the juridical function of the state. In alignment with our previous exploration, this juridical function is expressed through biopower, at least from the 17th century onward. Juridical power is

²⁹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 214.

³⁰ In general, we should be sure to not abstract Foucault from the history of anticlericalism in France from the 18th century onward. Chapter three will explore this briefly, but what is of greater concern to me is how anticlerical sentiments get reinterpreted to mean outright anti-theological or anti-religious, or—in the case of Foucault—anti-Christian. In my readings, I have yet to come across vehement anti-Christian sentiments as it pertains to a belief. Rather, I read more so these critiques of anticlericalism to highlight the modern French concern of religion bleeding too much into the secular state. Put another way, I read Foucault’s critiques of Christianity to come from French constructions of laicism and not directly from anti-theological sentiments. Furthermore, and perhaps this is too charitable of a reading, this can allow us to still critically receive Foucault, who drew so extensively upon the Christian tradition as he constructed his genealogical archives. This also can serve to note how queer theory often assumes a similar anti-*institutional* critique. Lastly, I am not asserting French laicism offers a theoretical panacea, as will be explored in chapter three. I should also note, I do not intend to represent the 18th century in France as representative of some concrete historical paradigm shift. Here, I bring attention to Sedgwick’s 5th axiom: “The historical search for a Great Paradigm Shift may obscure the present conditions of sexual identity,” *Epistemology of the Closet*, 44. Sedgwick is writing toward the specific articulation of homosexuality and not necessarily religion/secular divides, but as this project works in matters of sexuality and gender it is important to note that these comments should not be considered mutually exclusive. See also Joan Wallach Scott, *Sex and Secularism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

not gone, rather, it becomes intermingled with biopower and, perhaps, in some cases, appear to disappear entirely so long as we maintain a proper orientation toward the juridical.

It is how Foucault sets up his argument regarding counter-conduct that also gives clues as to how we can read such practices. Foucault draws a direct connection to Gregory of Nazianzen. Although the Greek phrase he coins, “economy of souls” (*oikonomia psuchōn*), never appears as such within Gregory’s works, Foucault gleans from Gregory notions of managing desires and passion for the sake of the *oikos*.³¹ To that end, while Foucault has provided scholars of religion, theology, and the historical canon of Christian thought for us to ponder and discuss, he too is presenting his own interpretation and coming to his own conclusions. The present project is not so much as concerned with determining the validity or use-value of such interpretations as it is concerned with how these interpretations have *already* functioned, both inside the study the religion and Theology, but also other disciplines like gender studies and theory.

For example, the concept of an “economy of souls,” drawn from the writings of Gregory concerning the management of desires and passions, can guide rhetorical shifts we will make later, when we draw upon Preciado’s phrasing of “economies of desire.” Within Preciado, and one of the impetuses for this project, was how Preciado once considered a dissertation on reading Augustine’s conversion as a process of transsexuality, where Augustine “transitioned from one

³¹ See Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 217. Additionally, *oikos* has received decent traction within the history of Christian thought, but, pursuant to the conversation regarding Aquinas in the introduction, we should not misinterpret *oikos* to be an original Christian term. Rather, coming from Greek philosophy, *oikos* referred generally to the family, the family’s ordering and property, and the household, adhering to patrilineal descent. This root shows up in words like ecology, but also economics. Two recent examples of its use in contemporary work. One, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity & Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1993). Two, Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2015): https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si.html.

economy of desire to another, contributing to the invention of a new sexuality dominated by theological introjection, the de-eroticization of the body, and degenitalization.”³²

But this notion of economies of desire is not foreign to contemporary theological thought. Marcella Althaus-Reid will employ the framework of location and locale (adapted from Elspeth Probyn) to articulate how queer theology is about transitioning to new locations. For Althaus-Reid, location becomes associated with economies of desire and locale is associated with pleasure.³³ To that end, the goal is not to play with locales in a present location. What does this mean? If locale is pleasure, the goal is not to move the so-called “perverse” pleasures of queers into a categorical box marked “licit,” because this movement still secures the hegemonic economy of desire. Rather, the task of queer theology and the queer theologian is to transition to new locations. Here, the framing of perverse queer pleasures has ceased to mean anything, because the entire economy of desire has shifted.

If Foucault deploys the phrase “economy of souls” to articulate how he is seeking to understand conduct and counter-conduct, then more questions arise. Does counter-conduct strive toward recognition within the same economy it is aiming to be in counter-conduct with? Or does counter-conduct necessitate a rupture from one economy in favor of conceiving of a new economy? What is the role of violence within counter-conduct? What becomes of ethics in counter-conduct? Can a counter-conduct become so normative there must be a counter-counter-conduct? How might such a maneuver look? Does counter-conduct also necessitate a counter-signification of the world? Answering these questions in a strict Foucauldian register is beyond

³² Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 2; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 14.

³³ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 11–12.

the scope of this project. Nonetheless, these questions do remain in play when we explore queer and trans theory. There is a push and pull between naming the *oikos* to facilitate an expansion of its reach and the breaking and creation of a new *oikos*. Regardless, even within Foucault there is a relationship between an old form of conduct, counter-conduct, and a new form of conduct.

There is not a convenient mono-narrative that ameliorates the messiness of human reality, the pastoral, and biopower; rather, it is a complex, poly-narrative that analyzes the various tendrils of discourse that feed into larger schema. Any reduction of this complexity jeopardizes an impoverished reading and analysis of the present age.

What is a *Dispositif*?

It seems fitting this portion of the chapter should bear this historical title, as it is a question that is continually asked by Foucault scholars.³⁴ As noted, I am not here to reinvent the wheel, but to note the continued conversation that surrounds just this one word and concept in Foucault—the interest has not quite ever vanished. This is because Foucault never gave us an explicit handy definition of *dispositif*.³⁵ In fact, part of a current resurgence is the result of more posthumous

³⁴ See Gilles Deleuze, “What is a *Dispositif*?” in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, ed. and trans. Timothy J. Armstrong (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992): 159–168; Giorgio Agamben, “What is an Apparatus?” in *What is an Apparatus and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); cf. for the translation of the Italian “dispositivo,” Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos’è un dispositivo* (Rome, IT: Nottetempo, 2006); Jeffrey Bussolini, “What is a Dispositive,” *Foucault Studies* 10 (Nov 2010): 85–107; and Staf Callewaert, “Foucault’s Concept of Dispositif,” *Praktiske Grunde: Nordisk tidsskrift for kultur- og samfundsvidenskab*, no. 1-2 (2017): 29–52. Additionally, it should be noted that translations have played a role in these continual discussions, particularly in the English-speaking academy. The discrepancy revolves around two words, *appareil* and *dispositif*. For many years, these two words have been translated as “apparatus,” though through the years, as *dispositif* studies grew, there has been a shift toward maintaining a distinction between these two terms.

³⁵ When referencing Foucault in and research in relation to Foucault, I will defer to the French *dispositif*, similar to the practice of leaving Lacan’s *jouissance* or Derrida’s *différance* untranslated. While “deployment” has been a standard practice of translation, I reserve this word, deployment, in this project to reference mechanisms of distributed sexuality in relation to Preciado, and not necessarily Foucault. While there is significant reference to Foucault, Preciado goes beyond Foucault’s project. Perhaps not conceptually, but continuing a genealogy of sexuality, Preciado unearths new analyses of sexual permutation and biopower in both *Countersexual Manifesto* and *Testo Junkie*.

publications of Foucault's materials. Despite the expressed wish for no posthumous publication, the transcription of Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France opened a door that swung wide open with the publication of *The History of Sexuality, Vol IV: Confessions of the Flesh*.³⁶

Central to these publications was understanding Foucault *more*, especially as it concerned his lectures providing glimpses into the formation of his ideas, many of which would be published later as monographs reflecting a more refined conceptualization. However, this never occurred for *dispositif*, as he developed this concept while on lecture circuits and not during his residency lectures at the Collège de France—it never received that same infamy as Foucault's other concepts (other than the ways in which a select few European scholars addressed it), yet nonetheless it found its way into *The History of Sexuality* and how sexuality is conceived, and appears to have been an important conceptual tool.

The fullest articulation of *dispositif* from Foucault comes to us is from the 1977 interview “Le jeu de Michel Foucault,” also reprinted in English under the title “The Confession of the Flesh,” not to be confused with volume four of *The History of Sexuality*.³⁷ This interview has formed the foundation of most of the work that has surrounded *dispositif*, but Davide Panagia has

³⁶ See Clements, “Foucault's Christianities”. Clements both does a historical overview of the Foucault's relationship to Christianity and positioning the publication of *The History of Sexuality, Vol IV: Confessions of the Flesh* into this larger frame of reference. Key to the argument, and central to this one as well, is that Foucault charts a specific interpretation of Christianity, one that perhaps is never consistent across his works. Perhaps this strengthens the assertion that power is exerted through forms of disparate *dispositif* that work together to structure of larger framework. Or perhaps it reveals the biases within Foucault's own scholarship. I think it is safe to say this it is a little of both, nonetheless, these discrepancies within Foucault, neatly overviewed by Clements, show that the “final word” regarding Foucault is far from over. See also Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh*; Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité, IV: Les aveux de la chair*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris, FR: Gallimard, 2018).

³⁷ Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York, NY: Vintage, 1980), 194; Michel Foucault, “Entrevue avec Michel Foucault: Le jeu de Michel Foucault,” *Ornicar? Bulletin périodique du Champ Freudien* 10 (Juillet 1977), 63.

recently offered another reading that locates insights regarding *dispositif* as early as a 1971 lecture delivered in Tunisia, when Foucault hinted at a projected book on Édouard Manet.³⁸ Panagia's article bears many similarities to the one provided by Gilles Deleuze, on the basis of light and visibility as integral to the concept of *dispositif*, though they arrive at their conclusions through slightly different archives. Nonetheless, the 1977 interview is oft cited for it provides a consolidated quasi-definition. Foucault states that *dispositif* is:

Firstly, a thoroughly heterogenous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid ... Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this [*dispositif*] is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogenous elements ... Thirdly, I understand by the term [*dispositif*] a sort of—shall we say—formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*. The [*dispositif*] thus has a dominant strategic function.³⁹

The definition is conceptually dense, and par for the course concerning Foucault. The heterogeneous conception of *dispositif* renders it a more fluid arrangement and distribution of bodies exercising power. For this reason, this is why there is a deliberate connection between

³⁸ The actual book never came to fruition, but these lectures have also been transcribed and can be found in Michel Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting*, trans Matthew Barr (London, UK: Tate, 2009); Michel Foucault, *La Peinture de Manet* (Paris, FR: Seuil, 2004). Davide Panagia outlines the controversies regarding Giorgio Agamben in “On the Political Ontology of the *Dispositif*,” *Critical Inquiry* 45 (Spring 2019): 714–746. In a rather condemnatory tone regarding Agamben, see Matteo Pasquinelli, “What an Apparatus is Not: On the Archeology of The Norm in Foucault, Canguilhem, and Goldstein,” *Parrhesia* 22 (May 2015): 79–89. There is merit to Pasquinelli's argument, yet he falls into the problematic tradition of utterly abstracting theology and any sense of religious influence out of Foucault's work. Additionally, as we have already seen, there potentially is precedence of reading *oikonomia*, I would say, *alongside dispositif*, based upon Foucault's articulations in *Security, Territory, Population*, a la Agamben's argument. The more salient feature of Pasquinelli's piece is the critique of Agamben's more speculative assertion that Foucault *obviously* is utilizing Hyppolite's understanding on positive religion through his reading of Hegel. To this point, I do agree. Nonetheless, especially as it concerns Foucault's perpetual tarrying with theology and religion, I do not think we can wholly write off Agamben's argument regarding *dispositif* as a secularized form of divine power; nonetheless, I find Panagia's argument regarding the formation of this concept within Foucault more compelling than simply Agamben, or even Pasquinelli.

³⁹ Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” 194–195; Foucault, “Le jeu de Michel Foucault,” 63.

dispositif and power. Contra to the sovereign figure,⁴⁰ *dispositif* lays the foundation, in my opinion, to understanding Foucault's technologization of power. Power, diffused through humans and not imposed by a sovereign figure, enacts a biopolitical maneuvering of power: biopower.

It is also helpful to recall Foucault's case study analysis in his projects. Discussions of the panopticon, while providing insights to the structure of a type of prison, is more so about the conceptual structure of total institutions and disciplinary power. Likewise, recalling that section IV of *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* is "*Le dispositif de sexualité*", we could consider sexuality to be the case study that aids the published conceptual debut of *dispositif*. Furthermore, this could also aid in how volumes II and III of *The History of Sexuality* took a decidedly different route toward biopower, as we can see a progression of Foucault's conceptual terrain, and which we can already see the glimpse of in part V of volume I. While this does not dispose of the term *dispositif*, it frames *dispositif* amidst a larger backdrop of Foucault's conceptual constructions.

While we have the section regarding the *dispositif* of sexuality within *The Will to Knowledge*, within *Psychiatric Power* (1973-1974) we read Foucault establishing the isotopic nature of *dispositif*, meaning, "that there is no conflict or incompatibility between these different systems; different disciplinary [*dispositifs*] must be able to connect up with each other."⁴¹ Sexuality, though not a physical institution, can now be analyzed as a circulation of power, just as Foucault had been analyzing more physical structures for his case studies.⁴² While not

⁴⁰ See the January 14, 1976, lecture of Foucault, '*Society Must Be Defended*', 23–41. Here, we begin to read Foucault wrestling with breaking free from the juridical-political theory of sovereignty.

⁴¹ Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 53; Foucault, *Le pouvoir psychiatrique*, 54.

⁴² For those who want a brief overview of the position of abnormality and the relationship it has to *Psychiatric Power*, *Discipline and Punish*, and *The Will to Knowledge*, see the introduction by Arnold I. Davidson in Michel

conflating multiple *dispositifs* to be synonymous, this isotopic nature only reinforces their influence and strategic function. As such, it creates an opening in analysis, for one *dispositif* rarely, if ever, operates in a vacuum.⁴³ Providing a secondary, tertiary, or even quaternary analysis of race, environmentalism, politics, etc. when analyzing more foregrounded ideas, therefore, is not necessarily a flare for the dramatics of gender theories, but a recognition of the interlocking *dispositifs* that world our realities. Put another way, following Foucault, it would be necessary to the analysis in the first place.

The trouble with this multivalent analysis is that we cannot be all things to all people, despite how well we may try. Indeed, a heterotopic analysis reveals there are always many worlds within worlds: the most commonly cited example from Foucault being heterotopias of deviation like asylums or prisons, and perhaps we could add contemporary iterations of conversion therapy “camps.” And, as the *dispositif* notes, these heterotopic, heterogenous elements mutually reinforce one another; not due to their similitude, but due their strategic function aligned toward a particular configuration of power. There is an incoherence to the power

Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974–1975*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni (New York, NY: Picador, 2003), xvii–xxxvi.

⁴³ There are other frameworks that chime with Foucault’s assessment. I do not mean to suggest these are completely synonymous, but I wish to highlight how this form of mutual reinforcement reappears again and again. See Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* no.1 (1989), 139–167. While coined in the 1980’s, intersectionality gained particular viral prominence as it was deployed in the context of higher education after the turn of the millennium. See also the matrix of domination, as outlined by Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London, UK: HarperCollins, 1990), 221–238. Additionally, these two examples brought forward also note race, and Foucault has been critiqued for not considering race seriously enough, especially amidst the backdrop of European (and US) neoliberal globalization. For a breakdown of this history and a potential way forward see Rey Chow, “Foucault, Race, and Racism” in *After Foucault: Culture, Theory, and Criticism in the 21st Century*, ed. Lisa Downing (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 2018), 107–121. As a succinct introduction, Chow will note, “Even as he helped popularize the important concept of heterotopia, then, Foucault has been found guilty of not being heterotopic enough. This chapter is an attempt to argue the relevance of Foucault’s work to the study of race in a different manner from this justifiable, though in my view not necessarily productive, approach,” 107.

that nonetheless tries to cover over its own tracks to present a coherent reality. Therefore, a “true” critique—as in a critique that captures the fullness of totality—is impossible as there is no coherent argument that can effectively untangle the web of *dispositifs* in their totality. No doubt, this inability to perfectly untangle various deployments of power is weaponized by virtually everyone.⁴⁴ Even so, critiques—even scathing, uncharitable critiques—have a place. Often, they are deriving from a place that seeks to unearth the life that is being disallowed; for when power becomes biopower, *dispositifs* are organizing and fabricating ethico-aesthetic parameters that express the very im/possibility of life itself. In many ways, the stakes of critique have never been higher.

Dispositif and Visibility

I turn to Davide Panagia and his research into visibility, to aid in this foray concerning *dispositif*. Just as visibility was a function of the panopticon, it too plays a role in understanding *dispositif*. Panagia reexamines Bentham’s Panopticon, noting that humans are forever entangled in processes that manage our spatiality and visibility.⁴⁵ Furthermore, within *The Will Knowledge*, as Foucault is opening his section “*Le dispositif de sexualité*” he notes the following:

To deal with sex, power employs nothing more than a law of prohibition. Its objective: that sex renounce itself. Its instrument: the threat of a punishment that is nothing other than the suppression of sex. Renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed; do not appear if you do not want to disappear. Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification. Power constrains sex only through a taboo that plays on the alternative between two nonexistences.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ A fine example of this can be seen in Kieran Healy, “Fuck Nuance” *Sociological Theory* vol 35, no. 2 (2017): 118–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275117709046>.

⁴⁵ Panagia, “The *Dispositif*,” 718. This also entails *dispositif* also paves the way for approaching questions and discussions of aesthetics. Additionally, Panagia notes, “The *dispositif*, in other words, is a device of disposition, arrangement, and movement (normalization) and precisely not an instrument of representation and domination (normativity),” 722.

⁴⁶ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 84.

The intriguing portion of this excerpt resides in its interplay of visibility and invisibility. Following Foucault's analysis of Manet, from his 1971 Tunisia lecture, we can note that the visibility of the subject is crucial to Foucault's formation and analytical value of *dispositif*. Contextually, we are still a few years off from Foucault's articulation of the panopticon, but his tripartite analysis regarding the space of the canvas, lighting, and the place of viewer within this tableau evoke elementary pieces of what will become Foucault's analysis of the panopticon. Resultingly, by the time readers approach *dispositif* within *The History of Sexuality*, it has been a conceptual term that has been operating for Foucault for some time that he has not truly disseminated to the public, nor would he ever really clarify this term for his readers in straightforward responses, as we have already seen.

Sex, within *The History of Sexuality*, is analyzed through this concept of *dispositif*. When the interplay of in/visibility is taken into consideration a dance begins to occur (what I will loosely allude to within chapter two as a structural incoherence within the socio-juridical constructions of US democracy). "Renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed" evokes the methods in which our confession of sex/uality demands we must lie to ourselves in order to escape suppression, which is not likely to be a stroll in the park, but a violent reorientation of the demanded norms. "Do not appear if you do not want to disappear," it could be argued, frames much of the neoliberal assimilative politics within the U.S. The functional "beauty" of the panopticon resides in its ability to render everyone visible; everyone has received a seemingly equal distribution of lighting that renders their bodies into relief. Nonetheless, through policing mechanisms this visibility settles out, articulated through docile bodies and an overall general trust or indifference to a surveillance society. What occurs in this visibility is a

form of invisibility; should you toe the line and maintain a proper orientation; your invisible visibility will not be questioned. However, should you deviate from a proper orientation you have jeopardized your functional invisibility. Foucault's conceptual framing is then reinforced by, "Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification."

To illustrate this concept, there is a scene in the film adaptation of Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* (2004). Del Spooner (played by Will Smith) is tracking a robot (who assumes the name Sonny) that has broken the laws of robotics and killed a human. After a glossy high-speed chase through an urban futuristic landscape, Del arrives at a storage warehouse facility that Sonny sought out to assume a sense of invisibility. When Del enters the facility, he is met by an endless array of robots that await their commissioning. The other robots are entirely functional but stand in a state of stasis; they are, in other words, docile bodies. Del assumes the figure who resides in the lighthouse of the panopticon, able to view those before him. While the scene does not show Del to be surrounded by robots—evoking the panopticon—it plays upon the fact that a solitary person, in real time, can only have one privileged vantage point.

As Del surveils the robots searching for the dissident body, Sonny's survival at this point depends upon his (he assumes masculine pronouns) invisible visibility. Del's tactic involves exploiting the laws of robotics that inhibit a robot from harming a human and begins to shoot the docile bodies within the warehouse. Sonny is only revealed as dissident when Del notices a micromovement of Sonny leaning out amongst the other robots, sneaking a counter surveillance. Nonetheless, this visibility now results in Sonny's inability to remain invisible among the other robots. Del, in his pursuit, is seeking to decommission Sonny to get answers: "do not appear if

you do not want to disappear. Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification.”

Of course, Foucault is not dealing with robots, but with sexuality. Nonetheless, this illustration also evokes laws. Hopefully, this final long quotation will orient us sufficiently going forward. In relation to the role of desire and its proximity to power, Foucault will state the following:

Whether desire is this or that, in any case one continues to conceive of it in relation to a power that is always juridical and discursive, a power that has its central point in the enunciation of the law. One remains attached to a certain image of power-law, of power-sovereignty, which was traced out by the theoreticians of right and the monarchic institution. It is this image that we must break free of, that is, of the theoretical privilege of law and sovereignty, if we wish to analyze power within the concrete and historical framework of its operation. We must construct an analytics of power that no longer takes law as a model and a code.⁴⁷

Foucault’s relationship toward the law instructs us to not simply assume the law as *a priori*, a concept we will return to in chapter two. He also makes clear his position in relation to sovereignty. As noted, the sovereign possessor of power does not hold sway for Foucault, yet he is willing to admit that it is not an easy concept for anybody to readily abandon. Rather than using the rhetoric, Foucault opts instead for the terminology of norms; a cultivation of a particular disposition in relation to something else. Therefore, while Foucault may apply a rhetorical sleight of hand, he is not necessarily done with law, nor sovereignty; instead, he is seeking to articulate and disconnect a narrative of discourse that has painted them as coterminous projects with power. We are still implicated within hegemonic formations, and it is hard to not see power, law, sovereignty, really, the construction of the world through new ways. Counter frameworks, oftentimes, advocate for a full-scale reorientation; such feelings of discomfort that

⁴⁷ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 89–90.

would be necessary under such counter framings are rarely readily embraced. Nonetheless, if we are to be theoreticians of the left to counter the theoreticians of the right, we must break free of the theoretical privilege of the law and sovereignty as coterminous with power.

Having addressed the necessary destitution of the construct of power-law and power-sovereignty, Foucault can then transition into his analysis regarding the domain of sexuality. Additionally, the conceptual reach for *dispositif* has already moved across various domains of research, which only speaks toward the difficult task of trying to pin down what exactly is a *dispositif*. As we will explore shortly, sexuality received a privileged location in relation to confession, and within Foucault's analyses of power we see a similar positioning for it is a particularly "dense transfer point for relations of power."⁴⁸ Sexuality is an element that is "endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies."⁴⁹

As it concerns Part II of this project, where the hermeneutical construction occurs, Preciado's goal is to foster a countersexual society. I am less concerned with the establishment of a new society, and that is most certainly beyond the scope of the project. However, as noted in the introduction, I employ the theories of Preciado to facilitate a counter to Theology. What occurs is a critical disposition in relation to the mechanisms of the heterocentric regime.

⁴⁸ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 103. This relationship has led to the colloquial adage that it is perhaps more appropriate to call Foucault's history of sexuality the history of biopower.

⁴⁹ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 103.

From the Confessional to the Psychiatric Couch

Finally, we must turn toward the transition of the discourse of truth from the confessional to the psychiatric couch, which refers us to Foucault's *The History of Sexuality, Vol I: The Will to Knowledge*. Once again, the Middle Ages is a privileged location in time, when "Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth: the codification of the sacrament of penance by the Lateran Council in 1215, with the resulting development of confessional techniques."⁵⁰ If we recall Foucault's concern with institutional constructions of pastoral power, and not so much the general belief of Christianity, these confessional techniques serve to set the stage for future permutations regarding the discourse of truth. Foucault is also quite clear regarding his sentiments to how confession was deployed: "One confesses—or is forced to confess. When it is not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative, the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat; it is driven from its hiding place in the soul, or extracted from the body."⁵¹ This will lead Foucault to make the assessment that confession and torture are dark twins: with torture supporting confession when voluntary confession can go no further.

⁵⁰ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 58. Cf. a more historical theological account of confession with John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of Roman Catholic Tradition* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1987). The ends of moral theology described by Mahoney, of course, are not oriented toward a translation to the psychiatric couch. I note Mahoney as Foucault's family has been historically noted as nominally Catholic. While Roman Catholicism is only one flavor of Catholicism, this larger tradition is mostly likely to have influence Foucault's perspective of faith and religion.

⁵¹ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 59. We see these mechanisms utilized within early queer theory, as Sedgwick analyzes *Billy Budd*. There are instances of confession, torture (especially psychological) and ultimately a violent conclusion. See *Epistemology of the Closet*, 91–130. See also, in the opposite direction, a refusal to confess in Marquis Bey, *Cistem Failure: Essays on Blackness and Cisgender* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), 21–46. Bey's text will be explored in chapter six.

Within this model, sex receives a privileged position. Foucault dispels the narrative that sex is that which we never speak about; rather, it is what we speak about all the time, relatively speaking as he explores the concept of confession. What has occurred is a construction of a discourse, one that extends outward into a society if the confessional is the site where one divulges the truth of their sexuality. “For us, it is in the confession that truth and sex are joined, through the obligatory and exhaustive expression of an individual secret. But this time it is truth that serves as a medium for sex and its manifestations.”⁵² Confession as the case study, furthermore, already presents a glimmer of the connections between the strategies of the discourse of truth and the formation of the moral subject and it relates to power and conduct.

While sex was given a privileged location in this discourse, Foucault was also concerned with the other actors at play. It is clear Foucault has been impacted by psychiatry and psychoanalysis, and this perhaps represents that *The History of Madness* created some foundations for *The History of Sexual* a few years prior.⁵³ Present within Foucault’s formulation is the triple relationship present within the act of confession. While noting the confessor and the one hearing the confession as the parties involved, Foucault also notes the intimate importance of what one is speaking about: speech, in the case regarding sexuality, is the third actor in this discourse of truth.⁵⁴

⁵² Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 61.

⁵³ See Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa, ed. Jean Khalfa (London, UK: Routledge, 2009). In particular, the chapter “The Correctional World” gestures toward sexuality and the classification of more libertine dispositions to suffer delirium and possessing a closer proximity to madness.

⁵⁴ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 62-63. Cf. Jacques Lacan, *Freud’s Paper on Technique: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I*, trans. John Forrester, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York, NY: Norton, 1991): “When I say *interhuman relation*, you can already see that I am describing things the way they are today. Indeed, the elaboration of the notion of the relation between analyst and analysand is the path taken by contemporary analytic doctrines in trying to rediscover a firm basis for the realities of that experience. Certainly it represents the most fertile line of

We can also recall that Foucault's pinpointing of the 16th century as a transformative moment which was elaborated on regarding counter-conduct in *Security, Territory, Population*.⁵⁵ This was more loosely gestured toward *The Will to Knowledge*: "For a long time, it remained firmly entrenched in the practice of penance. But with the rise of Protestantism, the Counter Reformation, eighteenth-century pedagogy, and nineteenth-century medicine, it gradually lost its ritualistic and exclusive localization; it spread; it has been employed in a whole series of relationships."⁵⁶ Within the disciplinary framing, the bodies that are unable to confess their sexuality and reshape their bodily comportment in relation to a properly ordered society become deviant bodies.⁵⁷

thought traced out since Freud's death. Balint call it a two-body psychology...I am not in a position to say more to you about this for the moment—even though, as those who are old hands in this seminar know, you are obviously aware that there is no two-body psychology without the intervention of a third element. If, as we must, we take speech as the central feature of our perspective, then it is within a three- rather than two-term relation that we have to formulate the analytic experience in its totality," 11.

⁵⁵ This perspective also chimed with concurrent postcolonial and decolonial scholarship and Foucault's own work would, in the future, continue to be used in this discourse, not above some criticisms of course, most notably, regarding racism.

⁵⁶ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 63.

⁵⁷ Cf. Arthur Bradley's *Unbearable Life: A Genealogy of Political Erasure* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019). Within this text, Bradley traces new concepts from a Foucauldian dive, but a more general dive into political theology, to express how biopolitical (framed now at the nihilopolitical) construction metastasized into a juridical formation that has foreclosed any possibility of life of having occurred. This chimes with some of the constructions of Achille Mbembe in *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), who also traces a lineage through a Foucauldian archive. Beyond the articulation of determines some lives as to not even having been lived (Bradley), Mbembe reveals the shadow side of biopolitics: "The ultimate expression of sovereignty largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to leave and who must die. To kill or to let live thus constitutes sovereignty's limits, its principal attributes. To be sovereign is to exert one's control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power," 66. Both Bradley and Mbembe treat sovereignty within their work. I note these scholars who are working within this vein of Foucauldian research, for you will see going forward that I mostly sidestep these conversations of sovereignty, not due to its unimportance but due to a different lens of focus. Within *The Will to Knowledge*, the final section "Right of Death and Power over Life" takes up sovereignty, as well as anatomo-political techniques of power.

As we also see, per Foucault's usual endgames, he is bringing us up to the 19th century. While writing toward the scandal of the psychiatric, Foucault states, "It was a time when the most singular pleasures were called upon to pronounce a discourse of truth concerning themselves, a discourse which had to model itself after that which spoke, not of sin and salvation, but of bodies and life processes—the discourse of science."⁵⁸ Such a methodological shift entailed the divulgence and subsequent codification and further articulation of sexual matters: a hearty scandal in its own right during that time period according to Foucault.

Foucault is not concerned with trying to now make sense of it all, nor making sweeping moralizations about what has occurred, for it has already happened, there is very little to be gained from such work. Rather, the goal is to unearth the mechanisms that occurred to produce such a shift from the confessional to the psychiatric: "We would do better to locate the procedures by which that will to knowledge regarding sex, which characterizes the modern Occident, caused the rituals of confession to function within the norms of scientific regularity: how did this immense and traditional extortion of the sexual confession come to be constituted in scientific terms?"⁵⁹ He would continue on to provide five components to the methodological translations: "Through a clinical codification of the inducement to speak; through the postulate of a general and diffuse causality; through the principle of a latency intrinsic to sexuality; through the method of interpretation; and through the medicalization of the effects of confession."⁶⁰ It is also important to once again note the shift in Foucault's scope for the project.

⁵⁸ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 64.

⁵⁹ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 65.

⁶⁰ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 65–67.

While *The Will to Knowledge* is concerned with power—and I would argue we can see *hints* toward conduct—the project would undergo a significant revision that transitions the scope through the lens of conduct. During this period, as well, there is also a general content reorganization; this is noted by Foucault himself in the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*.⁶¹

This also serves the larger aim toward which Foucault is arguing; sex is not some repressed category that we refuse to recognize. Sex is, or has become, a regulated discourse, particularly by the bourgeois, capitalist, industrial society that is utilized to ensure these engines of society (the construction of the family, economy, and society) maintain prominence and focus. In this regard, sex as regulated discourse is a privileged site. Preciado, in relation to Foucault, will note that most efficient form of resistance is, “counterproductivity—that is to say, the production of counter-protocols and forms of pleasure-knowledge as alternatives to the disciplines of the modern sexual regime.”⁶² In chapter three, I will consider the guild discipline of Theology through the help of Mark Lewis Taylor. Taylor will theorize the theological (aristic and poetic ruptures of life in contrast to or against guild Theology) as a counter position to Theology.

When this comes full circle to the psychiatric couch, Foucault notes how and why confession (our compulsion to speak this truth) around sex is so integral. Writes Foucault, regarding the two interrelated processes:

⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol II: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Vintage, 1990, 3–11. Additionally, the Orientalism that was on full display in *The Will to Power* has shifted to surveying cultural touchstones of the West. See also the introduction by Arnold I. Davidson in Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, xviii–xxxiv. Davidson’s introduction also provides helpful contextual notes that surround the publication of *The History of Sexuality* and notes a unique importance of Foucault’s lectures.

⁶² Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 21; Preciado, *Manifieste contrasexual*, 48.

We demand that sex speak the truth (but, since it is the secret and is oblivious to its own nature, we reserve for ourselves the function of telling the truth of its truth, revealed and deciphered at last), and we demand that it tell us our truth, or rather, the deeply buried truth of that truth about ourselves which we think we possess in our immediate consciousness. ... From this interplay there has evolved, over several centuries, a knowledge of the subject; a knowledge not so much of his form, but of that which divides him, determines him perhaps, but above all causes him to be ignorant of himself.⁶³

In thinking forward to Butler and the surrounding question they will pose regarding the subject, Foucault is laying the groundwork toward pinpointing a conceptual framework (here, sexuality) that functions as the constitutive lack. This deliberate allusion to psychoanalysis serves to suggest that psychoanalysis and Foucault are not irreconcilable, but to highlight how Butler and others within queer theory have ventured down routes of discourse with more psychoanalytic inflections.

Additionally, “revealed and deciphered at last,” in my reading, also reveals that any sense of the subject becomes a collaborate act. This could be interpreted through Althusserian interpellation⁶⁴ or we could even shift the register back into the theological through the language of creation from the Hebrew Bible and the foundational interrelation of creation, or even the more Pauline rhetoric of Galatians. These allusions only show that the slipperiness of the subject is not only some modern conundrum, though it has certainly been taken into new rhetorical registers, but something humanity has been wrestling for perhaps as long as we can remember. Nonetheless, as we have seen, Foucault has brought sexuality to the fore as integral to a sense of subject formation. It has been the category that functioned within ancient Greek and Roman

⁶³ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 69–70.

⁶⁴ Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capital: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London, UK: Verso, 2014), 188–194.

culture, operated within the Christian tradition, and finally underwent a translation into the secular.⁶⁵

Conclusion

While this chapter has not contained an overarching thesis, it is my hope these framings of power and counter-conduct, the *dispositif*, and the translation of the discourse of truth from the confessional to the psychiatric couch will aid the argument that proceeds. Part I of this project will continue along a more methodological route—as outlined in the introduction—and Foucault will reappear from time to time, though not form a rigid foundation. Additionally, part II will continue in arguably a form of Foucauldian power analysis by way of critically reading a select Vatican document.

By way of brief recapitulation. Power is not a zero-sum game nor finite, it is something that circulates and—while it can be concentrated in certain mechanisms—power can be wielded through forms of counter-conduct. Counter-conduct alludes to the comportment of life that runs counter to the ordained conduct set forward by a particular expression of power. In this way, counter-conduct retains the relation of revolution—the negation is what defines this conduct as counter. As will become clearer in the next chapter, this position becomes related to the political in this project.

We then turned to Foucault's concept of *dispositif*, a slippery word that never received a concrete definition, but nonetheless haunts Foucault scholarship. The concept is multivalent, and—concerning the themes of this project—was used in relation to sexuality. *Dispositif* is not

⁶⁵ An initial draft of this project contained a chapter dedicated to discerning the hidden project of secularism within queer theory but was ultimately scrapped. For conversations charting the trajectory of secularism as a biopolitical project see the following sources. This route could investigate Talal Asad, Judith Butler, Janet R. Jakobsen, Anne Pellegrini, Giorgio Agamben, Gianni Vattimo, Joan Wallach Scott, Jasbir K. Puar, and many other scholars.

necessarily a singular entity, but can manifest as various *dispositifs*, as the isotopic nature (the ability for *dispositifs* to link in compatible and non-conflictual ways) combined seemingly heterogenous elements. Therefore, there is a link between *dispositif* with power and counter-conduct. A certain constellation of power will play upon various *dispositifs*; likewise, a certain form of counter-conduct can play upon this constellation of power that plays upon various *dispositifs*.

Finally, we turned to a staple of Foucault's thought, which is the translation of the discourse of truth from the confessional to the psychiatric couch. While this project carries less with the mechanisms of confession—though this theme will be reprised in chapter six—it does address the larger idea that the discourse need not be confined to one disciplinary niche, if we extend this to the halls of academia. In this way, this component of Foucault will lay the groundwork for discerning epistemic foundations for queer theological projects. While the next two chapters will make clear my own position, it is important to emphasize this particularity: this is *my* position, albeit academically informed position.

This is the first nodule of our rhizomatic cartography. As noted in the introduction, part I consists of moving into various discourses to chart, however incomplete, a snapshot of an affective matrix impinging upon queer life. From here, our transdisciplinary methodological journey will reveal that we do not return to Christianity in the same way we left it. As the title of the chapter notes, we *are* leaving Theology behind, a particular variety of Theology. We will return to consider Theology in chapter three, but first I want to turn toward the socio-juridical. If the psychiatric couch represents a shift in the discourse of truth—and if Foucault's other analyses of biopolitical governmentality continue to hold sway—an exploration into juridical formations

in relation to queer and trans life will shape the inquiry of the next chapter. While the connection of sovereignty-law has been severed for Foucault, it does not mean that law has disappeared, it has simply been translated into new formations.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIO-JURIDICAL: CRITICAL TRANS POLITICS AND THEOLOGY

The previous chapter of our transdisciplinary methodology introduced some Foucauldian concepts, such as his understandings of power, counter-conduct, *dispositif*, and the shifting of sexual discourse from the confessional to the psychiatric couch. These touchstones of Foucault's thought are not meant to form a boundary that we work within, but to locate themes that reemerge in other theories and thinkers in queer and trans theory. This chapter was placed at the outset for those in Theology who are less versed in Foucault than people who study gender and sexuality.

The nodule of the rhizome in this chapter takes a turn toward critical politics, particularly trans and queer critical politics. This chapter will draw extensively from the thought of Dean Spade and Eric A. Stanley. The politics of Paul B. Preciado's *Countersexual Manifesto* will be engaged in chapter four. Here, we can rest in the important notion that such concern regarding politics is not unique to Preciado. In this regard, thinking ahead to the phrase "Christ is a dildo," this chapter presents a political attunement to which the performative utterance of "Christ is a dildo" is responding.

Throughout the chapter, there will be inflection points concerning black letter law and Theology. The chapter's goal is to establish the socio-juridical as my privileged term to describe the tension between governmentality and biopower. Within the introduction I noted how I employ queer and trans theory to interrogate how some Theology delimits the politicality of

queer and trans life. Looking forward to Mark Lewis Taylor in the next chapter, the socio-juridical serves to elucidate the “political” of a political theology.

I have opted to utilize the phrasing of juridical—with its more legal connotations—over political—as the produced effects of legal parameters—as part II of the project explores a counter position in relation to natural law. In other words, there is recourse to forms of legal measures that dictate the ways in which ethical life, a political expression of lived being, is or is not accessible. There is the diffuse sociological factor at play, where the mediation of power dynamics does not issue forth from a solitary sovereign person but has become translated across norms and even contemporary law. Per the example of natural law, this diffused sociological factor has been disappeared, yet it is precisely the effects that will ground a juridical framing. The juridical foundation is, therefore, a juridical fabrication, though such realities must remain hidden. This circular logic will be addressed further in this chapter, but also in part II.

By way of preview, the dildo reveals the fabrications of a natural law logic within *MF*, not necessarily natural law, in itself. Natural law is a concept from Greek thought that has been infused into Theology. Historically leaning upon humanity’s ability to closely observe nature and determine intrinsic value within the human creation, throughout time this has been contested and retooled. The model was not as kind to women, but this also takes some historical traversing, as sex and gender categories we have today did not exist in the same way in ancient Greece. I will note later how there have been revisionist veins of natural law (from a theological perspective) that aim toward reassessment of natural law, yet they have failed to be adopted within the bureaucracy that is the “church.” Nonetheless, it is the nebulous bureaucracy that produced *MF* and *not* the revisionist avenues of natural law. Therefore, with the hermeneutics of

christotechtonics, we can discern how Christ trafficks within this document. What is the articulation of natural within *MF*? More importantly, is what is considered natural actually a fabrication?

I will be forthright: this project is more concerned with how we are not quite done with the law—a potentially scandalous statement for both theories of gender and sexuality and a (loosely) Christian theological project—not so much conversations regarding sovereignty (conversations I mostly sidestep, but perhaps ones I will return to in future work).¹ Of course, since I have chosen to retain the juridical over the political to highlight the pronouncement of laws (in both the civil utterance and the more diffuse construction of norms), sovereignty is not wholly absent, it is simply not the primary concept under scrutiny. If framed through the register of Foucauldian grammar, while biopower and biopolitics represents a framing of power circulation, socio-juridical is meant to more explicitly name the circulation of law,² which occurs within and alongside the biopolitical schema.³

¹ Along these lines, see recent arguments of coping with our nonsovereignty in Lauren Berlant, *On the Inconvenience of Other People* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), as well as Berlant and Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*. See, for general information regarding sovereignty as it applies to this project, Foucault, 'Society Must Be Defended' and Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*.

² For there can be a *dispositif* of law, with all the complex realities associated with *dispositif* from the previous chapter.

³ See Janet R. Jakobsen, *The Sex Obsession: Perversity and Possibility in American Politics* (New York: NY: New York University Press, 2020): "Biopolitics works by denying these relations, obscuring the connections between one 'population' and another. An example of this biopolitical denial would be the way in which public discourse in the US tends to focus on the hard work of American individuals to explain American economic success rather than on the way in which the US economy was constituted through slave labor and the labor of populations across international divisions. The fact that that life of any individual—even a hardworking one—is dependent on countless other living under very different conditions disappears from ideas of both freedom and moral agency," 45. In this project, this understanding is shifting into the register of law. In this way we can analyze how specific laws create the conditions for transnational corporations and the general shift of unchecked globalization that both inextricably binds us to people all around the world and disappears these bindings on U.S. soil in favor for the narrative of "it just is." Law is not exempt from the larger biopolitical schema but occurs within and alongside it. There is much resonance with Jakobsen's overall project in *The Sex Obsession*.

For fear of rambling, I will leave this nuance with the following: socio-juridical should be utilized in its dual meaning—the sociological hegemon (in its forms of diffuse power) operates in a juridical fashion (to that extent, there is a *form* of sovereignty at play, but we cannot pinpoint a sovereign figure—because such a solitary figure does not exist) that circulates both pronounced civil laws and performative norms; and simultaneously, the juridical (in its manifestation of laws and norms) operates through a sociological implication and functions through the medium of a hegemonic consensus (to the extent that any juridical utterance should *feel* sensical, for this is how a sociological contingency understands it—put another way, the juridical becomes most potent when it has been disappeared behind the rhetoric of “natural” with natural-ness assuming an *a priori* sense of the sovereign; while a singular claim of sovereignty may be more untenable within the context of a contemporary neoliberal democratic state, the displacement of power to a natural order operates in this sovereign vacuum).⁴ Simplified without my parenthetical voice:

The socio-juridical means **both**

⁴ Cf. Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991): “Just as the juridical symbol is empowered to transform the individual body and conscience, it also aims to create a public, collective ‘body’ from among the dispersed spectators. The ‘mob’ contains a multiplicity of opinions, but its stony collective gaze, organized around the A, effaces dissension. Thus, when the state sponsors an act of ‘public discipline,’ the referent ‘A’ extends both to the prisoner and to the ‘people amongst whom religion and law were almost identical.’ As readers of the A, they become the eyes of the law, enacting its penal aspirations. They become ‘impressed’ by the law as well, convening in a new identity, a new affective time and space, as if a fully new regime of law has been installed through the A’s transfigurations. To stress the ‘New Law’s’ effect on political subjectivity, the narrator calls this site of collective memory ‘their *imagination*,’ 68. See also the epilogue in Eric L. Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People’s Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 245–252. It is not so much that sovereignty is gone, but that it has become—and now “looks”—different. The epilogue provides a small glimpse into the central claims of the text, but a breakdown of the various thinkers and concepts is beyond the scope of the present project. See also Mark D. Jordan, *Convulsing Bodies: Religion & Resistance in Foucault* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015). Jordan draws our attention back to the role Foucault has played—and with the posthumous publication of *Confessions of the Flesh*, continues to play—within gender studies, as well as the fields of religious studies and theologies. See chapter one of the present project for more on Foucault.

*the sociological operates in a juridical fashion that circulates both pronounced and civil laws
and performative norms*

and

*the juridical operates through sociological implication which functions through the medium of a
hegemonic consensus*

On its own, this is warmed-over Foucault, but as I noted in the previous chapter, queer and trans scholarship still carries with Foucault for various reasons. The circular logics of the socio-juridical are not about filling a gap in Foucauldian scholarship, per se. The circular logics of the socio-juridical are to provide readers of this text a glimpse in the recursive processes of queer and trans existence. Remember, as we are moving into various different discourses, we are charting an affective matrix of queer and trans life. This is not to say others don't experience recursive processes, for if we understand Foucault's framings of biopower, *everyone* is impinged.

I will note in a couple of pages a sense of proximity to power. Just as I noted in the introduction that even heterosexual couples are framed outside the ideology of heterosexuality in *MF*, it must be affirmed that these people exist in *closer proximity to a consolidation of power*, for, unlike their trans and intersex counterparts, they have not been ontologically erased by *MF*. Likewise with these recursive logics, when someone exists in closer proximity to the consolidation of power they are less likely to experience the affective shock of this recursive living. Rather, in relation to critical queer and trans politics, the following scholars point to the reality that such recursive experience is an everyday occurrence, constantly reminding queer and trans people their presence in most structuring logics is an aberration and, if they were to die,

there death would not be recorded as such, as they were not framed as possessing certain rights to begin with.

A good example is changing a gender designation on a driver's license. For those who have always felt "home" within their gender identity, they might not consider this to be too worrisome. Yet for many trans people, this can often entail entering into medical care (a medico-juridical structure) that clinicalizes and diagnoses them with gender dysphoria to receive access to hormone replacement therapy. As noted, we have to wrestle with the tension that such access to medical care should simply be available, yet still must acknowledge that the current route has led to life-saving care. Individuals cannot immediately then go to the DMV, as most places require a change of birth certificate, and a legal death of an old identity (Preciado will remark on this in *An Apartment on Uranus*⁵), and one can still be refused the legal change on a license for other unknown factors. Thus, the process repeats. This will be what Dean Spade refers to as administrative violence. And remember, this is but one example of myriad recursive loops where queer and trans life is thrown against the socio-juridical.

When queer and trans life occurs—and it will occur, for it is simply another instance of life—it forms a structuring antagonism in relation to a hegemonic socio-juridical order. This hegemonic order is most often captured under words like heterosexualism and/or heteroneocolonialism, but also homonormativity and/or homonationalism (to name but a few) within queer theory. In this way, the political, then, is the manifestation of contrasting socio-juridical

⁵ Paul B. Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus: Chronicles of the Crossing*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2020), 194-196.

frottage— with perhaps the potentiality this antagonism may give way to mutual inconvenience.⁶

A socio-juridical analysis and action is already inherently political in either conscious choice such as in activism or in the tacit structure in relation to racialized, sexed and gendered bodies— Black bodies, women’s bodies, trans bodies, disabled bodies, etc. do not possess the luxury of privacy (no matter how hard it may be sought) and their very existence is political as the hegemonic socio-juridical formation demands their existence to chafe against its own formation. Socio-juridical, therefore, offers a greater specificity of how I interpret this politics to occur.

Socio-political, additionally, can also falsely portray a potential separation with regard to the aforementioned public/private binary, which all too often is not a binary reality for intentionally exploited populations. As noted, a singular trans or queer person does not have the luxury of a private life, when laws demand the transparency of sex, gender, sexuality, sexual practices, desires, etc. under the pretense of assuaging fears of heterosexualism (e.g., bathroom bills, educational bans on sexual and gender education, gender affirming medical care, as well as critical race theory), embodied through a juridical order that has disappeared the sovereign (i.e. laws are presented in such a way to make the law appear as neutral or a (now) common-sense extension of what is deemed to be natural, when in reality they are anything but—in this example, they are skewed to protect and privilege the citizen formation of heterosexuals at the expense of racialized queer and trans persons; or as we will see later with Dean Spade, they are skewed to protect and privilege the citizen formation of white gays and lesbians at the expense of Black and brown trans and queer persons). Therefore, what began as a supposed singular queer

⁶ See Berlant, *On the Inconvenience of Other People*, 6. I see resonance with Berlant’s articulations of the “inconvenience drive” and concepts surrounding agonism. Perhaps, in the future, these connections will be explored further.

or trans person has been revealed to be someone *already wrapped up with other people, ideologies, symbolic regimes, and law (manifest through politics)*. In this sense, the idea of a socio-political is rather redundant; instead, the juridical is understood as the primary function of the state, with the political operating as the expressions of the socio-juridical.

When the socio-juridical is deliberately challenged or transgressed, then, it is not so much a political statement (even though it most certainly is) as it is a challenge to the very foundation of the law; in this way, seeking to understand some of the function of the socio-juridical can allow greater political attunement. As the argument progresses, I will note why the deliberateness of this action is crucial for those queer people who exist in closer proximity to acceptability under the law, with the reminder that they too are only ever one law away from socio-juridical—and therefore political—erasure.⁷ To be clear, while some more radical queer activists may trend toward anarchy, Spade and Stanley are informed by re-envisioning what law can be, albeit through very critical analysis. Affiliated with the anticapitalist collective of queer and trans activists, artists, scholars, and writers know as Against Equality, their works are often pointed critiques of neoliberal mainstream LGBT politics.

The conversation will begin with an introduction to Lauren Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism," which elucidates in greater detail these references toward affect I have been making.

⁷ Jakobsen presents a more ambivalent sentiment in relation to law in *The Sex Obsession*; nonetheless, it is through juridical processes that a sense of progress becomes a national narrative: "Arguments that conceptualize gay rights as building on previous movements draw upon a well-established habit that has persisted over decades: thinking that every victory for civil rights advances a long and continuing struggle to adhere in practice to the principles of democracy as laid down in the Constitution. Every legislative victory thus builds on previous steps forward. This freezes in time earlier accomplishments that required years of activism and organizing to achieve, and assumes that social movement is inherently progressive. What's lost are the singular conditions of the past, the simple fact that victories on behalf of justice are never secure, and the necessary understanding of the interrelation among forces in social relations," 141.

A complete foray into affect theory in beyond the scope of the project, and Berlant has been selected due to their lasting impact on queer theory. The conversation will then transition to Dean Spade, where we will be challenged to look at what law is actually doing versus looking at what law is saying it is doing. The analysis is then utilized to interrogate and position this theological project. Finally, the conversation will turn toward Eric A. Stanley concerning near life and slow death within this ongoing political attunement. This will be enjoined with recent work from Paul B. Preciado.

As noted, I read queer and trans thought as offering a disposition that allows for ethical considerations of some Theology that delimits the politicality of queer and trans life. This project's position to the discipline of Theology will become clearer in the next chapter, where I will recast queer and trans theory to function as a theological force. For now, this political attunement, due to the entanglement of Theology and Christian religious history, also becomes theological attunement, for I do affirm Taylor's claim that there is not anti-theological anti-space. The task at hand involves the privileging of trans and queer life and theory as the site from which political attunement occurs through interaction with socio-juridical structures. To begin this attunement, we will turn to Lauren Berlant.

Cruel Optimism

I returned to the works of Lauren Berlant after their passing in 2021. I found renewed interest in cruel optimism, particularly how it might converse in a project like this. While affect theory—à *la* Berlant—plays upon sensations of feeling, it is not reduced wholly to it. In Berlant's study, affect holds a historical sense, that impacts how the present is perceived: "the present is what makes itself present to us before it becomes anything else, such as an orchestrated collective

event or an epoch on which we can look back.”⁸ Under this framing, there is no historical moment that is not already affective and political. Berlant will note of their own project, “This book pays a lot of attention to different styles of managing simultaneous, incoherent narratives of what’s going on and what seems possible and blocked in personal/collective life. We understand nothing about impasses of the political without having an account of the production of the present.”⁹

This situating of the discourse facilitates a conversation that becomes much more a critical history and/or analysis of the present than a classically understood historical argument. Crucially, not only in this chapter, but going forward throughout this project, I take up various tendrils of thought and analysis that shed insight on the incoherence of life, particularly from the vantage point of intentionally exploited populations.¹⁰ In this chapter it is law, US citizen formation, and the interventions of critical trans politics. This tension is navigated through the titular concept of Berlant’s text: cruel optimism.

Some definition is in order. Berlant notes from the outset that “a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing... These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that

⁸ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 4.

⁹ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 4.

¹⁰ See Jakobsen, *The Sex Obsession*: “The looseness of coherence allows slippage in the network. And this slippage can actually reinforce the overarching social formation by providing a shifting site of reference in the face of counterevidence. When one claim is challenged or insufficient, it is possible to discursively slip to another, thus protecting the network as a whole,” 71. The conversation will return to incoherence toward the end of the chapter. Nonetheless, the mechanisms of shifting to different lines that structure the incoherence is what lead to complex narratives of interlocking oppressions. See Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*. In particular, the chapters dedicated toward binarisms reveal the interlocking mechanisms of slippage. The binary slippages as the mechanism through which the law operates become the overarching tactic of oppression. Additionally, this slippage aids in the construction of the incoherent subject.

draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially.”¹¹ Later, they will also write: “All attachments are optimistic. When we talk about an object of desire, we are really talking about a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us. This cluster of promises could seem embedded in a person, a thing, an institution, a text, a norm, a bunch of cells, smells, a good idea—whatever.”¹² These two quotations provide a foundation to Berlant’s constructions around optimism, particularly one inflected with a presence of cruelty: hence, cruel optimism. Now for some unpacking.

All attachments are optimistic; we would not form an object attachment to something that cannot be imbued with optimistic sentiment. Put simple, we form object attachments to things, ideas, norms, institutions that we think will make us “feel” good, however that might look. Once an object attachment has been formed, they are devilishly hard to break, if they truly can ever be broken. It may only be possible to cultivate an ever-greater capacity to protect one’s psychic realities from such cruelty. For Berlant, this can occur from the micro (perhaps quirks of character that necessitate unique dispositions to function, no matter how uncomfortable it may make one feel) to the macro (perhaps through interactions with institutions that form one’s existence outside institutional function yet dangle a captivating “promise” that can never be attained).

For our purposes here, cruel optimism extends to political manifestations of the socio-judicial, but also to Theology. This project asks, what pre-existing object attachments in relation to Theology devolve into a form of cruel optimism, where one’s sex and/or gender becomes the

¹¹ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 1.

¹² Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 23.

obstacle to one's flourishing? In gesture toward part II, we will explore how intersex and transgender people are disallowed flourishing (the attainment of a potential cluster of promises) within the theological imagination presented in *MF*. Unlike some implicated identities (heterosexuals facing fertility challenges), intersex and transgender people are disallowed this flourishing as they have been rationalized as not properly human. As I have noted, I do contend the value of such church documents as these are more immediate points of contact with the average layperson than academic theological texts (whether systematic or not). In relation to the present chapter and political attunement, I must float the lingering question elicited by cruel optimism: why do we (queers, trans, intersex, bisexual, etc.) return to sites where cruel optimism rears its head that signals our aberration in a hegemonic structure. There is no easy answer to this question, but it *is* a question which scholars are responding to. Here, I lean upon the critical politics of Spade and Dean to highlight how similar mechanisms of disappeared exclusion and/or the demise of some bodies to vivify the life of other bodies within nation-state formation.

Berlant brings to the fore in their work the formal structure where people are brought to the collapse of phantasmatic systems that have arranged the perceived reality and desires within subject—and social—formation. Recall from chapter one, if power and the discourse of truth have shifted outside the hands of the governing figure or body of Theology, a new structure will emerge. Berlant's study of affect helps shed light on the disciplining mechanisms that shape a habitus in relation to a symbolic order; nonetheless, I do not think we have so easily escaped the grasp of a particular US Christian Theology that lurks in the shadow of this symbolic order. What scholars like Jakobsen and Pellegrini have called "Christian secularism," though other scholars like Talal Asad, Judith Butler, and Jasbir K. Puar have also noted this lurking presence through

other rhetoric. Put another way, while a different rhetorical structure and conceptual vocabulary is being employed, there is still some form of theological dialogue occurring.¹³

What makes this optimism so cruel is that we do not know the extent to which we have attached to a cluster of promises.¹⁴ In this regard, we can think of a seemingly secular sexual ethics informed by disappeared Christian sexual mores. What makes the optimism so cruel, painful, sour, is that we do not often understand how attached we are/were to a cluster of promises. We can look toward marriage equality as allowing gay and lesbian marriages to pass into a form of licit sexual ethics. Nonetheless, this juridical decision has done nothing to challenge the disappeared Christian underpinnings of marriage functions, nor question *why* marriage has been deemed a *good* for human flourishing. Furthermore, this rights-expansion (often touted as a good) still leaves no space for polyamorous couples. Per the tensions noted

¹³ See also Berlant's note at the end of the introduction regarding writing criticism: "The problem of detaching from the normal applies to writing criticism as much as it does to any object that coordinates intensities of projection into the historical present. Each of the chapters to follow is uncomfortable in its shape and length: is each a too-short little book, an overlong case study, or good-enough porridge? In relating animating events to analytic generalization, I become progressively less clear about how best to rhetorically to manage the problems they crystallize, and more certain of the need to invent new genres for the kinds of speculative work we call 'theory.' In the meantime, though, I hope you will find, in these scenarios of living on in the ordinary, where subjectivity is depicted as overwhelmed, forced to change, and yet also stuck, incitements toward your own analyses of the kinds of unraveled life to which *Cruel Optimism* points: impasses in zones of intimacy that hold out the often cruel promise of reciprocity and belonging to the people who seek them—who need them—in scenes of labor, of love, and of the political," *Cruel Optimism*, 21.

¹⁴ Furthermore, part of Berlant's project in *The Anatomy of National Fantasy* is positioning Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* in mores of his time. When analyzing John Winthrop's writings, Berlant notes: "These discourses theorize an ideal relation between the individual subject and the civil polity, wherein natural law is modified by a regenerate civil law that regulates the passions of the individual subject but attributes the individual's desire to be so regulated to the light of his own reason. The law is enforced not only through formal codification but also through a juridical apparatus that operates 'inside' of the individual. By a principle called 'synteresis,' conscience becomes the trace of prelapsarian man's unimpeded access to the Law of Laws, that which contains both the law of nature and of reason—for before the Fall, these were the same. Conscience, 'the lawgiver,' controls the individual's private acts, the ones to which formal and external social controls have no access," 88. We will turn to this work momentarily, but it is possible to see glimpses of cruel optimism. This in where law becomes modified to the point where it forms the symbolic imagination that seems innate to all people, but in actuality, it (the law) is a created thing. To that end, we form an object attachment—with all their clusters of promises—both consciously *and* unconsciously.

with access to HRT, this is not necessarily saying marriage equality is *bad*, but it is naming that marriage equality is not the liberal rights-expansion panacea it is often portrayed to be, because even marriage equality can be a cluster of promises.

Thus, a cruel optimism can feel like a collapse of an entire world. The recognition of one's gender and sexuality often entails a loss of an entire world that was, until that moment, an optimistic possibility: a narrative rupture. At the same time, attainment of an object can also leave a person unable to fully grasp the nuances of the object attachment, leaving a bittersweet aftertaste.¹⁵ Again, let's take the example of marriage here. One may be married, but now feels a new pressure of neoliberal assimilation, or perhaps, it is only after one has been married that one comes to understand latent polyamorous desires. The attainment of the object should provide the "feeling" of attainment, yet the acquisition of the object has formed the stumbling block to one's flourishing.

Shifting out of the case study of marriage, this ability for cruel optimism to function in both instances—when the object is utterly always outside of reach *and* also able to be grasped only to be revealed as a hollow semblance of what the object was supposed to be—is critical.

¹⁵ Regarding the latter, Berlant analyzes Charles Johnson's "Exchange Value," where two Black brothers stumble upon hitherto unknown amounts of money that allow them to grasp their object attachment (each having their own). Berlant elaborates the ways in which both fail to actually attain what they thought they needed in order to achieve the optimistic ends. "What usually gets returned in the exchange of desire embedded in things is merely, disappointingly, a brief episode, often with a *thing* as memento of the memory and not the actualization of desire," *Cruel Optimism*, 42. Then, in reference to the struggle between community and sovereignty in a psychoanalytic register: "An unquantifiable surplus of money—what any capitalist subject thought anyone would want—turns each brother into a walking contradiction, a being who has what everyone wants and yet who reveals that the want that had saturated the fantasy of the whole imaginable world is wanting, because sovereignty, while ideal, is a nightmarish burden, a psychotic loneliness, and just tainted.

This means that the object of cruel optimism here appears as the thing within any object to which one passes one's fantasy of sovereignty for safekeeping. In cruel optimism the subject or community turns its treasured attachments into safety-deposit object that make it possible to bear sovereignty through its distribution, the energy of feeling relational, general, reciprocal, and accumulative," *Cruel Optimism*, 43.

Berlant is not trying to say one of these instances is cruel optimism and the other is not; rather, they are wanting us to ask the critical question that undergirds both instances: has the object of our desire become an obstacle to our flourishing?¹⁶ At the deeper level, will the object of our desire *always* be an obstacle to our flourishing?¹⁷ The response to these questions can be answered with the popular adage: “Damned if you do; damned if you don’t.”

The difficulty of such a question is hard to gauge when one does not yet know that a current object attachment is cruel. This is what makes it “cruel,” for it is *supposed* to be good. There is also the potential that there are warning signs the object attachment has begun its inexorable slide toward cruelty, but its continuity provides some form of stability, however precarious. Here, I want to turn toward religious communities in the forms of churches. While episcopal hierarchy is alive in most traditions (even Protestantism, though few are eager to name it as such), the individual shepherding of congregations can differ wildly from “official church teaching.” In this example, we could think of a queer or trans parishioner in a Catholic congregation (chosen as *MF* comes out of Catholicism) who is living a vibrant life of community and faith. While priests and others can continually affirm the joy, life, and dignity of this person, this does not remove the affective shock of documents like *MF*, or *The Pastoral Letter*. Again, I am not saying the response of the parishioner is to simply leave the congregation, because the congregation may reject such documents. What I am saying is that we cannot discredit these types of documents that can signal a potential warning sign of “it’s just a matter of time.”

¹⁶ Of course, such sentiments have often been hurled at queer people as justification for their deviancy, which disallows any sense of happiness as possible. Berlant’s argument, however, is working toward a more formal articulation. Put another way, these same mechanisms also function in relation to heterosexuality. Regardless of the optimism, the propensity toward cruel optimism always exists.

¹⁷ This chapter more so seeks to explore the first question, with the latter question being addressed in part II of the project.

Nonetheless, staying with the (potential) trouble provides far more stability (perhaps socially, but also psychologically) than leaving. Returning to Berlant, they will employ the phrase “our endurance in the object” to note how our proximity to a cluster of promises also determines the level of cruelty that can be experienced.

Recasting the previous example through personal anecdote, though I was raised Roman Catholic, I no longer identify with the denomination, favoring a smattering of Protestant theologies with perhaps a dash of transubstantiation thrown in from time to time for good measure because old habits die hard. Therefore, when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith responded in the negative to a question regarding whether the Church has the power to give blessings to unions of persons of the same sex,¹⁸ the affective shock¹⁹ still washes over me (with

¹⁸ Holy See Press Office, *Responsum of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to a dubium regarding the blessing of the unions of persons of the same sex, 15.03.2021*, accessed March 16, 2021, Vatican.va. This was also paired with the *Article of Commentary on the Responsum ad dubium, 15.03.2021*, accessed March 16, 2021, Vatican.va. It should be noted this is issued from an ecclesial body, and that attitudes and ceremonies regarding people of the same sex vary from community to community, congregation to congregation. Nonetheless, as noted before we must interrogate if any marriage in any assemblage of $x > 2$, where x stands for queer persons, would ever be licit.

¹⁹ This illustration is borrowed from Brian Massumi: “Affect for me is inseparable from the concept of shock. It doesn’t have to be a drama, though. It’s really more about microshocks, the kind that populate every moment of our lives. For example a change in focus, or a rustle at the periphery of vision that draws the gaze towards it,” *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2015), 53. When understood through the frame of microshocks, we can begin to also analyze more general affective response. For instance, there could be a person who is staunchly anti-religious. Such an announcement by such an illustrious religious body can also hold its own affective shock for even this person. In this sense, such an announcement holds political implications, which impresses upon this hypothetical individual, despite having no religious affiliation. Compare this Irving Goh, in conversation with Jean-Luc Nancy: “Allow me to postulate a hypothesis about affect: affect is a form of pressure [*pression*]. The origin of this pressure can come from anywhere, which is to say that there is no exact point of origin. Or else, one could recall here what you said about the deepest abyss of a body and/or the abyss deeper than that body as the ‘source’ of this pressure. In any case, a body senses this pressure; or, the body is touched by this pressure. The body thence receives the *impression* of affect, by which it experiences all sorts of *compressions*, including *depression*, *decompression*, *repression*, and *suppression*, other than the affect of joy, which is no less a form of compression that seeks an outlet, or release,” *The Deconstruction of Sex* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 36.

the potential for a lingering hope to be rapped along the knuckle with cruel optimism), but not nearly as intensely as a queer who remains in closer proximity to Roman Catholicism.

Proximity can also entail that we are unable to see the cruelty of the optimism. When Berlant writes toward an endurance, the following captures the relationship they are describing:

Whatever the *experience* of optimism is in particular, then, the *affective structure* of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that *this* time, nearness to *this* thing will help you or a world become different in just the right way. But, again, optimism is cruel when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and, doubly, it is cruel insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming.²⁰

The proximity one has in relation to their object attachment can lead to profound psychic harm and cycles of cruel optimism. Berlant's optimism, furthermore, should not be confused with a sense of hope. In fact, hope hardly appears in Berlant's text, receiving only small attention in latter chapters, after—it is “hoped”—readers have more fully understood the formal argument around optimism.²¹ What is brought forward in the above quotation could be applied to the

²⁰ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 2. See also, in regard to our fantasy determining fate, Mari Ruti, *The Singularity of Being: Lacan and the Immortal Within* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2012): “Fantasies are fate defining in the sense that they determine the ‘content’ (or ‘substance’) of repetition compulsion, giving our desire its inexorable direction, and making us single-mindedly preoccupied by, and doggedly faithful to, certain existential designs and preferences even when these undercut our well-being. To the degree that they endow us with a misleading sense of the role we occupy in the world, they delimit what we consider psychically and existentially possible, predetermining the range of our actions and holding us ensnared in perfunctory ways of living and relating. At their most narcissistic, they delude us into thinking that we are more agentic, coherent, invincible, and self-identical than we actually are. They, in short, promise the end of alienation by suturing our lack or self-division. For example, the fantasy of an ‘essential,’ inviolable inner core obscures our ontological void, offering us the comforting illusion of a flawlessly integrated psychic life. This makes everyday life more manageable, not to mention more gratifying, but it also perpetuates the deceptive dynamic of misrecognition and mistaken identity that epitomizes the mirror stage; as an existential ‘strategy,’ it can drastically, and often quite devastatingly, misguide us by causing us to pursue the kind of self-certainty and solidity of being that Lacan deems inherently impossible,” 37–38.

²¹ We can also see how Terry Eagleton has brought this relationship to the fore in *Hope Without Optimism* (London, UK: Yale University Press, 2015). He notes, “An optimist is not just someone with high hopes... An optimist is

example of marriage; perhaps the perpetual return to a stagnant relationship, or a return to an abusive relationship; cognitive investment in neoliberal economics while living in poverty; assurance in platitudes like “when the time comes, they will do the right thing”; and so much more. These examples highlight a certain proximity to people or even a proximity to an ideological ideal that extends beyond the self. Our individual attachments to clusters of promises structure worlds, whether that be theological systems, interpersonal relationships, or even globalized market economies. Even when, time and time again, our drive to attain the object of desire slips through our fingers like sand, we often remain in this symbolic desert of cruel optimism thinking *this* time the fistful of sand—our return to the scene—will remain solid; yet it too, is doomed to slip through our fingers.

A critical distance, then, becomes integral to Berlant’s study of optimism. This need not be understood through a strict physical notion of our endurance in the object of our desire. It can also be understood as a form of psychic distance and/or a willingness to critically interrogate the

rather someone who is bullish about life simply because he is an optimist. He anticipates congenial conclusions because this is the way it is with him. As such, he fails to take the point that one must have reasons to be happy. Unlike hope, then, professional optimism is not a virtue, any more than having freckles or flat feet is a virtue. It is not a disposition one attains through deep reflection or disciplined study. It is simply a quirk of temperament,” 2. I assess Berlant and Eagleton to share a similar theoretical disposition: the current end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century is marked by optimism. For Berlant, they are concerned about the ways in which optimism fails us concerning our relationship to prevailing ideologies. Eagleton, while also concerned about pervading ideologies, is aiming to present a more reasoned approach to hope that is not conflated with optimism. He provides a succinct illustration: “Hope, then, is what survives the general ruin,” 115. Berlant also notes their position in distinction to José Esteban Muñoz’ *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), where the past and future are more in conversation with each other than the prison of the present. Rather, “optimism is, instead, a scene of negotiated sustenance that makes life bearable as it presents itself ambivalently, unevenly, incoherently,” *Cruel Optimism*, 13–14. See also the question posed by Jack Halberstam in *The Queer Art of Failure*: “We are all used to having our dreams crushed, our hopes smashed, our illusions shattered, but what comes after hope?...What is the alternative, in other, to cynical resignation on the one hand and naïve optimism on the other?,” (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1. I note these conversational threads around hope and optimism, as these texts occurred within a short time span of one another (both within queer thinkers and outside queer thinkers). It is beyond the scope of the project to do an overly formal analysis of hope and optimism.

microshocks of any given affective occurrence. They write, “Sometimes, the cruelty of an optimistic attachment is more easily perceived by an analyst who observes the cost of someone’s or some group’s attachment to *x*, since often persons and communities focus on some aspects of their relation to an object/world while disregarding others.”²² It cannot be overstated the current privilege I possess in being able to conduct this work; namely, I am within the shiny auspices of the academy where such criticality is not only encouraged, but perhaps demanded with the hope of attaining the ever-fleeting possibility of a tenure-track position. I have the luxury and the academic training to take a critical psychic distance—a luxury very few people possess.

Framed in the opposite, as suggested by Berlant: there may not be many lay people (both theologically and academically) who are able to hold the constant psychic tension that Berlant is writing about. Their lives are too viscerally connected to a promising object attachment that foments cruel optimism. In such instances, those who have training (Berlant alludes to psychoanalytic training, but I am also extending it to theological training and/or general academic training) are more easily able to observe mechanisms of cruel optimism. This does not mean lay people remain un-affected, but that they often have not been provided the life chances to interrogate their affected being. The work of the analyst would then entail progressively helping the lay person interrogate these affective structures (i.e., transference, being cognizant of countertransference, and the general psychoanalytic process).²³

²² Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 24.

²³ Such processes need not occur through rigid formalized care but can occur through simple lines of questioning that ask people to explore their feelings, as they are good secondary indicators of affect. It can occur by asking people if they can think of another possible world. Barring they have not yet been completely alienated by neoliberal capitalism, most people are aware, at some level, of the things that “are not working.” While they may not always have a vision for a world otherwise (yet!), the opening of possibility facilitates the mechanisms of affective belonging. I currently conduct my introductory course on Christian theology as an introduction to queer theology.

They continue, “But if the cruelty of an attachment *is* experienced by someone/some group, even in a subtle fashion, the fear is that the loss of the promising object/scene itself will defeat the capacity to have any hope about anything.”²⁴ Here, the concern regarding hope (as this more often would be the term utilized by those outside the framework of cruel optimism) is an appeal more so toward a corporeal ability of endurance, rather than the affective articulation. Writes Berlant, “Often this fear of loss of a scene of optimism as such is unstated and only experienced in a sudden incapacity to manage startling situations.”²⁵ Here is where another tension arises. As noted, not all people exist in the same psychic capacity to confront cruel optimism, despite the inability of cruel optimism to ever fulfill their desire; yet, and this is crucial, this does not render cruel optimism obsolete. Rather, the cruel optimism can take the shape of psycho-somatic response.

An example may be workplace dynamics and discrimination. Let’s say someone has accepted an employment opportunity at a, as advertised and noted in the interview process, progressive workplace. A moment of psycho-somatic response could occur, for instance, when this new hire, perhaps it is a young queer woman, is presenting a report on her division’s recent successes. Upon completion, her cis-male heterosexual colleague makes a comment that often falls just outside of consideration for discrimination: “that was surprisingly eloquent.” For some, this may be hard to imagine one word impacting a person in such a way, but feminist, queer, and critical race theories, among others, have shown how such adverbial phrasings highlight the

The narrative disruption of what Christian theology *has* to be allows students to explore deeper questions. It also pushes open the doors of what theology can look like.

²⁴ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 24.

²⁵ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 24.

aberration of their being in any given normative space. A psycho-somatic response, then, could be a slight hitch in vocal response, a facial tick, or a sudden wash of fluster. This one adverbial phrase has come down with an unspoken disposition in relation to a given normativity: you do not really belong here.

The affective structure holds a kernel of something that will become the desire of the big Other—which is formed internal to us as a response to the big Other—but, based upon racialized gender and sexuality (and other intersectional analyses of socio-economic status, ability, and more), there is an inability to truly attain the desire which is sought. In my estimation, the ability to have a critical distance comes with *a responsibility to conduct critical analyses of the paradigms we hold dear*.²⁶

Per Dean Spade, the inability to critically question Theology or a theological paradigm might reveal certain tendencies within queer and trans engagement of Theology to be an uncritical endeavor. In other words, belonging, through attainment of a tiny sliver of proximity to the normative, becomes more important than transformation through the fundamental questioning, reform, or rejection of the normative, when it comes to seeking recognition and inclusion. The problem with belonging, here, is that it leaves the harmful ideological and

²⁶ Cf. Mari Ruti, *The Ethics of Opting Out: Queer Theory's Defiant Subjects* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017) in regard to Lacanian ethics: "In Lacanian terms, from the void where the humanist subject dies its agonizing death emerges a subject capable of taking a degree of critical distance from the Other. This should not be confused with Edelmanian antisociality, for the subject who challenges the Other may well remain capable of ethical fidelity to intersubjective others. That is, the defiant Lacanian subject is not invariably a subject who severs its relational ties in order to exit the symbolic through a self-destructive act; often it is a subject who resists the hegemonic symbolic *in the name of* its relational ties, in the name of an other—or others—who is so deeply valued that the subject is willing to risk its own viability for their sake. The key point—one that both Žižek and Edelman tend to lose track of—here is that there is a difference between the Other as a hegemonic collective social formation and the universe of intersubjective others: the defiant subject may well wish to reject the Other without wishing the discard (all) intersubjective others, some of whom may be cherished rather than resented. This is why reading the Lacanian ethical act as one of 'antisocial' (or 'antirelational') rebellion can be somewhat misleading," 42–43.

theological paradigms unchecked, only exacerbating queer and trans harm regarding people who are unable to meet the standards of any normative slice being allowed a closer proximity to the normative ideological expansion (which, to be clear, is still ultimately all racialized queer and trans persons, but there will always become a more “unacceptable” population of racialized queer and trans persons who get coded outside the law, who are unable to ever attain any proximity to the normative).

Belonging, through this framing, is a form of assimilationist Theology and—as this project’s context is the US—we may yet argue that it is a theological disposition that upholds a neocolonial Theology.²⁷ This project asks: what happens to Theology when we take a more anti-assimilationist strategy? What happens when the radical politics of queer and trans artists, activists, and theorists are applied to critiquing the socio-juridical order of Theology? What happens when queer and trans thinking re/turns to theology, but with a critical distance?

The concern currently can be inflected through one’s proximity to an object of desire and how this can be translated into queer theological constructions. While it is important to note that

²⁷ See the guiding theme in Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetition with Critical Difference* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003): The theme of repetition runs through this book. I have already intimated that one of my contentions is that gay and lesbian theology reached a state of theological breakdown and this manifested itself in a tendency to simply repeat itself (mirroring the repetitious discourse of those who oppose the inclusion of lesbian and gay people in the full life of the Christian community). Butler maintains that gender is inscribed upon the body through repetition. Queer theorists have argued therefore it is necessary to perform gender—to repeat—with critical difference in order to subvert it. I want to argue that repetition with critical difference is at the heart of Christian praxis and therefore there is a kinship between queer and Christian and more, that Christian theology has the ability to prevent queer theory failing into repetitious nihilism. Christianity is a queer thing,” 11. I do go a long way with Stuart, yet I find her argument that queer theory has a propensity toward trending toward nihilism to be lacking. While nihilism is not off the table, we cannot so quickly sidestep such a process of negativity in favor of theology. This comes forward, particularly toward the end of the work, where sexuality is depicted as the idol in our midst, and we should do well to ensure that a proper orientation toward God is what really matters. This only re-establishes Christianity as the normative frame that has simply absorbed sexuality and gender. Cf. Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*. Published the same year, these texts are interesting snapshots of queer theology and how scholars can privilege or maintain certain discourses.

cruel optimism will always occur (it is only ever a matter of time), it is equally important to offer visions of theology that have sought to break out of a current cycle of cruel optimism. Framed through neoliberalism and its exclusionary effects of dissident bodies, why would the sole task of queer theology seek enfranchisement in such harmful colonial and imperial formations? In essence, I am deliberately recognizing the necessity of queer theologies that, perhaps, spoon-feed those who possess power as offering their own unique form of queer Theology within the boundaries of a standard disciplinary trajectory, but I am adamantly stating that this form of theology is not seeking to take this route.²⁸ Just now I have elided neoliberalism with enfranchisement-seeking queer theologies, and to a larger extent hegemonic forms of theological accounts that have allied or have become allied (through appropriation) with neocolonial endeavors. As the conversation turns more earnestly toward law, a critical trans politics articulates more transformative visions of law than *less bad* formations of the law. Regardless of the divide, it is imperative to note that law remains an active component of this theology.

Critical Trans Politics Against a Neoliberal National Symbolic

While cruel optimism, according to Berlant, is a reality that cannot be escaped—for we will always form attachments and are therefore prone to investing many life promises upon said attachments—it inhabits a reality that is not fixed—though, admittedly, the fantasy does a rather phenomenal job disallowing this thought outright. Now the conversation must pivot toward critical trans politics and investigating how such critical work melds with Berlant’s project.

²⁸ In essence, I follow the categorization of Tonstad, *Queer Theology*. Tonstad recognizes the validity of apologetic queer theologies, but it quite clear that there is a something reductive if we seek to assert that this is the only way to conduct queer theology. Tonstad offers up “beyond apologetics,” which, to this day, is still defined by the works of Althaus-Reid.

While agendas sometimes overlap, the facilitation of this conversation is not to express coterminous goals (though they are far more similar than different) but to highlight critical points that resonate between the thinkers as they relate to the present project. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, I am not sold on the narrative that we are done with the law. Drawing upon the work of Dean Spade, we will now begin to explore how law can function going forward for this theological project; in both the civil utterance, but also in the construction of un/spoken norms.

As expressed by Dean Spade, scholar and founder of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project—a legal aid organization with an expressed mission to “guarantee that all people are free to self-determine gender identity and expression, regardless of income or race, and without facing harassment, discrimination or violence”²⁹—“The emotional and affective registers of neoliberalism are attuned to notions of ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’ that obscure systemic inequalities and turn social movements toward goals of inclusion and incorporation and away from demands for redistribution and structural transformation.”³⁰ In contrast to Berlant’s position regarding emotions,³¹ Spade names this connection to affect in relation to neoliberalism.³² Here, affective

²⁹ Sylvia Rivera Law Project, accessed May 15, 2022, <https://srlp.org>.

³⁰ Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, & the Limits of Law*, revised and expanded (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 22.

³¹ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 12–13.

³² While Spade notes the oftentimes slippery and imperfectness of the term “neoliberalism,” he does express the following: “I find the term useful because it allows space for critical insight into the range of practices producing effects at the register of law, policy, economy, identity, organization, and affect. It helps us look as a set of things together and understand their interlocking relationships rather than analyzing them in ways that make us miss key connections,” *Normal Life*, 21–22. Cf. Jakobsen, *The Sex Obsession*: “Not only does neoliberalism name a bundle of policies and practices, but contemporary governmentality is also produced by practices that have been layered over time. Neoliberalism creates new forms of organization that build on old contradictions, introducing new, taxing levels of incoherence. In this sense, neoliberalism is both a new formation and an ongoing enactment of capitalism,” 73.

registers get framed as “freedom” and/or “choice,” and when these two realities are that which is sought after there is far too much risk of individualized failure.

The “freedom to” narrative is not foreign to the US imagination, nor is the concept of choice absent (though recent changes in law throw this latter reality into suspicion). Queer and trans people are *free to* choose incorporation and inclusion—to “fit in.” When such a choice has been made, the “free” individual becomes responsible for any “successes” or “failures” in relation to the normative standard. Dean Spade, in contrast, intimates a pertinent question: why are we not able to restructure the law in such a way that such choices and freedoms need not be legislated by external, governmental bodies?

This freedom and choice only serve to enforce new normativities upon bodies that fall outside the expanded normative of rights expansion reform, which still reside under the demand of neoliberalism. The onus of the maintenance of the law/norm falls upon the precarious, unbearable persons, and, surprisingly, not the legislative body who pronounced the law which manages the enforcement of the law/norm.³³ The actions of the legislative body have been papered over and the neutrality of the law has been claimed. Notice how biopower still circulates within this maintenance of the law—through surveillance society—yet there is also now a circulation of the law itself that is occurring within this biopolitical frame that works to disappear its position of non-neutrality.

Within such a pernicious situation emotions become entangled within this process, but, in light of our explorations of cruel optimism, we cannot reduce the affective to merely emotion.

³³ We often see this framed through activism. This is why marriage equality has become such a critiqued subject. It was framed as if it would be a panacea to the social ills of gay and lesbian politics, and while many white gays and lesbians benefitted, a new category of queer arose that spoke (and continues to speak) toward the limitations of such expansions. Are those queers who do not want marriage afforded the same rights?

Both are present for Spade because they can express two different experiences of reality. In many ways, the connection opens the doors that Berlant has more so left to the analysts. Emotional responses can reveal the limitations of neoliberalism. Simultaneously, they can also be employed to represent the (in)ability to invest in the ideology. You, too, can be happy, because you have the freedom and choice to attain *xyz*—what is missing from this ideological maxim is what happiness is actually supposed to be. Abstract goals or desires rarely yield satisfactory or concrete realities, especially when the reality has been constructed in such a way to necessitate unequal proximity to the object of desire. With this as the backdrop, how then are we to analyze law and our proximity to its function?

Following Spade’s call to “look more at what legal regimes do rather than what they say about what they do,”³⁴ the theology of this book critically distances itself from most of Theology. Rather than noting the potentialities of theologies of the past, I am more interested in exploring the perspectives of trans and queer realities that can construct different or offer counters of theologies of the present. The former can usually (at risk of sounding too reductionistic) be understood through what I call “the openness argument” (i.e., there is openness in *x*’s Theology or argument for queer and trans belonging). To be clear, I am not saying this type of Theology is wrong, I am simply stating that this is *not* what the present theology is seeking to do: to borrow Linn Marie Tonstad’s classifications, it is, at the end of the day, apologetics.³⁵

While retrieval work is important and fundamental for any field, especially as it concerns realities of intentionally exploited populations, it can quickly become the unspoken standard that

³⁴ Spade, *Normal Life*, 10.

³⁵ Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 4–6, 16–17.

the task of these types of theological projects must always be a retroactive articulation of a potentiality that ultimately never came to fruition (but now, thank God, we have been the ones to find it! How academically convenient; of course, this project is not exempt from these politics, as it simply skews an academic convenience in the other direction regarding historical trajectory.).

If this co-opting of one methodological component as the zenith of any “marginal” Theology is to be the standard, it is certainly an effective strategy to delimit critical theologies of the present that seek to draw from differing archives (which already possess their own, unique subjugated histories) as they construct their theological projects.³⁶ It also becomes an effective tactic to demand a form of disciplinary purity, while simultaneously requiring the ability to be ever only in conversation with various other disciplines over and against any transdisciplinary approach that transgresses the boundaries of not one, but both (or various) disciplines.³⁷

³⁶ This is not to jettison history as a concern; rather, it is a privileging of a *different* history with a critical emphasis of the contemporary era. Though not wholly synonymous projects, I find affinity with portions of Linn Marie Tonstad’s work; particularly her articulation of queer theologies into apologetics and beyond-apologetics. I do not consider Tonstad to making a rigid categorization claim but emphasizing that different dynamics of power are being privileged in this description of apologetics and beyond-apologetics; namely, theology over queerness. Additionally, her text “The Limits of Inclusion: Queer Theology and Its Others” *Theology & Sexuality* 12, no. 1 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13558358.1115599>, provides helpful insight regarding the aims of some queer theological projects. Her 2018 text, *God and Difference* offered slightly differing and more doctrinal position (but one she wholly acknowledges in *Queer Theology*, 50). While I disagree with her specific reading of Lee Edelman’s *No Future, God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (London, UK: Routledge, 2016) does offer new critical insights for scholars wanting to remain in more systematic theological conversations.

³⁷ See Dean Spade, when he writes about disciplinary power that is missing from current law reform efforts: “This process has occurred not just in the realm of sexuality. The invention of various categories of proper and improper subjects is a key feature of disciplinary power that pervades society. The creation and maintenance of such categories of people (e.g., the homosexual, the criminal, the welfare dependent mother, the productive citizen, the gifted child, the psychopath) establish guidelines and norms (e.g., punctuality, heterosexuality, monogamy, dietary norms, racial segregation, manners, dress codes). These norms are enforced through institutions that diagnose, evaluate, engage in surveillance, take formal or informal disciplinary action, or require trainings, as well as through social or internal approval or shaming. Through these operations, we all learn the norms that govern being a proper man or woman, girl or boy, student, worker, manager, parent, member of our racial group, soldier, age-appropriate dresser, dieter, patriot, or member of our subcultural group. These norms and codes of behavior reach into the most minute details of our bodies, thoughts, and behaviors. The labels and categories generated through our disciplined behavior keep us in our places and help us know how to be ourselves properly.

Foucault suggested that as these norms become internalized, self-regulation would come to displace directly coercive means. This might seem to suggest that disciplinary power is somehow ‘softer’ or less violent than

From the perspective of racialized queer and trans belonging within the US (my own context) if the theologies of the past were/are so star-spangled open then why are we conducting the exercise where we must painstakingly articulate this said openness? Instead—riffing off Spade—we should look at what Theology does (or has done) rather than at what it says about what it does. Put bluntly, if the alleged openness of Theology to this point did what it purported to be able to do, I would not be here penning this text. There would be no racialized queer and trans antagonism in relation to Theology, for it would already be within theological significance. This, obviously, is not the case.³⁸ I contend the openness argument is dependent upon a mythic

other forms of control. But, as anti-colonial re-readings of Foucault by theorists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ann Laura Stoler, and Rey Chow have described, corporeal violence and looming threats of violence have accompanied and bolstered these forms of control. Many have taken this concept of discipline to denote a reduction of violence because control often becomes internalized and thus rendered largely invisible. An examination of race, gender, and colonialism, however, reveals that violence does not end with discipline's emergence. Examples of violent manifestations of enforcing these norms come to mind easily. Consider involuntary psychiatric treatment aimed at changing the mental processes and capacities of people whose behavior or expression is deemed outside certain norms. Another example is the forced assimilation of indigenous people in the United States through boarding school programs that forbade young people from speaking indigenous languages or engaging in indigenous cultural practices and forced them to conform to European gender norms, using violence and separation from family and community to enforce European American ways of being. Examples like these are everywhere in culture—violence is a key means of social control, of enforcing gender, race, ability, class, and other norms. These norms shape how we understand ourselves, others, and the world. They permeate every area of life down to the smallest details of how we chew our food or walk or talk, to the broadest systemic standards of how we keep time, measure productivity, and come to identify and understand human life.

Resistance to the disciplinary mode of control has frequently focused on opposing norms that center whiteness, Christianity, heterosexuality, maleness, gender binarism, and standards of health, intelligence, beauty, and reason that produce violent hierarchies of value. These resistance strategies often focus on exposing disciplinary norms as norms, and proposing alternative ways of being as legitimate. When activists form consciousness-raising groups that encourage people to question standards about how they see their own bodies and identities and replace those norms with other ideas that they consider better, they are engaging with the disciplinary mode of power...Resistance at the level of disciplinary power can also be seen in instances when controversies emerge over whether or not something should be treated as a crime, an illness, or just one way of being among many others (e.g., homosexuality, obesity, trans identity, pregnancy, drug use). Those battles are about resistance to particular disciplinary norms and standards, often emerging from medicine, criminology, and sociology, and reflect a desire to re-code the meanings of certain acts or identities” *Normal Life*, 54–56; I am also thinking along the lines of Julietta Singh’s *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018). Also noteworthy, is the internal irony that Singh notes. That to speak about unmastery is in some ways articulating a mastery. Just as speaking towards transdisciplinary can be interpreted as simply trying to pave a new discipline. Nonetheless, there is a sense that there is great value to be found when one becomes “undisciplined.”

³⁸ This sentiment also chimes with, I argue, those assessed by Taylor in *The Theological and the Political*: “The hermeneutical resistance in Theology is due less to an intellectual conundrum, and more to a desire to maintain

past, combined with the contemporary desire to unmoor and stretch “queer” from its modern articulation into a homogenizing reality that is uncritical to unique particularities and contingencies of history—especially in relation to gender, sex, sexuality, race, and power. Here, a Foucauldian genealogical method can be of use.

This project, therefore, is more interested in redistribution and structural transformation than inclusion and recognition. To facilitate this goal, we need a dissection of the socio-juridical landscape of the United States. This also aids in articulating further the context of this project. In slight foreshadowing toward chapter three, the archive of this project, which may be called queer theology, does not trace a lineage through the archive of Latin American liberation theologies, at least not directly. As noted in chapter one, this project traverses various queer and trans theories, cultural studies, a touch of psychoanalysis, continental philosophy, political theology, and more—all of which have also intertwined with Liberation Theology over the years. Nonetheless, in order to understand this project, it must be made clear that I am not trying to align this argument in the archive of Liberation Theologies (as the disciplinary categorization), though even I am prone to an occasional flare here and there. A transdisciplinary approach pushes and pulls all disciplines it touches.

This approach serves a secondary role of law taking shape along disparate incoherencies that try to pass itself off as coherent. This is part of how I understand a socio-juridical framing

certain privileged knowledge and subject-positions. The debate about context in Theology’s thinking is often an epistemological disputation that masks the guild discipline’s routinized pattern of safeguarding the subject positions and subjectivities of those who long have been taken as the primary agents of discourse in Theology,” 54–55. What I also find intriguing in Taylor’s work is how he more so addresses the discipline of guild theology than the expression of lived faith. For Taylor, the lived faith is theology; however, he more so is asking why is it that the lived faith of the intentionally exploited considered legitimate theology. This also chimes with the typical response to queerness, where a lived faith of a particular community is presented that counters the traditional guild theology, as if it acts as a *mea culpa* to an entire cis-tematic theology that continues on as if nothing occurred.

within the US. I turn again to Berlant, this time to *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life*, wherein they explore the construction and operations, and subsequent counter-forms-of-embodiment, of the “National Symbolic.” The “National Symbolic” represents the discursive mechanisms that render a particular geo-political accident of birth to inherit/inhabit a collectively-held history; accompanied with its own collection of icons, metaphors, heroes, rituals, and narratives that function to congeal a “collective consciousness or national subjectivity; through the National Symbolic the historical nation aspires to achieve the inevitability of natural law, a birthright.”³⁹ Observed through this orientation of the law, we return to the claim of Dean Spade and something occurs when we begin to interrogate what laws actually do versus what they say about what they do. Berlant shapes their argument by utilizing Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, through both literary criticism and historical analysis of extant sources of juridical (political) and religious leaders. The result of this anatomy reveals the contours of a Puritan/American (US) ideological structure of politics, law, scripture, sense of nation, and sexuality into a robust imaginary that aligns juridical incorporation as National Symbolic—in other words, they become coterminous.⁴⁰

A principal force of Berlant’s argument is the function of law—in the civil sense, but also along the lines of unspoken, but nonetheless very real, cultural norms and the theological landscape of colonial legacies—and how the law functions within the National Symbolic. In

³⁹ Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, 20.

⁴⁰ As Berlant notes, “Naturalized law, then, operates like affect: the expression of juridical sentiments seems like intuition; conscience seems to work like an organ,” *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, 67. Just as in *Cruel Optimism*, imaginary is not meant to convey fiction in regard to her usage of Hawthorne, but to allude to psychoanalysis. Cf. John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

order to maintain its ideological hold, the law must function in a state of semi-permeable existence. Following the discussion of Theology in the present project thus far regarding politics, law, scripture, sense of nation, and sexuality, and I will add race, it is only sensical (natural) that the foil of “the openness argument” would be the *ideal* argument to articulate as it reveals how the law is semi-permeable, and therefore open to allowing a greater incorporation of people into the National Symbolic. However, and this is key, only the bodies that adhere to the disparate components of this particular historic consciousness are allowed within, which simultaneously erases the particular history which led to said incorporation.⁴¹ In other words, it is the process where we do not discuss the reality that only *some* bodies can be naturalized into the National Symbolic. It becomes, following the arguments of Edelman (another collaborator with Berlant), the neoliberal left, which always reveals its hand regarding legitimacy and the vanishing of the “otherness” that queerness embodies—even after it has aligned itself with the neoliberal State.⁴²

By way of personal example in order to illustrate these mechanisms, I will think alongside the blend of gender theory and Critical Race Theory, and I will turn to the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which was issued 10 years before my mother’s birth, with *Lawrence v. Texas* occurring in 2003 and *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015. Growing up as a mixed-race (Filipino+Black+Polish) child of the 90s and early aughts, the national consciousness of

⁴¹ Following Spade, this would occur through a form of rights-expansion model of law reform; nonetheless, he notes the following: “With the recognition that changing what the law explicitly states about a group does not necessarily remedy the structured insecurity faced by that group comes a larger question about transformations that cannot occur through demands for legal recognition and inclusion. In fact, legal inclusion and recognition demands often reinforce the logics of harmful systems by justifying them, contributing to their illusion of fairness and equality, and by reinforcing the targeting of certain perceived ‘drains’ or ‘internal enemies,’ carving the group into ‘deserving’ and ‘the undeserving’ and then addressing only the issues of the favored sector,” *Normal Life*, 68–69.

⁴² Edelman, *No Future*, 19–22.

racism skewed toward the sentiment that the “problem” had been solved;⁴³ sexuality, arguably, has become taboo in light of HIV/AIDS—especially any forms of deviant desire. The unique histories regarding the atrocities directed toward Black and brown bodies was papered over in favor of a historical consciousness that may express some wrongdoings,⁴⁴ but nonetheless now incorporates these bodies into the natural/ized law. And we need not look far to see—or rather, not see—the papered over histories of non-normative sexual expressions.⁴⁵

⁴³ See the argument regarding “mobility for stasis” as articulated by Jakobsen in *The Sex Obsession*: “This movement...in which public discourse brings sex to the fore as race and class move to the background, then returns to class and/or race as the focus on sex fades. This movement among issues helps to inscribe the idea that the US is progressively addressing past injustices. As one issue comes to the fore and move to the background, it seems there is always progress on some issue even as there may be retrenchment on others and that retrenchment is kept in the background.” Then, drawing upon the thought of Catherine Bell, “People and institutions can understand themselves to be not racist or sexist by bringing a single moment to the fore and ignoring contravening actions, relegating them to the background. The idea that the United States is a land moving toward freedom and equality can be the common sense of the nation, even as the US actually offers less social mobility than many other countries,” 131. Fundamentally, “mobility for stasis” is employed to describe how discourses shape a perceived progression of social change, when, in reality, there has been very little, or no, hierarchical change. Jakobsen first articulated this term in “Different Differences: Theory and the Practice of Women’s Studies,” in *Women’s Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics*, eds. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Agatha Beins (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 125–142. The scope of this essay is more in relation to the Women’s Studies within the university setting; rather than focusing on alliance politics and politics of difference, we need to shift toward analyses of contradiction which hold these two foci in tension. As she defines here: “Mobility for stasis works because we can be constantly moving toward some goal and become invested in the feeling of progress. But, this progress narrative is a linear narrative that induces change along a single trajectory, thus denying contradictions, denying, for example, that even as there is class mobility (for individuals), economic classes (as a whole) remain in place,” 127. There is a unique way in which we can put “mobility for stasis” alongside “cruel optimism.” Like many things in this chapter, there would be interplay. Mobility for stasis allows for clusters of promises to form, yet cruel optimism reveals the reality of this stasis. Cruel optimism may reveal the way things are, resulting in a program that aims for a progress trajectory which is mobility for stasis. The cycle repeats. In both conceptual frameworks, the bigger concern must be for transforming the very structure that foments the groundings for these concepts.

⁴⁴ See Spade, “Politicians, primary school textbooks, and the corporate media tell the story that the United States left ugly histories of white supremacy behind through a civil rights movement that changed hearts, minds, and especially laws to eradicate racism and bring freedom to all. This simplified narrative if relentlessly reiterated in US culture and has played a starring role in the past four decades of lesbian and gay rights advocacy where the analogy to the Black civil rights movement has been a consistent rhetorical tool,” *Normal Life*, 139.

⁴⁵ See Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015) regarding a more long-range historical trajectory; Eric Cervini, *The Deviant’s War: The Homosexual vs. The United States of America* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020) for an intimate account of Frank Kameny; Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Seal, 2017) covered from the 19th century onward; Roderick A. Ferguson, *One-Dimensional Queer* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2019) critiquing the history of whitewashing queer struggles; Andrew Campbell, *Queer x Design: 50 Years of Signs, Symbols, Banners, Logos, and Graphic Art in LGBTQ* (New York, NY: Black Dog & Leventhal, 2019) for visual

They, those dissident and deviant bodies, now—we do not think of back then—have a claim to the birthright of the national consciousness. In this sense, only *some* history is allowed to be incorporated into the National Symbolic. The result is the erasure of some of the grossest atrocities of the past and, oftentimes, of contemporary historical struggles that render present activism (primarily; and secondarily, theories and cultural criticisms) as being too greedy.⁴⁶ Juridically incorporated marginalized bodies should express thanks that the benevolent fathers (for it must *always* be masculine) of the nation have made accommodations to the existing National Symbolic that naturalizes their being to be a natural/ized law of an *a priori* consciousness of the nation state and can thus participate within the neoliberal regime.⁴⁷

representations regarding various movements within activism and legal advocacy; and an early entry in the movement, Merle Miller, *On Being Different: What It Means to Be a Homosexual* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1971). Additionally, while this list is certainly not exhaustive, it also is specifically focused on the political activism within the U.S., the contextual focus here.

⁴⁶ This is also met with epithets regarding the people who dare to voice their realities: nasty women, uppity Black, militant faggot, ungrateful immigrant, and so many more. They serve to simultaneously demean these populations and also serve to redirect political anger toward these intentionally exploited populations and not the nation state. See also the introduction to Nikole Hannah-Jones and The New York Times Magazine, *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (New York, NY: One World, 2021).

⁴⁷ See Dean Spade, in relation to the administration of gender: “The terms and categories used in the classification of data gathered by the state do not merely collect information about pre-existing types of things, but rather shape the world into those categories that, ultimately, are taken for granted by most and thus appear ahistorical and apolitical. Indeed, many such categorizations are assumed as basic truths,” *Normal Life*, 76; Lisa Duggan’s framework of homonormativity: “It is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized, gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption,” and “The gay right wing, self-constituted as a new center, is definitively *not* a single-issue political lobby. The IGF’s gay equality rhetoric is a proffered new window and publicizing strategies of ‘the gay movement’ are rejected in favor of public recognition of a domesticated, depoliticized privacy. The democratic diversity of proliferating forms of sexual dissidence is rejected in favor of the naturalized variation of a fixed minority arrayed around a state-endorsed heterosexual primacy and prestige. The New Homonormativity comes equipped with a rhetorical coding of key terms in the history of gay politics: ‘equality’ becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservativizing institutions, ‘freedom’ becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil society, the ‘right to privacy’ becomes something to be escaped. All of this adds up to a corporate culture managed by a minimal state, achieved by the neoliberal privatization of affective as well as economic life,” “The New Homonormativity”, 179 & 190; see also—when a post 9/11 neoliberal landscape emerged that spurred a rethinking of the relationship between sex, race, and nationality—Jasbir K. Puar’s articulation of homonationalism: “National recognition and inclusion, here signaled as the annexation of homosexual jargon, is contingent upon the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others from the national imaginary. At work in this dynamic is a form of sexual exceptionalism—the emergence of

The hiccough occurs, though, when certain bodies—or even theories that relate to certain bodies—are framed as disrupting the National Symbolic (one can reflect on perpetual phobia toward teaching Critical Race Theory and basic discussions around sexuality and gender, which has come to the fore in recent years due to the populist election of Trump and push toward more overt white, heterosexual, Christian nationalism within the U.S.). What ultimately transpires is the confluence of recognizing the limitations of rights-expansion law reform and the mechanisms of cruel optimism as the affective cue that allows us to assess our relational position toward the natural/ized law.

As Berlant articulates, “Disruptions in the realm of the National Symbolic create a collective sensation of almost physical vulnerability: the subject without a nation experiences her/his own mortality and vulnerability because s/he has lost control over physical space and the

national homosexuality, what I term ‘homonationalism’—that corresponds with the coming out of the exceptionalism of American empire. Further, this brand of homosexuality operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects. There is a commitment to the global dominant ascendancy of whiteness that it implicated in the propagation and this brand of homosexuality. The fleeting sanctioning of a national homosexual subject is possible, not only through the proliferation of sexual-racial subjects who invariably fall out of its narrow terms of acceptability, as others have argued, but more significantly, through the simultaneous engendering and disavowal of *populations* of sexual-racial others who need not apply,” *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 2; finally, Judith Butler also analyzes this narrative of neoliberal increasing freedoms in their analysis of geo-political war and politics wherein global powers come to represent modernity, and sexual politics of the neoliberal modern are deployed to enact a temporal shift—in the case of post 9/11 declarations of war—toward Islam as a religion and, in general, the overall culture of the Middle East, where they exist in a different, pre-modern time. “To the extent that both artistic expression and sexual freedom are understood as ultimate signs of this developmental version of modernity, and are conceived as rights supported by a particular formation of secularism, we are asked to disarticulate struggles for sexual freedom from struggles against racism and anti-Islamic sentiment and conduct...Indeed, according to this view, struggles for sexual expression depend upon the restriction and foreclosure of rights of religious expression (if we are to stay within the liberal framework), producing an antinomy within the discourse of liberal rights itself. But it seems to me that something more fundamental is occurring, namely, that liberal freedoms are now being understood to rely upon a hegemonic culture, one that is called ‘modernity’ and that relies on a certain progressive account of increasing freedoms. This uncritical domain of ‘culture’ functioning as a precondition for liberal freedom in turn becomes the cultural basis for sanctioning forms of cultural and religious hatred and abjection,” *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London, UK: Verso, 2016 [2009]), 109.

historical time that marks that space as a part of her/his inheritance.”⁴⁸ Berlant draws upon Frantz Fanon, and the liberationist struggle in which he engaged; and similarly, Joseph Drexler-Dreis—from a decolonial theological perspective—also engages Fanon to articulate mechanisms that speak toward a reanimation of history within decolonial struggle, particularly as it pertains to national consciousness as he works toward a decolonial re-conception of salvation.⁴⁹ Drexler-Dreis will couple Fanon with the writing of James Baldwin, arguing that “Baldwin’s orientation of decolonial love ultimately spells the end of ‘America,’ as it exists as a legend and a myth...Decolonial love violently shatters the false sense of reality to which Americans are able to cling as long as dominant forms of signification remain unchallenged.”⁵⁰ The semi-permeable nature of the National Symbolic means there are gaps within the historical erasures. As such, dissident bodies write themselves within these cracks of the fantasy—to utilize Drexler-Dreis’ articulation of Baldwin’s literature.

For fear of this chapter turning too theological too quickly (which we will return to in the next chapter), I will cinch these quotations together with Mari Ruti—working at the intersection of post-’68 critical theory, queer theory, and psychoanalysis—and her explorations of the truth of one’s desire: “it is a means to ensure that we do not hand over to the Other all the instruments of meaning production, but retain for ourselves the right to bring new ideals, values, and systems of representation to the world.”⁵¹ The psychoanalytic edge that links these thoughts and concepts

⁴⁸ Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, 24.

⁴⁹ Joseph Drexler-Dreis, *Decolonial Love: Salvation in Colonial Modernity* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2019), 92-99.

⁵⁰ Drexler-Dreis, *Decolonial Love*, 116.

⁵¹ Ruti, *The Singularity of Being*, 52.

together cannot be ignored. This interplay, which demands a historical erasure in favor of the accession of a National Symbolic, entails that a fragile ecosystem exists. Therefore, any disruptions to the National Symbolic will precipitate the loss of nation experience, a vulnerable position in which a person effectively becomes a non-citizen.

What Spade helps us understand is that by only seeking rights-expansion law reform, we are always implicitly pre-determining which bodies are incapable of sharing in the National Symbolic: they, in effect, become a people with no nation existing within a nation state that seeks their extermination, but coded through the rhetoric and the letter of the law that would permit their survival if they were able to meet the acceptable neoliberal standard that ensures the status quo has not changed. Put another way, the process of rights-expansion law reform demands certain bodies “actively” disrupt the National Symbolic though they have not made any conscious choice to do so.

This precipitates the vulnerability of which Berlant notes—experienced both by the now precarious bodies *and* the now precarious National Symbolic which is threatened by these precarious bodies—and the violence noted by Drexler-Dreis—again, experienced both by the now precarious bodies *and* the *perceived* violence toward the National Symbolic (and those who enjoy the benefits of ideological proximity due to race, sex, class, etc.). The *perception* of the violence toward the National Symbolic is crucial, for Spade notes that rights expansion occurs specifically because it allows the juridical status quo to remain unchecked; those who have already possessed the power and the ability to adjudicate the National Symbolic still continue to exert that power regardless of any new incorporated body. Put another way, those in ideological proximity to the National Symbolic do not experience violence when rights expansion occurs

because the violent system is a benefit to them in some way, and this is why rights expansion has been seen as the correct response. When the conversation turns toward transformational restructuring of the public the tone changes; there is a sudden lashing out in the name of violence being done unto those who possess ideological proximity to the National Symbolic. A de-centering causes distress and disproportionate response.

In the revised and expanded version of Spade's text he notes that, "the concerns about inclusion I described in the first edition can be difficult to digest."⁵² Nonetheless, Spade still holds his position years later, and does so out of his understanding of Foucauldian power analysis. This position also lends itself to the subtitle of the text: *Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*. The more primary concern of analysis becomes the administrative bodies of the law (think the DMV, homeland security, the IRS, prison, etc.) which become sites that administrate law, gender, race, etc.⁵³ The argument can be made that

⁵² Spade, *Normal Life*, 139. Cf. Jakobsen's analysis in *The Sex Obsession* in relation to neoliberal detanglements in conversation with Spivak's intermingling of domination and exploitation: "Value and values are fundamentally interlinked. There is no way to extract the bare bones of either the practice of labor or the exchange of goods from the circuits of desire or the values that constitute them. Values make the act of valuing and hence the creation of value possible. Separating values from value, ethical commitments from economic necessity, culture from the market, all contribute to thinking that makes it harder, not easier, to critique the commitment to productivity that is in many ways fundamentally destructive to bodies and minds and the natural world," 82. Again, Jakobsen does not take up an extended analysis of the law in her work; nonetheless, incorporation of the law into her analysis would only deepen this sentiment of difficult critique. Law becomes entangled in this mess of value and values, often operating as the foundation on which values are positioned to provide a semblance of a stable origin, when, in reality, it is difficult to point to either value or values as the origin. Since this valuation chain lack stability, it allows the following: "The lack of casual necessity means that the world could be otherwise," 83.

⁵³ Eric A. Stanley also brings forward the circulation of blood within necrocapitalism of the U.S pharmaceutical industry around PrEP: "Because of PrEP's prohibitive cost, many of those most impacted by HIV, namely young Black, Indigenous, and/or Latinx trans women and MSM as well as IV drug users, have limited, if any, access. The ongoing legacies of colonial medical disinformation swirls with transphobic epidemiology and the homicidal stigmatization of IV drug use that results in the uninterrupted of the pandemic for some, while the *end of AIDS* is habitually proclaimed for others. In a lethal irony, it is the logic of the patent—the argument that innovation is only spurred by the security of private property—that replicates the virus and its differential death. Put plainly, the HIV cells of those taken without their informed consent or compensation, housed in the NIH reagent bank and also laboring in publicly funded labs that produce PrEP, are withheld from the same populations, and perhaps the same people from whom they were initially extracted. The theft of their viral labor helped grow Gilead's incalculable

rights have been expanded via individual anti-discrimination laws and we should all consider this to be a good thing. However, the socio-juridical generates analysis regarding “sites of production and implementation of racism, xenophobia, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, and ableism under the guise of neutrality.”⁵⁴ A common example that comes to the forefront is health care.

Concerning medical procedures and medications that are utilized by trans and cisgender people, Medicaid lacks a unified care for trans individuals. In essence, cisgender patients could receive aid for medications and procedures, and trans individuals will be denied care for the same procedures. In the case for cisgender patients, these procedures allow them to retain their sense of socially constructed gender, while trans patients are denied this care. “Thus, the distinction made in refusing this care to transgender people appears to be based solely on diagnosis. Denying care to a politically unpopular group that is provided to others in need of such care, advocates have argued, constitutes ‘diagnosis discrimination,’ a violation of federal Medicaid regulations.”⁵⁵ While a law may purport to limit discrimination, discrimination can be

wealth, which included \$36.2 billion in earnings off Truvada alone,” in *Atmospheres of Violence: Structuring Antagonism and the Trans/Queer Ungovernable* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 62.

⁵⁴ Spade, *Normal Life*, 73; see also Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence*: “The time of LGBT inclusion is also a time of trans/queer death. From the phenomenological vault of nonexistence lived as quotidian withdrawal, to the gory details of gratuitous harm—the archive engulfs. Nonetheless, anti-trans/queer violence is written as an outlaw practice, a random event, and an unexpected tragedy. Dominant culture’s drive to dissolve the scope and intensity of this violence is expected. Yet mainstream LGBT politics also colludes in this disappearance in exchange for recognition, however partial and contingent. Through this privatization, meaning the continued trafficking in a belief that things might be any other way while leaving the social intact, the enormity of anti-trans/queer violence is vanished.

Thinking violence as individual acts versus epistemic force works to support the normative and normalizing structuring of public pain. This is to say, privatizing anti-trans/queer violence is a function through which the social and its trauma are whitewashed, heterosexualized, and made to appear gender-normative. This relegation of anti-trans/queer violence, which always appears in the syntax of race, casts the human—the referent for cis white mourning—as emblematic. While mainstream LGBT politics clamors for dominant power through a reproduction of the teleological narrative of progress, it also reproduces the idea that anti-trans/queer violence is an aberration of democracy—belonging only to a shadowed past, and increasingly anachronistic,” 6.

⁵⁵ Spade, *Normal Life*, 83.

perpetuated under new forms. Following the example, the harmful argument of “it is not a medically necessary procedure or course of care” can be invoked to deny gender affirming procedures and medications to trans people. Simultaneously, expression in the opposite sentiment (as a medically necessary procedure to protect the socially constructed gender) in relation to cisgender people. In other words, we are denying the affirmation of transgender people while simultaneously protecting the affirmation of cisgender people in medical care.

It is possible, therefore, to interpret rights-expansion law reform as a mechanism of cruel optimism that allows us to return to the scene of fantasy, because “*this* time, nearness to *this* thing will help you or a world become different in just the right way.”⁵⁶ While Spade does not make his argument through the lens of cruel optimism, he can be read as attuned to these realities. The above example represents the limitations or the intended consequences of the law, yet Spade’s concern seems to trend more toward the psychic well-being of peoples. As it relates to the administrative structures, laws and the sites where law functions—allegedly created to ensure inclusion and recognition—are actually responsible for the perpetuation of violence, and every time one confronts this impasse they are hit with the affective force: you do not belong, you are an aberration of the system.

In contrast to such potential optimism, Spade asks us to interrogate what has *not* changed: the harmful structures that have created the fundamental violence. A critical trans politics:

...moves us away from an uncritical call to “be counted” by the administrative mechanisms of violent systems and instead allows us to strategize our interventions on these systems with an understanding of their operations and of their tendencies to add new categories of legibility as methods of expanding their control. This is particularly meaningful given that quests for recognition and inclusion tend to forgo

⁵⁶ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 2.

such a politics in favor of being incorporated into harmful systems and institutions.⁵⁷

Not only are recognition and inclusion laws harmful, but they are also uncritical! When understood with Berlant, recognition and inclusion laws tacitly embrace the National Symbolic, despite the harm and violence it enacts. Those who gain recognition and inclusion do not necessarily escape this harm and violence but perpetuate it while simultaneously existing in a state of citizenship that can actually still be harmful. For example, think along the lines of white gay and lesbian access to marriage. While marriage is “technically” licit, there are still bodies who exist in closer proximity to neoliberal assurance, understood through assimilation. As noted by Spade, “We must think deeply and critically about how law reforms can be part of dismantling violent regimes of administering life and death and forgo them when they cannot.”⁵⁸ Now, we must ask, what implication might this have for Theology?

No doubt, I am holding Theology and law together (though I would argue they are never quite separate). Spade, in his account, draws upon Critical Race Theory (which has a heavy foundation within the field of law) to articulate the ways in which critiques of civil rights movements note how reforms did not go far enough. Spade draws upon Derrick Bell’s concept of “interest-convergence”⁵⁹ to articulate that a trans critical framework is not working toward

⁵⁷ Spade, *Normal Life*, 86–87.

⁵⁸ Spade, *Normal Life*, 93.

⁵⁹ See Derrick A. Bell, Jr. “*Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma,” *Harvard Law Review* 93, no. 3 (Jan 1980): 518-533. In particular, Spade is drawing upon the claim: “Translated from judicial activity in racial cases both before and after *Brown*, this principle of ‘interest convergence’ provides: The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites. However, the fourteenth amendment, standing alone, will not authorize judicial remedy providing effective racial equality for blacks where the remedy sought threatens the superior societal status of middle and upper class whites,” 523. Prior to this statement, the argument was concerned with normative and positivistic aspects of the law, something which Dean Spade (and queer and trans theories) are deeply concerned with. In this reading, the positivistic—the world as it *is*—would ascertain the larger sentiments of the U.S. population do not deem trans

justice if it does not take seriously the ways in which Critical Race Theory has been alerting the world to the limitations of the law for nearly the past 50 years. Put simple, interest-convergence describes how certain civil rights relating to race were gained because they converged with the interests of white people. Resultingly, what has not changed, despite the advancement of some rights, are the fundamental systems of control that create structural maldistribution, which ultimately benefit white people (to this we can add cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, male, affluent, English-speaking, etc.).⁶⁰

equality as legitimate, therefore any normative—the world as it *ought* to be—expansion becomes bound by positivistic fears. Rather, as Spade is arguing, there needs to be larger systemic transformation that fundamentally questions expansions dependent upon minor normative pleas. Follow Stanley, racialized anti-trans and queer violence operates in the hidden non-neutrality of these expansions in law, because the normative has not produced a challenge to the positivistic. It is another example of mobility for stasis, but as Stanley shows, this mobility is produced at the expense of bodies who are framed outside the new boundaries of social and juridical legibility.

⁶⁰ The mechanisms of interest-convergence, I think, can also aid in conversations regarding the phenomenon of “passing.” In this realm, a Black person can enter white spaces so long as they are not too Black, express congruent neoliberal expressions, and overall, play by the rules of white people (This, of course, being a miniaturized example, for these levels of passing can extend to what neighborhood a person has chosen to call home, the type of food (and the level of “smell”) people eat, how clean a person keeps their home—in short, everything becomes a point of external and internal surveillance with the looming threat that rights can be retracted should a person transgress in any way, because, as the saying goes, clearly they are undeserved. Bear in mind, under this framing, white people are not held to these same standards and free to transgress without fear of rights-retraction. This relationship of the law and transgression of the law will be explored further in chapter 4.). People who get categorized as conducting scholarship too closely associated with an “identity” often seek to maintain a level of respectability (because despite people in power benefiting from the literal murder of other humans, the onus of respect is still distributed unequally), which is coded language to mean acceptable discourse and comportment to meet the arbitrary standards of whatever disciplinary or social guild to which a person is seeking to gain access, which often falls along the lines of stereotypical privileging. As we can see, when rights-expansion occurs, we get two new categorizations: those that conform to a neoliberal assimilation which inherently still deprivileges their existence and those other, still too-deviant bodies: too Black, too queer, too poor, too unwilling to continue to hide their disability to make others feel more comfortable. See also the conceptual framing of “mobility for stasis” within Jakobsen, *The Sex Obsession*: “movement that does create real social change but that does not fundamentally shift the prevailing order of things,” 36. This is the tension between the recognition and inclusion model and the transformational critical politics that changes the law. Real social change *has* occurred, but the same alienation powers remain in control. In the context of this chapter, then, a new body must be now be determined to be unintelligible to this system; just outside the frame of law, allowing unspeakable to be done unto their bodies.

We should be hesitant to utterly jettison law as an outside concern of political theology, for we run the risk of missing important intersectional analysis.⁶¹ A queer and trans critique cannot afford to ignore matters of the law, which impact race, sex, gender, ability, the environment, and so much more. Moreover, despite its best analyses, we will never get it right, but critical politics already names this as such. We must ask Theology, from the perspective of openness, if it has a duty to address these intersectional analyses, especially when these analyses pinpoint Christianity (in particular) as encouraging such systemic structures that inflict pain and suffering. Part II will introduce Preciado's theorizations of the dildo alongside Christ to interrogate the document *MF*, which references a natural law paradigm that, theoretical, should be able to expand to include intersex and trans bodies. The document, however, facilitates a shrinking of what is to be considered natural, thus opening the door for pain and suffering beyond intersex and trans people. Therefore, it becomes the task of theologies like this project to name these myriad interlocking systems of subjection,⁶² even at risk of becoming too long, unwieldy, and seemingly incoherent in its focus or critique: in a word, overdetermined. Nonetheless, the concern of interest-convergence should give us pause when we contemplate race, as well as matters of sex and gender, ability, and more.

Queerness—here functioning in conversation with a socio-juridically mediated structuring of worlds—also comes with its own myriad histories and must be remembered in its contexts—if not, then what is it: it has ceased to be queer. Put another way, queer and trans

⁶¹ See Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex". Beyond the influence of this article on women's studies, feminist theory, queer studies, queer theory, critical race, ethnic studies, and more, I retain the history that this article arises out of a legal critique. Without expressing a primacy of the law, intersectional analysis (especially if invokes Crenshaw's origins) misses something when legal legibility and/or erasure is absent.

⁶² For Spade's usage of the term "subjection," see *Normal Life*, 6.

existence is understood as a structuring antagonism: one is queer and/or trans *in relation to something; even if this relation is trans, non-binary, and queer existence in contrast to a more neoliberal codification of white gay male politics.*⁶³ This, of course, also means there is never one queer or queerness, but myriad expressions of queer and queerness the world over, and one should not quickly run to a universalization of queer.⁶⁴ In this respect, this theology is leaning upon the vein of critical political theory that names the structuring antagonism for what it is, and then transitions this critique into theology—not in a way that renders it intelligible to already-existent Theology, but in a way that seeks to maintain its critical political agenda, now in a differing theological location.

⁶³ See Spade: “Overall, the lesbian and gay rights agenda has shifted toward preserving and promoting the class and race privilege of a small number of elite gay and lesbian professionals while marginalizing or overtly excluding the needs and experiences of people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, indigenous people, trans people, and poor people. The institutionalization of lesbian and gay rights that started in the 1980s and produced a model of leadership based on educational privilege and a model of change centering elite strategies and law reform facilitated the abandonment of social justice struggles that concern the most vulnerable queer and trans people in favor of the advancement of narrow campaigns to include the most privileged queers in dominant institutions. As the leading lesbian and gay rights organizations emerged, they were (and remain) primarily funded and staffed by white gay people with professional degrees and/or wealth. These organizations operate through hierarchical models of governance, concentrating decision-making power in board members and senior staff who are even more likely to be white, wealthy, and have graduate-level educations.

The gay rights agenda, then, has come to reflect the needs and experiences of those leaders more than the experiences of queer and trans people not present in these elite spaces. The mostly white, educationally privileged paid leaders can imagine themselves fired from a job for being gay or lesbian, harassed on the street (often by an imagined assailant of color), excluded from Boy Scouts, or kept out of military service. They do not imagine themselves as potentially imprisoned, on welfare, homeless, in the juvenile punishment and foster care systems, in danger of deportation, or the target of continuous police harassment. Because such figures shaped and continue to shape the ‘gay agenda,’ those issues do not receive the resources they warrant and require. Furthermore, these paid nonprofit leaders come out of graduate schools more than from transformative, grassroots social movements of people facing centuries of state violence. Because of this, they do not possess the critiques of notions such as formal legal equality, assimilation, professionalism, and equal rights that are developed through grassroots mobilization work. Even relatively popular feminist critiques of the institution of marriage could not trump the new call for ‘marriage equality’—meaning access for same-sex couples to the fundamentally unequal institution designed to privilege certain family formations for the purpose of state control,” *Normal Life*, 34–35.

⁶⁴ See Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 22–27; “Axiom 1: People are different from each other,” 22. Therefore, a universal “queer” subject does not exist.

This critical analysis, at times blisteringly, articulates the violence of Christianity toward queer and trans bodies. Therefore, it decenters the existing discourse in favor of privileging the impossibility of queerness. Impossible, for the critical political agenda is one that risks envisioning a potentially impossible political reality/future that “tirelessly interrogates processes of normalization by analyzing their impacts and revising its resistance strategies as it observes their unintended consequences.”⁶⁵

Within this project, I am not concerned with a universal construction through a positive articulation of a theological system, but of a hermeneutical lens derived from epistemological privilege of queer and trans theory that shapes a powerful critique of *MF*. The critique will take aim at heterosexuality (the ideological structure) that is beneficial to only a tiny sliver of people and even excludes heterosexuals. Thus, this critique aims to get us to a location where then we can commence renewed constructive work that counter-intuitively, brings together *more* people and not less. In other words, this project we will be a deconstructive enterprise rooted within queer and trans theory, which provide the serrated edge that cuts across the social realities and restricted politicalities of marginalized bodies fomented by Theology. A secondary project—though a project not explored in these pages—could entail the creative theological task of reimagining a different theological landscape. Pursuant to the theorized instability of queer and/or how queer functions more so as a critical mode of analysis in contrast to a positive identity construction—as well as my own stated position in relation to apologetics—academic and intellectual rigor is required to ensure this theological imagination engenders an open mesh

⁶⁵ Spade, *Normal Life*, 7.

of possibilities and does not retrench an imperio-colonial sense of Theology where queer has been added into the matrix of domination.

This deconstructive position can be unnerving for some, but I contend there is no need to fear. By way of foreshadowing the reading of *MF*, the logics of *Humanae Vitae* are still in full effect. To that end, contraceptives, prophylactics, and assisted reproductive technologies are out of the question, for these technologies either thwart reproductive mechanisms (penis-in-vagina ejaculation) or “tamper” with human life (management of embryonic tissue). While these sexual tools are utilized by “queer” people, they are also embraced by heterosexual people. Thus, within the logic of *MF*, and the anthropology it is proposing, heterosexual people also fail to embody to the ideological kernel. Thus, a deconstruction of the logics along the lines of critical trans politics leads to a deconstruction of an ideological system that cannot even contain the bodies it is purported to edify. But again, such deconstruction can be unnerving, or unsettling for some, particularly those who are more accustomed to uninterrogated privilege within a hegemonic socio-juridical affective assemblage.

In the usual tactic, it is actually *them*, those advocating for retributive and regressive policies, that are the true victims in this situation. In contrast to emergent critical politics, these retributive voices are really the ones who are expressing the critical political position, for it is now radical to seek a time “when women were still women and men were men; where marriage was between Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve; and when Black people knew their place in society.”⁶⁶ To those who have picked up this book, these positions may seem rather comical, but

⁶⁶ Cf. this mechanism in Jakobsen, *The Sex Obsession*, and an analysis of neoliberalism in the age of Trump: “For those who understand themselves to have suffered socioeconomic losses due to deindustrialization and neoliberal policies, the political promise to ‘make America great again’ is an animating one, as they hope it will return the United States to a system in which the distinctions between white men and other people, those with jobs and those

they stem from real fears.⁶⁷ This fear speaks to the comfort that can be felt by clinging to a cluster of promises (in the case of *MF* it would be biological complementarity ordered toward reproduction), despite the reality very few can attain such promises. It is far easier—even at risk of our psychic well-being—to believe that this time it will be different.

From the context of the US, even for heterosexual couples who are able to fulfill the demands of *MF*'s anthropology, we still must contend with myriad additional factors. This can extend from racial disparities between Black and brown parents to white parents, from gender-affirming care of transgender parents to access to abortion. Beyond childbirth, we must acknowledge how the US lacks paid parental leave (of any sex and/or gender) comparable to other developed and developing nations. Interest divergence does not necessarily entail such reproduction be halted; rather, it entails we interrogate by what means does an ideological reproduction demand further interventions of political life. Thus, a deconstruction is necessary, but such work facilitates more expansive—and ideally equitable—possibilities of a different political life.

without, and a moral distinction between earned and unearned benefits will be brought into line. In other words, they are willing to support the shredding of the safety net if they believe it has a chance of 'bringing back' the jobs that allowed for a sense of not just of economic well-being, but also of being morally 'deserving.' And so they may even be willing to risk losing some of their 'earned' benefits if they believe there is a chance of 'bringing back' the economic system that made this intertwined set of distinctions operative on their behalf," 79.

⁶⁷ Cf. Drexler-Dreis, *Decolonial Love*, "Baldwin's mode of historical reflection confronts those who sustain a distorted image of the United States and the larger modern/colonial network in which it's situated with their failure to monopolize the construction of worlds. This praxis of reflection, which is ultimately a praxis of revelation, indicates a passive view of revelation insofar as revelation is an already present reality. Yet, revelation is also an activity, and is even sometimes perceived as violent. Revelation strips away the legitimating covers of US identity and of Western modernity more broadly. Revelation, in Baldwin's work, sustains the tension of a reality that simply *is*, and an active praxis of love that brings reality forth. Baldwin thus affirms with Long the historical task of reflection in the United States, but also takes up an eschatological challenge—understood in terms of depth rather than chronology—*through* the reflective task of actualizing revelation. Reflection opens up cracks in the modern world-system out of a commitment to the eschatological reality of decolonial love. Baldwin finds, in those cracks, loci from which to participate in decolonial love," 103–104.

More fundamentally, I would argue, these fears also come from an incorrect understanding of power; namely, that power, in this case it is rights through law, is a zero-sum game (i.e., if other people gain rights that must mean I lose rights). As already noted, those who exist in a state of precarious rights are still those bodies that cannot be properly assimilated to society based upon the supposed expansion of rights.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, *change is still required* and law will be restructured—hence, why a sense of loss may occur. Fundamentally, this restructuring of law asks, in what way does this law come about or enforced at the expense of other people? A sense of losing rights (from those who possess hegemonic power), then, may stem from a loss of a world (through how we unconsciously move and process our citizenship) that was only possible because it demanded the exploitation of others.

Likewise, concerning Theology, the movement of Theology into the landscape of critical queer and trans political approaches does not take power away from Theology that has previously existed, because that is not how power works. Rather, the dialogue that is harmful toward queer and trans will still circulate; however, this conversation claims its own power to circulate as a counter political theology. As chapter one suggested, there is a departure from a certain form of Theology and theological discourse and a movement toward more transdisciplinary permutation. There is, to some extent, the process of constructing and articulating (for Preciado already has done immense constructive work) a new symbolic imagination.

⁶⁸ For a helpful chart regarding Spade's critique of marriage equality as the defining right for queer and trans activism and law in favor of critical queer and trans political approaches, see *Normal Life*, 32–33.

This new symbolic imagination is not only theological, but also socio-juridical, and has implications regarding the National Symbolic of the US and how we construct the concept of the citizen. In relation to Preciado and the fabrication of the concept of “natural,” this reveals the complete fabrication of the National Symbolic. It perhaps may go without saying, but the US’s National Symbolic is not natural, but a fabrication; it is not an occurrence that naturally sprung forth from creation, but an arbitrary construction of a new reality. This fabrication is revealed, especially when we recall the language of “naturalization” into the National Symbolic. As this concerns sexuality, and the implications of sex, gender, and race in part II we interrogate these questions of “natural” through the visual regimes present within *MF* to reveal how these visual regimes betray the “nature” before them in favor of a fabricated ideological construction of sexual dimorphism.

For now, we can note there is a desire to counter the symbolic structure has been shaped in such a way that even if rights-expansion were achieved, it would only be in relation to that singular aspect of the symbolic regime, now framed through the juridical: there would still exist dissonance across the symbol structure, the great *socio*-juridical that will cause cruel optimism to always occur. Instead, there is the ability to opt for the exhaustive struggle of material and symbolic work that counters the conservative law and cultural politics of the US.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ See Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997): “This exhaustion of cultural struggle over the material and symbolic conditions of U.S. citizenship is a desired effect of conservative cultural politics, whose aim is to dilute the oppositional discourses of the historically stereotyped citizens—people of color, women, gays and lesbians. Against these groups are pitted the complaints not of stereotyped peoples burdened by a national history but icons who have only recently lost the protections of their national iconicity—politicians who are said to have lost their ‘zone of privacy’; ordinary citizens who are said to feel that they have lost access to the American Dream; white and male and heterosexual people of all classes who are said to sense that they have lost the respect of their culture, and with it the freedom to feel unmarked.

Indeed, today many formerly iconic citizens who used to feel undefensive and unfettered feel truly exposed and vulnerable. They feel anxious about their value to themselves, their families, their publics, and their nation.

Clawing Toward Freedom

All this writing toward the limitations of law and Theology may leave one wondering what a viable route going forward might look like. Turning toward more recent scholarship, I want to briefly engage Preciado. In 2019, Preciado was invited to give a speech before the *École de la Cause Freudienne*. The speech opened with a salutation to any psychoanalyst that is queer, trans, or non-binary, and proceeded to offer a critique of psychoanalytic projects that base their foundation in sexual dimorphism. Preciado was heckled off the stage, and only managed to present about a quarter of his prepared remarks.⁷⁰

Preciado's remarks turn toward notions of freedom and the potentiality of psychoanalysis to offer a way out for sexual and gender nonconforming people.⁷¹ In other words, psychoanalysis does not need to utilize sexual difference as the foundation of its process. In so doing, this dependence on sexual difference reveals more so a deliberate epistemological framing than any insights regarding desire. We should, instead, be asking how psychoanalysis can provide a way out.

They sense that they now have *identities*, when it used to be just other people who had them. These new feelings provoke many reactions. One response is to desire that the nation recommit itself to the liberal promise of a conflict-free and integrated world. Another is to forge a scandal, a scandal of ex-privilege: this can include rage at the stereotyped peoples who have appeared to change the political rules of social membership, and, with it, a desperate desire to return to an order of things deemed normal, and order of what was felt to be a general everyday intimacy that was sometimes called 'the American way of life.' To effect either restoration of the imagined nation, the American ex-icon denigrates the political present tense and incites nostalgia for the national world of its iconicity, setting up that lost world as a utopian horizon of political aspiration," 2.

⁷⁰ Preciado, *Can The Monster Speak? Report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts*, trans. Frank Wynne (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2021), 11; Paul B. Preciado, *Je suis un monstre qui vous parle: Rapport pour une académie de psychoanalystes* (Paris, FR: Grasset, 2020), 11–12.

⁷¹ Cf. the assertions of Ruti across her works. Ruti will note this as the “clinical edge” of psychoanalysis. Clinical not in the sense that it is seeking to cure something, but clinical in the sense that it provides tools to understand and combat symptoms of our being. Ruti will distinguish this against the deployment of psychoanalysis in much of queer theory as only possessing the power to pathologize queerness.

I want to investigate Preciado's remarks toward freedom. To be fair, Preciado is not necessarily addressing freedom through the lens of the state, yet his psychoanalytic inflection concerning freedom does trend toward symbolic restructuring, which we now know is not antithetical to matters of the state. Preciado, toward the opening of his dialogue, notes the following:

Neither then nor now did I ask to be “given” freedom. The powerful constantly promise freedom, but how could they give subalterns something they themselves do not know? A paradox: they who bind are as imprisoned as they whose movements are hobbled by the knotted ropes...No one can give what they have never known...Liberation, whether gender or sexual, cannot under any circumstances be a more equitable redistribution of violence, nor a more pop acceptance of oppression. Liberty is a tunnel that must be dug by hand. Freedom is a way out. Liberty—like the new name by which you now call me, or the vaguely hirsute face you see before you—is something that is carefully fabricated and exercised.⁷²

Central to Preciado's articulations is this question: what is freedom? Recall the previous treatment regarding freedom in this chapter. Preciado is simultaneously noting the socio-juridical structures—though not named as such—that promise freedom. Through this critique, we may arrive at something that more resembles freedom than what we presently have. Preciado further notes that any sense of freedom is not given by another person, but it is something that is labored toward: we can think in more singular terms of survival through initial escape and also more collective terms of co-creating new ways of imagining life together, whether these are intentional living communities, the house cultures of queer and trans people, and so many other formations of freedom that struggle to take shape amidst neoliberalism. What simultaneously occurs, within

⁷² Preciado, *Can The Monster Speak?*, 28–29; Preciado, *Je suis un monstre qui vous parle*, 29–31.

these co-created communities—is a critique of “the way things are.” It is not, as the usual homophobic and transphobic narratives go, a selfish individualism.

As Berlant has articulated, this living out of a counterpublic (to borrow the language of Michael Warner, with whom Berlant has collaborated⁷³) can be perceived—as Drexler-Dreis has articulated—as a violence toward the hegemonic National Symbolic. Eric A. Stanley goes as far as summarizing their argument in *Atmospheres of Violence* in the following way: “Racialized anti-trans/queer violence is not antagonistic to the democratic state; it is among its foundations.”⁷⁴ Stanley’s and Spade’s arguments converse well, as Stanley’s critique of democracy chimes with the fundamental democratic limitations of rights expansion reform—and, as this project seeks to extend this theory, the limitations of openness arguments within “traditional” constructions of Christian Theology. At a foundational level, the operations of democracy—and the theological traditions which undergird its function—are dependent upon racialized and sexual violence, and socio-economic violence, and environmental violence, and more.

It is an unpopular opinion, one met with animosity (from both the right and left). Stanley, however, wants to probe this disdain for critiquing democracy:

To question democracy, even from the left, authorizes suspicious despair and raw hostility directed toward all that give it language. Yet those produced as democracy’s debris from the global wars waged under its name to the internal attacks ordered against anyone who dreams of more demand our resolve. This drama was particularly evident in the aftermath of the election of Donald Trump and the subsequent attempts to denounce him and his administration as an outlier in the otherwise smooth space of the United States. The proclamation “This is not

⁷³ See Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public.” In *Publics and Counterpublics* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone, 2002), 187–208.

⁷⁴ Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence*, 114.

normal” codifies the ringing truth of its own lie. Yet the architecture of this reclamation, its nonperformance, enable the force of liberal normativity to pull the center further toward the right in hopes of recovering a now-challenged fantasy of protection that was never there for most. Tragically, we are returned to the dreaded cage of realism, where *less bad* becomes the only name freedom can take. My intent here is not to erase the vicious specificity many are living and dying through in the current nightmare misnamed the United States, but what closures come with reading such habituation as rupture?⁷⁵

Working in reverse, the language of rupture may set some bells ringing for those more versed in Liberation Theology. However, when we explore how Stanley has invoked this term it holds its own form of cruel optimism. Like the context of this project, Stanley’s analysis focuses on the US—which they identify as a misnamed nightmare—and how those who live under the violence of its habituation may settle for simply *less bad* circumstances. The central question from Preciado returns: if this is the case, what is freedom? Following Stanley’s argument, and also Spade’s, it becomes apparent that this *less bad* reality has an unspoken and unwritten qualifier: *for some people or for people who are willing to toe the line*. In other words, survival within neoliberal democracy becomes one of compromised existence, where one never truly is allowed to live.

Furthermore, far right populist movements pull a modicum of national fantasy toward the right in order to retain people within the National Symbolic, while simultaneously noting the irregularity of such positioning. This results in only further disenfranchised peoples, both internally, but also externally as the US is positioned on a global landscape in relation to other cultures and nations. For example, hyphenated identities suddenly hold the pressure of ideological assent: “I am Asian-American, I am Mexican-American, etc.” Without erasing racialized geo-political histories, we must question what the hyphenated “-American” means in

⁷⁵ Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence*, 114–115.

relation to one's ethnic heritage and the potential symbolization of one's willingness to assent to the violence of the U.S. ideology that is the National Symbolic (think along the lines of assimilation, but also survival).

Additionally, it serves to cultivate and maintain a US hegemony in relation to the suffix "American," as if people who reside within the US are the only people within the hemisphere who can claim this demonym. Simultaneously, it is often due to ongoing assimilative processes that this hyphenated "-American" also aids in external populations gaining any semblance of enfranchised purchase within the US—usually at risk of assuming an outsider status within any "original" ethnic identity. It is not a simple either/or construction—would it be, it perhaps might be easier to come to a solution. To blend the rhetoric of Lauren Berlant and Judith Butler, assent to hyphenated existence operates through an optimism of "becoming 'socially coherent.'"⁷⁶

In addition to a sense of citizen formation, Butler is also arguing against the rationale that kinship must always be heterosexual, demanding an ideological and material perpetuation of the family. Along with this also comes the ideological and material perpetuation of the state, race, and more, i.e. the (ideally) white bourgeois nuclear family. The National Symbolic, then, also functions as a mechanism that effectively incorporates identity into the fantasy while simultaneously creating a division within identity that cannot properly cohere with the National

⁷⁶ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, (London, UK: Routledge, 2004): "The norms of recognition supplied by the state not only often fail to describe or regulate existing social practice but become the site of articulation for a fantasy of normativity that projects and delineates an ideological account of kinship, at the moment when it is undergoing social challenge and dissemination. Thus, it seems that the appeal to the state is at once an appeal to a fantasy already institutionalized by the state and a leave-taking from existing social complexity in the hope of becoming 'socially coherent' at last. What this means as well is that there is a site to which we can turn, understood as the state, which will finally render us coherent, a turn that commits us to the fantasy of state power," 116–117; Cf. in regard to transnational cultural studies, queer theory, and ethnic studies (noting the allusions to the naturalization of the U.S. queer subject), Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 76–78.

Symbolic. The insidious nature of this division is that we rarely are cognizant of such wagers regarding incorporation into the National Symbolic until we have breached the spoken, but more often the unspoken, norms that prop up the National Symbolic through this very division of identity. Put bluntly, the National Symbolic is created at the expense of intentionally exploited peoples who are thrown into an unbearable or precarious life, but this unbearability or precarity is hidden underneath the very ideological trafficking that is the fantasy of the National Symbolic.⁷⁷ We will return to this thrownness in chapter six.

I am writing toward this sense of incoherence in the above example.⁷⁸ The ways in which ideological assimilative monikers function as socio-juridical coding of citizenship is enough to

⁷⁷ Cf. Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (London, UK: Verso, 2020): “While we continue to navigate toward a more vast and abstract concept of gender, it must be said that at times it really does feel, paradoxically, as if all we have are the bodies we are housed in, gendered or otherwise. Under the sun of capitalism, we truly own little else, and even so, we are often subject to a complicated, bureaucratic, and rhizomatic systems of institutions. The brutality of this precarious state is particularly evident via the constant expectation that we as bodies reassert a gender performance that fits within a binary in order to comply with the prescriptions of the everyday. As political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott writes, ‘Legibility [becomes] a condition of manipulation.’ These aggressions, marked as neutral in their banality, are indeed violent. Quotidian in nature, we find ourselves fending off the advances of binary gender as it winds its way through the basics of modern life: opening a bank account; applying for a passport; going to the bathroom,” 9–10. Russell also notes the ways in which the materiality of the body—the racialized, sexed, and gendered body—is interpellated into larger structures of society. In distinction to the present discourse, we can add the National Symbolic also produces the material bodies that must exist in static format, still along the racialized, sexed, and gendered lines. In distinction to ethnic heritage, the enforcement of national demonym—while caste through the lens of the quotidian—is, in fact, a violence done toward bodies. Russell, in similar fashion to the current project, is asking how we can “glitch” in order to create newer and greater abstractions of material bodies.

⁷⁸ See Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, writing in relation toward the law: “In Montgomery County, Maryland, in 1973, and eighth-grade earth science teacher named Acanfora was transferred to a nonteaching position by the Board of Education when they learned he was gay. When Acanfora spoke to news media, such as ‘60 Minutes’ and the Public Broadcasting System, about his situation, he was refused a new contract entirely. Acanfora sued. The federal district court that first heard his case supported the action and rationale of the Board of Education, holding that Acanfora’s recourse to the media had brought undue attention to himself and his sexuality, to a degree that would be deleterious to the educational process. The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals disagreed. They considered Acanfora’s public disclosures to be protected speech under the First Amendment. Although they overruled the lower court’s rationale, however, the appellate court affirmed its decision not to allow Acanfora to return to teaching. Indeed, they denied his standing to bring the suit in the first place, on the grounds that he had failed to note on his original employment application that he had been, in college, an officer of a student organization—a notation that would, as school officials admitted in court, have prevented his ever being hired. The rationale for keeping Acanfora out of his classroom was thus no longer that he had disclosed too much about his homosexuality, but quite the opposite, that he had not disclosed enough. The Supreme Court declined to entertain an appeal,” 69. We can see

make anyone's head spin; nonetheless, this identity incoherence is the lived reality of many. Simultaneously, those who have cultivated their privilege to remain unmarked by the National Symbolic, possessing the innate factors that warrant automatic life, are able to deepen the hegemon, ensuring ever greater incoherence. The irony, of course, for Berlant, is that even these people live within incoherence, though their existence does not present the incoherence as such. Even now, as we continue to live with COVID-19, pandemic response has fundamentally caused people to reconsider the incoherencies of neoliberalism.

As Berlant notes, "One does not find the materials of the patriotic public sphere theorizing citizenship in either beautiful or coherent ways. These materials frequently use the silliest, most banal and erratic logic imaginable to describe important things, like what constitutes intimate relations, political personhood, and national life."⁷⁹ Berlant is not saying the same thing as Stanley, yet their rhetoric hints at similar processes. National consciousness and citizen formation is not a straightforward, linear, nor even logical process; yet the National Symbolic often presents itself—*ex post facto*—as possessing a coherent, even idyllic, foundation.

The concern of critiquing democracy, following Stanley, is that a necessary symbolic collapse is required. However, such a collapse is often coded as desiring a totalitarian opposition—which only alludes to the reality that the current symbolic structure already exists

lineages of this thinking at work in the politics of jobs postings and equal opportunity. Universities alleged *want* these diverse people, going as far as noted they will not discriminate on the basis of identity. Nonetheless, the politics of job hiring often must align with an unspoken acceptable research agenda (here, there are sometimes tensions between departmental committees and higher-up university administration—that is, a department may offer one candidate for hire based upon what they need and what the candidate offers, but administration could reject that candidate on very different grounds). Despite calls for diversity, positions often demand straightening and whitening to ensure job stability: diversity and difference is both desired and reviled.

⁷⁹ Berlant, *The Queen of America*, 12.

extremely close to totalitarian manifestations, and this expresses a fear that “they will do to us what we have done to them.” Recent trends reveal that those most vulnerable within the present violence of US democracy are further disenfranchised from the political sphere through socio-judicial processes (educational bans, voting restrictions, school redlining, bathroom bills, etc.). Each of these tactics, while political, also hold the socio-judicial force of rendering people impacted by such harmful legislature as non-persons, thus allowing unspeakable violence to be enacted that will ultimately be disappeared because said violence was never really directed at a person. Put simple, these bodies have been framed outside the totality of the system. The phrase Stanley will use is near life and slow death.⁸⁰

Thus, we return to the concept of rupture. If institutional structures fundamentally remain the same, has any rupture occurred? Or are we settling simply for a *less bad* situation? Again, if we settle for this *less bad* situation, this situation is often *less bad* for only a small portion of the population. Recall the example of marriage equality. Yes, marriage equality makes a few situations *less bad* for some people, but in terms of rights enfranchisement there are still far too many people who are framed outside of the minimal expansion. As the critique of the white gay and lesbian movements which have attained said marriage equality, the conditions of trans, non-binary, bisexual, polyamorous, and more are disappeared.

Under such constraints, Stanley offers a meditation on being ungovernable, about strategically employing disappearance. Drawing connections to queer and trans youth, who are bullied and tormented by peers, educators, and caretakers, truancy often becomes a response. Familial dynamics can play a factor in whether a juvenile is turned over to the state and

⁸⁰ See Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence*, 37–39.

potentially juvenile jail. This is often coupled with queer and trans youth exploring sexually, as many cisgender heteronormative youth also do. However, this is framed as deviant sexuality, and when placed before the courts, one's sexuality can be displayed before the masses present, and every sexual detail is painstakingly outlined by the state's forced disclosure; recall Foucault's dark twins of confession and torture. Due to their failure to adhere to the unspoken juridical norm of cis-heterosexual exploration, they are effectively rendered "incorrigible". As Stanley notes, "Moralism reappears in the *neutral* space of the court to reconfirm the court's affinity to non-neutrality."⁸¹ As Spade warned in *Normal Life*, the juridical power of the courts presented as neutral only reveal new lines of normativity that cannot be transgressed. Any form of ungovernability—a refusal to show up in any location as we are supposed to or show up at all—exploits the cracks of heterosexualism, the socio-juridical, and Theology.

It is in these spaces where we enact a new reality and transgress norms; where our decision to behave differently becomes our being by those who oppress. "It was then, as it is now, much easier to banish the survivors and to produce us as the problem of our own making than it is to confront violence's grind."⁸² This existence will always be in antagonism with the "neutrality" of the law. If we return to Preciado, this is not real freedom: this is a "freedom" given to queer and trans people by those in power who do not know what freedom is. It is, in the most banal terms, tolerance of perversion.

⁸¹ Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence*, 119. Cf. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013).

⁸² Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence*, 120.

Conclusion: Theology Going Forward

What does this have to do with Theology? Put simple, this project is aiming toward anti-assimilationist theology that does not hold itself accountable to the prison-speech of traditional theological discourse. It rejects the necessity of a “proper” theological foundation before conducting a so-called queer theology, because theology has already been translated into the secular through socio-juridical processes. Put another way: *theology has already happened and is continuing to happen within queer and trans communities in flagrant disregard toward its acceptability under the auspices of academic and ecclesial forms of traditional theological discourse and governability—outside a framing akin to the National Symbolic*. Put another way, *developments in so-called queer theologies are not new, they are just starting to be articulated through language that has been deemed acceptable by gatekeepers*.

This dynamic leads to fierce struggle over the definition/s of “queer” and concepts of intelligibility in relation to hegemonic power. Said differently, if a queer theology has rendered itself fully intelligible to a hegemonic power is the resulting theology even queer anymore? Is something not lost when such a translation occurs that deprivileges the function of queer or a queer epistemic foundation? A secondary question arises: has the conjoined phrase “queer theology” already lost its serrated edge derived from radical politics as a response to homophobic and transphobic juridical *dispositifs*? Has “queer theology” (this project not being exempt) already assimilated to the neoliberal games of U.S. academia, seeking lucrative job offers by employing the shiny new buzz words of scholarship over being a steward to the history of radical queer politics (in contrast to gay and lesbian politics) in relation to Theology?⁸³ What moral and

⁸³ Cf. Heather Love, *Underdogs: Social Deviance and Queer Theory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 18–19.

ethical seriousness does an account of queerness—being associated with shame and the social and political detritus of the hegemonic structure—elicit when it encounters a Theology that foments such excruciating realities? This is not to say Theology is being entirely left behind, nor that in order for theological conversations to occur that gender and sexuality must be left behind. Both are necessary for this project.

Regarding Theology, within this chapter I have sought to complicate the role of a theological imagination in relation to juridical processes within the U.S.—both in terms of laws through rights expansion and in terms of ideological underpinnings of the National Symbolic. Through a simple exercise of holding the mirror up to one's actions, I also sought to interrogate a form of queer theology that dictates it can only be done through the discipline of Theology, either siloed off from other discourses or only employing other discourses to serve its own ends. This is accomplished through a reading of affect theory, which functions as a form of political attunement toward the socio-juridical processes that structure the misnamed nightmare of U.S. democracy along racialized, sexed, and gendered lines. I am progressing toward a more transdisciplinary approach, where I am arguing that a queer theological disposition that counters Theology will disrupt the various disciplines it employs, meaning that it will be unable to sit comfortably within any discipline. This will be the focus of the next chapter, as we explore “the theological” in the work of Mark Lewis Taylor. This chapter served as a second nodule of our rhizomatic cartography charting an affective assemblage that is a snapshot of the present moment for this work.

This chapter also began to flesh out some contours of the critiques present within queer theory toward institutional formations of Theology, religion, and the juridical foundations of the

U.S. fantasy. Present within this discourse are the kernels of radical politics, often misunderstood—by those who have much to maintain and/or gain from heteronormativity and its offspring homonormativity and homonationalism—as being unnecessarily critical of heterosexualism, often misunderstood as simply heterosexuals. These sentiments are only compounded when further intersectional analysis is employed. This radical politics comes with the additional critique that heterosexual (and white, able-bodied, and more) allyship is, oftentimes, a farce of neoliberal sentimentality. If what Stanley notes, that “racialized anti-trans/queer violence is not antagonistic to the democratic state; it is among its foundations”⁸⁴ holds true, then any politics that seeks to name and/or ameliorate this violence speaks too loudly, for it is shouting that everyone is not okay. This radical politics—the radical politics of this project—comes not from violent urges, but from the softest, most vulnerable parts of the bodies of intentionally exploited peoples: the desire for everyone to be okay.

⁸⁴ Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence*, 114.

CHAPTER THREE

SOCIAL THEOLOGY: ON WEIGHING-IN AND THE THEOLOGICAL

The previous chapter concerning the socio-juridical may seem to appear I have rather negative views regarding Theology. While I am certainly critical of some Theology, it is my hope it becomes apparent that the veins of Theology I am most critical of are the forms that reinforce an enclosure of a theological project aligned with the capitalist and ideological reproduction of the state that is aligned toward white heterosexual ends. This theological project is often construed as *the* theological project, set apart by its capitalization—Theology.

I borrow this methodological stance from Mark Lewis Taylor. Within *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* Taylor introduces readers to the “theological.”

Writes Taylor, succinctly in the preface:

Allow me to introduce the theological. It is not to be confused with Theology, which I render here in capital letters to mark its status as guild discipline, a credentialed profession in especially the Christian West that typically reflects on doctrines of a religious tradition and fosters an ethos of transcendence. The theological is a specter haunting Theology, is already unsettling, perhaps dissolving it, disseminating it anew among other languages and other disciplinary discourses—on the way to revealing something much more significant than Theology’s doctrinally structured ethos of transcendence. The theological strike a “neither/nor” approach to the binary of transcendence/immanence, but recasts both of these in the milieu of what Jean-Luc Nancy terms ‘transimmanence,’ a haunting and ghostly realm of seething presences. It is a milieu within which we must reckon with a new belonging of the theological and the political to one another.¹

There is much to tease out here, and this paragraph will provide a touchstone throughout the chapter. Additionally, it sheds lights on why, to this point in the project, “theology” has oscillated

¹ Taylor, *The Theological and Political*, xi–xii.

between the upper case and lower case, with the lower case pointing toward theology more attuned to the theological. Recall from the previous chapter the necessary partitioning of the word political in favor of juridical to reveal how mechanisms of law organize political possibility.² While Christian Theology certainly has its own history concerning its relationship to law (whether it be the Law of the Hebrew Bible or the emergence of secular black-letter law in contemporary societies), I assert that Taylor has revealed another instance of law: the very process of discipline.

Taylor sets this guild discipline apart through its capitalization (Theology) or refers to it as “guild theology.” To be clear, Taylor is not delusional. He does not assume that because he is writing about the theological that his project has escaped Theology. I consider this project to reside in a similar vein. While I may avoid certain disciplinary staples and play with what might be possible in a theological project, the content does not escape its contingency of an academic exercise (both in terms of research, but also in terms of credentials). In a nod toward what Taylor is trying to do in his own narrative, and what I am trying (and hopefully succeeded in some capacity) to do, is facilitate a form of undisciplined discipline. Per Eric A. Stanley, from the previous chapter, this is to conduct an academic exercise with some level of ungovernability—a refusal to show up or arrive in the way I am supposed to—in relation to guild discipline that hopefully allows us to arrive somewhere new. It might be helpful to conceive of the treatment of

² Even Taylor recognizes the need to present his own nuance regarding the word, *The Theological and the Political*: “The political is much more than what is usually referred to as politics. It refers to a certain mode of organizing the human practices that structure social interaction and the dynamics of collective action in history, but also, by extension, the interests, beliefs and ideologies of individual actors. The social practices of the political are not to be identified with governmental policies or state and party functions, typical understandings of ‘politics,’ but more importantly with our very ontological condition in all spheres of human living. Chantal Mouffe puts it well when she emphasizes that ‘the political cannot be restricted to a certain type of institution, or envisioned as constituting a specific sphere or level of society. It must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition,’” 5.

the theological through the language of critical reflexivity, for both Taylor's project and my own. The theological is a formalized term that seeks to capture poetic and artistic event that escapes the typical boundaries of guild Theology. Neither of us are seeking to pass our own work off as the theological; rather, we are trying to discern *with* the theological as a form of critical reflexivity. Such a posture may call into question foundational assumptions of hegemony, imperio-colonial imposition, and matters of power.

This chapter follows the heels of the previous chapter, though in different fashion. If chapter two charted a complex web of the socio-juridical and the critique of assimilationist theological projects, this chapter aims toward a simpler goal. Put simple, this chapter serves to position this project in ongoing conversations of continental philosophies of religion. While I do not give an account of the swerves and curves of the most recent decades of scholarship, I do position this work, theologically, to align with scholarly sentiments of Taylor. Additionally, this facilitates a critical distance from more traditionally framed theological projects, despite my intervention of more systematic topic in part II (Christology).

For the time being, then, I am not seeking to reinvent the wheel concerning where this project resides on a theological landscape. By employing Taylor, this situates this project more at the intersection of theories of gender and sexuality and continental philosophies of religion. As such, this chapter has a two-fold edge.

First, I will draw out the salient features of Taylor's work for this project. Put simple, *The Theological and the Political* continues the methodological springboard. By and large, while Taylor provides case studies for his assertion, the project is more concerned about the distinction between the theological and Theology. While sex, gender, and sexuality are noted, there is not

extended interventions regarding these topics. If Taylor's aim is establishing the framework, this project's trajectory is a constructive theological hermeneutic in this disposition. This chapter serves to articulate that I presuppose the mechanisms of weighing-in, meaning something theological is already occurring within the communities and thought of non-normative sexual bodies. Therefore, this project charts but one pathway of theology that can be derived from such weighing in.

Second, and in relation to above distinction of our projects, I will stitch concepts from Taylor back into the previous chapter. Based on the framings of the socio-juridical, trans and queer people weigh in an awful lot, and I contend these can be interpreted in a theological capacity. This also, by way of preview, reveals the bind of the project. While I am ascertaining the theological in queer and trans life, I must reiterate this project does reside in the disciplined realm of the academy, and while I may try to distance myself from guild Theology, I cannot escape the fact that I am simply composing this project into a different form of undisciplined discipline. Put another way, I am taking a moment of theological rupture and bringing it into guild Theology.

The Theological

Taylor opens the text contemplating our post-theological moment. Far from lamenting the end of Theology or simply throwing another *post*-[insert emerging flashy academic niche] into the mix, naming the present as a post-theological moment means “and opportunity for fresh thinking.”³ Importantly, Taylor is not presenting a political theology (i.e., “Christian theology that unfolds its

³ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 2.

meanings for political life”), but an “analysis of the politicality of Theology, which persists as ‘the theological.’”⁴ This leads to two necessary definitions: the political and the theological.

Taylor aims broadly concerning the political: “A mode of being affected by our socially and historically mediated ontological constitution.”⁵ Crucial to Taylor’s formulation is that this is an agonistic political, meaning there is tension in the various social formations of our ontological constitution. Therefore, the political is not simply politics, it becomes much broader than that. There is a particular openness in this definition of the political to allow space for socially (and ontologically) negated subjects to weigh in. I will note that my gloss of Taylor’s definition of the political is bare bones. The previous chapter, however, served to understand the political also through differing means. However, the second half of this chapter will reprise concepts from the previous chapter considering the theological.

The theological also needs to be defined. This entry will be quoted and expounded upon at length, as this definition is crucial to this project:

The theological is a discourse that discerns and critically reflects upon the motions of power in this agonistic dimension. More particularly, it traces and theorizes the ways that persons and groups rendered subordinate and vulnerable by agonistic politics and its systemic imposed social suffering nevertheless haunt, unsettle, and perhaps dissolve the structures of those systems. The theological traces and theorizes the way this haunting congeals into specters and forces both threatening and promising alternative patterns and lifeways. Again, the theological as a discourse should not be confused with Theology, the guild discipline long established in the theological institutions, seminaries, divinity schools, and, more controversially, in some Western university religion departments.⁶

⁴ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 3.

⁵ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 6.

⁶ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 9.

The theological is further broken down in three ways, to abate any objections that we could simply retain the word “Theology,” with renewed understanding (this sentiment is one I largely reject, opting instead to utilize both uppercase and lowercase relation to “theology”). Taylor’s framing is deliberately attuned to *nontheologians* (mainly, for his theoretical framing, political theorists), that, despite little to no training within the guild “delve into sources and meanings of Theology without sanctioning its traditional concerns as guild discipline.”⁷ Second, owed to the conversation of secularization, religious studies, and the “turn to religion” in continental philosophy, there is “no antitheological anti-space that might be counterpoised to the cultural history that has been shaped and stamped by Theology and its practices in the West.”⁸ Finally, pursuant to etymology, “it is not necessary for theologically interested discourse to make reference to a transcendent or to ‘a God,’ even less to require to belief and reverence for such.”⁹

Within this third point, the emphasis becomes the set-apartness of the capitalized “God” of Christian discourse, with the lowercase god(s) of everything. The etymological trail noted by Taylor alludes to the fact that we need not restrict Theology simply to the God of Christian explorations. Furthermore, with Christianity’s relationship to ancient Judaism, there is constant reference in the Hebrew Bible to other existing gods. Such a disposition has led scholars to note a continuum of monotheism, as it would be incorrect to simply state ancient forms of Judaism were *always* monotheistic; popular framings of this are monolatry, where one is worshipping one god exclusively, but not necessarily denying the existence of other gods. Or even henotheism,

⁷ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 10.

⁸ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 10–11.

⁹ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 11.

which can extend this exclusive worship to perhaps a tribal pantheon of gods. In all these cases, pursuant to the etymological foundation, these are all theology. We will return to this in a moment.

Some unpacking is in order. Pursuant to a foundation in Foucauldian power analysis, Taylor's argument revolving around the theological already presupposes his former definition of the political. The theological, therefore, is indelibly entangled with political agonism. Amidst this entanglement, and needing to choose a deliberate theoretical intervention, the theological privileges the epistemic loci of intentionally exploited peoples, what Taylor refers to as "person and groups rendered subordinate and vulnerable by agonistic politics." The theological traces the circulations of power possessed by these peoples, seeking to pinpoint flashes where they "weigh in" regarding the structures of negation imposed upon them. Taylor's transnational analysis turns toward carceral structures, so concepts of biopower and surveillance are in play. These instances of weighing in congeal in forms that are *both* threatening and promising. They threaten the oft-cited "powers-that-be" or the "just-so" nature of guild Theology, yet they simultaneously promise a way out, to recall language from the previous chapter. Importantly, the theological should not be confused with the disciplined formations of guild Theology.

As it concerns this project, which employs the philosophies of a nontheologian (Preciado foregrounded, with trans and queer theory, in general, backgrounded), the theological turns toward people who utter or perform theological assertions. I am reminded of my time during seminary when I was living in Minneapolis – St. Paul, MN, where sometimes religiosity seems baked into one's bones—it cannot be let go. Speaking to fellow patrons in queer bars was always a joy. When asked what I do I would kindly say I was in seminary, and the response was often

“Oh! I have *so* many thoughts about God.” Sometimes a larger conversation would ensue. The point of this anecdote is not to illustrate that I could have properly disciplined this fellow patron into guild Theology, or, even worse, sought to evangelize them. Rather, it illustrates that nontheologians have theological insights, often deeply entwined within their political contingencies.

In that regard, this first nuance of the theological also facilitates a transnational edge. Nontheologians are not a monolith, but offer discrete theological insights rooted in a particularity. As noted in the previous chapter, this project is firmly rooted within a US context, so the theological will look different here than in Europe, than in Latin America, than in Africa. Going further, theological insights are not a monolith even within the US: Minneapolis – St. Paul is not Chicago, New York is not Los Angeles, Miami is not Fargo, ND. While I eschew Taylor’s reference to political theorists, I still retain the factor regarding nontheologian actors within the theological. If anything, rather than that disciplinary niche of political theory, this project turns toward queer and trans theorists, who also often slough off multiple disciplinary silos, yet still conduct their work in an undisciplined discipline.

This progresses us to the second reason concerning the theological and not simply a retooling of Theology. Here, the connotation is on the inverse. We simply cannot rid ourselves of Theology, due to the way the West (which is Taylor’s and this project’s focus) has been shaped and stamped by Theology. Later in the text, Taylor will address Theology’s “Imperio-Colonial Sense”—which escapes the body of the project but is briefly glossed in a footnote¹⁰—to

¹⁰ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 49–62. By way of gloss, the features of Theology’s Imperio-Colonial Sense will be noted in brief. One, there is a sustaining precondition through the projection of a transcendent outside. Two, the imperio-colonial sense cultivates a transcendental ethos. Three, the impeio-colonial sense of Theology is resistant to hermeneutics that contextualize Theology’s language. Four, the imperio-colonial sense upholds the

overview, in a sense, a fundamental deficiency for the theological to be fully contained within Theology. Crucially, Taylor is not saying the theological and Theology are not mutually exclusive; rather, if Theology purported to do what it touts it can do, there would be no need for the theological; yet here we are. We should remember Dean Spade's call to "look more at what legal regimes do rather than what they say about what they do."¹¹

Notice how nuance one dovetails into nuance two. In this instance, the nontheologian is not necessarily an "anonymous theologian," but the recognition of Taylor's nuance: there is no antitheological anti-space that could render a subject outside the foreclosed enclosure of Theology. Put another way, and perhaps in bleaker terms, the nontheologian is the excluded inclusion of Theology.¹² This exclusion internal to the structure is the political agonism so described by Taylor. While some may interpret this as the incessant reappraisal of Theology's hegemony, for Taylor, this ensures that any critique of Theology (foregrounded) and the colonial West (backgrounded, though not absent), is not impoverished due to deliberately overlooking the impact of Theology concerning the larger colonial project of the West. Drawing upon Alain Badiou and Gayatri Spivak, among others, Taylor expresses these authors "find it necessary to engage, however tangentially and ambivalently, the offerings of Theology, this is because even

subject-position and subjectivities of Euro-American, predominantly white and male, discourse and thinking. Concerning this last factor, this is not to say these named bodies cannot *do* Theology; rather Taylor is gesturing toward a propensity to seemingly reinforce the same system time and time again. To be clear, this reinforcing can occur even if a theologian employs people understood to be subjugated, if it still reinforces the hegemony of the imperio-colonial sense.

¹¹ Dean Spade, *Normal Life*, 10.

¹² For an understanding concerning the role of exclusion and interaction with hegemonic systems, see Enrique Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, trans. Eduardo Mendieta, Camilo Pérez Bustillo, Yolanda Angulo, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013). In particular, see part II, "Critical Ethics, Antihegemonic Validity, and the Praxis of Liberation."

those who reject it must work in the ruins of its failure.”¹³ To drive home this distinction, Taylor is not asserting nontheologians must *do* Theology; rather nontheologians should not shy away from the theological simply due to etymological proximity to Theology.

This is why Taylor’s final nuance engages said etymology. Theology is nothing more than the discourse or words (*logos*) concerning “God” (*theos*). Here, I follow Taylor’s posture of placing God in scare quotes to note his ambivalence; to point toward the constructed enclosure of God to refer to *the* God (i.e., the Christian God). In full disclosure, I will adopt the common practice of guild Theology and capitalize God in reference to a Christian theological project. Though in reality, *theos* can refer to any notion of a god or gods. Additionally, Taylor even draws upon Plato to push beyond gods, and how the theological “may attach to something more inchoate, indeed perhaps unfocusable, too—here, the ‘moving and running,’ the ‘running nature’ of the world and its bodies.”¹⁴ This framing was often attributed to celestial bodies.

This etymological step is one more notch of distinction between the theological and Theology. Combining these three nuances, we are left wondering what the discourse of the theological looks like? Taylor notes that Theology is concerned with doctrinal loci (sin, Holy Spirit, Christ, etc.), and the theological eschews proper arrival to these categories—or these categories altogether—for they do not provide the meaningful symbolic matrix to understand the historicity of their contingency—despite their presence in Theology being a factor in said contingency.¹⁵ For example, the symbolic matrix of grace from Theology might articulate the

¹³ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 11.

¹⁴ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 12.

¹⁵ Part II of the project will complicate this distinction. What happens when the theological actually is intervening concerning doctrine that is usually reserved for the guild discipline?

unique sanctity of each person, yet it may simply sound like a bullshit response when one does not have food to eat, a place to sleep, or clothes for their body. Now, that does not mean that the Theology of grace is wrong, in a disciplinary sense; rather, there is a monumental inadequacy and distance concerning its disciplinary exercise and the realities of the world. And to emphasize, nuance two still is valid. This does not mean Theology is gone. Rather, it becomes part of the ruins of coloniality. There is not anti-theological anti-space, but there are ruins. We even see this gestured toward, with the example of grace, by Althaus-Reid in 2000.¹⁶

In all fairness, that was an example of what the theological does not speak toward, while still addressing other contingent realities. It was, to some extent, only a negation of Theology. For Taylor, as well as this project, the kernel of the theological is expressed in “the artful image, with symbolic force to convey the promise and threat of the spectral, the haunting by peoples and groups who are often rendered disposable, excluded, and oppressed.”¹⁷ Crucially, this artful image or symbolic force is *not* Theology. This is the theological. This distinction will be imperative for the project going forward.

Taylor will offer a minor, thought important, concession, through the framing of “faith and spirit that characterize movements and communities of struggle.”¹⁸ Per the claims of the previous chapter, I am suspect concerning a consideration of queer defined through the lens of

¹⁶ Grace, per Althaus-Reid, has become implicated within the colonial mechanisms of how grace has operated—as an exchange value with those people historically indigenous to Latin America. This conception of grace still troubles Theology, for it assumes the positionality that we humans are utterly deprived and need grace in order to pass from illicit to licit. Althaus-Reid will end the article by naming that it is time to leave apologetics behind. Marcella Althaus-Reid, “Grace and the Other: A Postcolonial Reflection on Ideology and Doctrinal Systems,” *Concilium: The Bright Side of Life* no. 4 (2000): 63-73.

¹⁷ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 12.

¹⁸ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 23.

acceptable assimilation into a hegemonic order of the National Symbolic. Likewise, with Theology, I am suspect of queer defined as coming from within a pre-existing community of faith. Considering matters of this contextuality, writes Althaus-Reid, “In a time when Third World theologians have made contextuality a hermeneutical key, it is sad to notice how contextuality has remained linked to the geographical more than the epistemological.”¹⁹ I am interested in queer and trans writing toward life outside of this paradigm of Theology. Thus, I lean upon this epistemological contextuality in relation to queer and trans theory.

Thus, it is important to note that Theology, per Taylor, is less associated with outright oppression (though its connection to colonial history is certainly very real), and more so the distinction that Theology is already abstracted from the lives of real people, it is a guild discipline, inaccessible to most people. Likewise, I note this distinction with queer and trans *theory*, which is ascertaining a second-level reflection concerning the constructedness of sex, gender, sexuality, race, and more. My goal, by the end of the chapter, is to assert that, since there is no anti-theological anti-space, this second-level reflection from queer and trans theory can function as the theological.

This, additionally, also frames Theology as a foil, in a more rhetorical literary sense. This does not seek to present a straw argument with my references to Theology, but to highlight how these are familiar mechanisms present within theological discourse. The foil of satanic whiteness in Theology in James Cone, the foil of patriarchy and sexism in Theology in feminist theologies, the foil of economic exploitation in Theology in Latin American liberation theologies, and the foil of transphobia and anti-queer positions in Theology in this work. As noted in the last chapter

¹⁹ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 25.

concerning affirming congregations, there have also been churches striving toward abolitionism, there have been churches that have sought sexual and gender equity, and there have been churches that have stood against the rapacious greeds of neoliberal capitalism.

Allow me to tease this out further with sociologist Kieran Healy. Since the 1980s, there has been a rise in the desire for “nuance” as it concerns theory (for his work he is most concerned with sociological theory, but there are implication for cultural theories). Theory dies with nuance, because theory is dependent upon the necessary abstraction of particulars (those above examples of congregations that “break the mold”) in order to say anything meaningful that allows research to happen. He will also note three “traps” that these nuance arguments fall into. One, the fine grain, which is the reintroduction of the particulars that were necessary to abstract away. It’s a trap that leads to bad theory because if you are trying to speak (or write) toward everything, you often end up saying nothing. This is where I would put the above examples. If you reintroduce all the congregations or scholars who are working toward abolition, then it may seem to suggest that perhaps Christianity doesn’t have a problem with racism. Two, is the conceptual framework, which is where I would place my framings of the “openness arguments,” where there is ability for the framework to continually expand. My criticisms of this position were noted in the previous chapter. And finally, there is the trap of the connoisseur, which, for Healy, is the example of those scholars at conferences that feel the need to inform you of their own research and how your research is less-than for having not taken into consideration this knowledge. Per Healy, “It is mostly a species of self-congratulatory symbolic violence.”²⁰ This is why Healy claims that we must “Fuck Nuance” in order to do good theory.

²⁰ Healy, “Fuck Nuance,” 120–121.

What does this mean for us here? Theology, then, is being used with the hidden “hegemonic” in front of it. It is the necessary abstraction that must occur for the guild discipline to stage its research. Importantly, and just as Taylor notes, this current project is not exempt from this reality. It, too, is a product from and for a guild. The concern for Taylor and myself will be, how willing are we to actually be affected by the theological? Per the previous chapter, and anticipating where this chapter will go, we must contend how this theological relates to the political.

The political describes the agonism implicit in the social formations of our ontological constitutions. I have spent less time describing the political *à la* Taylor, as the previous chapter served to address the political through a socio-juridical sense.²¹ Additionally, that chapter serves to present the mechanisms of weighing-in in relation to queer and trans studies. The socio-juridical, in that regard, can be placed into Taylor’s mechanisms of the political. Hence, I do not dwell in the specific philosophical thinkers employed by Taylor to arrive at a social site, as that has already been accomplished in the previous chapter.

The theological describes those realities that escape the boundaries of guild discipline Theology. Not wholly captured by gauche academic discourse as “the new horizon of research,” the theological is theorized as a powerful mechanism that allows those who do not have access to guild Theology to nonetheless weigh-in concerning Theology.

For Taylor, he is especially keen on scholars (political philosophers) outside the guild discipline, though not wholly outside the guild, in general. While the conversations regarding secularization theses is beyond the scope of this project, the usage of the theological also serves

²¹ Nonetheless, the socio-juridical is not antithetical to Taylor’s project, though Taylor does not frame it through this phrasal pairing. See his comments on Foucault, *The Theological and the Political*, 27–30.

to note how there are very few (if any) spaces in our postcolonial world that are *truly* anti-theological anti-space in reference to our positionalities that are historically contingent. Resultingly, it could be argued that completely jettisoning the theological is both academically disingenuous and potentially negligent if one is attempting to highlight intersectional analysis. However, this does not mean that one must entertain Theology *à la* Christianity in a systematized composure but can play upon the etymological openness of the word “theology.” Here, theology is in lowercase to note how this theology, pursuant to Taylor’s argument, should be understood as the theological in relation to guild Theology.

To do theology, in the register of the theological, may not look like Theology. This is the final emphasis on the discourse of theology. The theological subverts traditional categories and/or conceptions of Theology in favor of the lived experiences of people weighing-in. I also want to emphasize the “may” in “may not look like Theology.” Concerning Taylor’s project, and my own, there is a necessary recognition that the audience is not the general masses, or even the particular exploited communities we are part of. By its nature of being an academic text, it has already crossed into the guild; whether or not that subdiscipline of the guild is Theology is up for debate. I would say yes, but there will be, without a doubt, colleagues in guild Theology that will vehemently say that it is not. To be clear, this has not already foreclosed the entire argument. Following the theological, it perhaps is better to recognize these limitations at the very beginning, rooting this work in a form of contingent humility.

There are two more concepts crucial to Taylor’s overall argument, one which has proleptically appeared a few times and one that has not. The two concepts are weighing-in and transimmanence. While these concepts are crucial, they are not as methodologically weighted for

the present project as Taylor's conceptualization of the theological. Nonetheless, these concepts do simmer in the sauce, adding another depth of flavor to the argument without overpowering the main dish. It will only benefit the project to overview them briefly.

I will begin with weighing-in, as I have already mentioned it a few times. Indebted to Jean-Luc Nancy's text *Corpus*, Taylor utilizes the notion of weight and weighing-in to provide insight to both the theological and political. Taylor is firmly entrenched with the themes of spectrality and hauntings that were par for the academic course at the time, yet this theme of weighing-in still holds traction.

Taylor will use the language of motion, again, borrowing this framing from Nancy.²² Rather than escape the metaphor of weight, perhaps a better conception is simply weight as mass, which is where Taylor will pivot his framing. We can think of gravity. Objects have mass, and these masses exert a force on each other (exert even a motion). While Taylor notes Nancy's conceptualization of the weighted bodies side by side (what Taylor will exploit to help gain greater access to the agonistic political), the gravitational mass also alludes to the violence of the structuring antagonism. The metaphor breaks down, for celestial bodies are indifferent to the machinations of humanity. Nonetheless, humanity too has the capacity to embody indifference to gravitational subsumption. The future absorption of the inner planets of the solar system into the sun is simply the mechanisms of the sun; the future deaths of intentionally exploited peoples (more often than not in "developing" nations) is simply the mechanisms of globalization. Those seemingly unaffected by these mechanisms need not—so we're taught—interrogate these mechanisms.

²² Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 40–41.

Enter Taylor's intervention. Contra to Nancy's conceptualization of extension, which describes the interplay of intimacy and distancing of bodies,²³ Taylor will introduce "shifting weight." Shifting weight alludes to the precarity of the structure as a whole, which cannot simply be described as interplay of intimate and distant bodies. While Taylor admits shifting weight may introduce a sense of antagonism into Nancy's work,²⁴ this intervention aids this project quite well.

The precarity of the structure is a fine-tuned machine. Retrieving our celestial metaphor from earlier, many things needed to occur just right for life to be possible on earth, and it is contingent on a delicate system, which is quite cosmic in scale. For example, Jupiter acts as a cosmic shepherd, herding asteroids away from earth. While asteroids do, from time to time, still strike earth, there is no telling the frequency of such strikes would Jupiter suddenly disappear. For Taylor, this is when he draws upon Nancy's conception of concentration, when the extension of a person in their intimacy and distance is disrupted. When a shift occurs, the delicate balance is thrown off.

Taylor's conception of weight, therefore, appears to hold more theo-ethical value than moral value. While weighing-in may lead to moral claims, as a conceptual apparatus it does not provide any salient moral claim. What do I mean by this distinction? Following both this project's Foucauldian foundations, as well as Taylor's, moral claims and the general concept of morality is shaped through a determined valuation concerning the interrelating of bodies, whereas ethics is eschewed more as the critical discernment of how bodies are relating to bodies,

²³ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 40.

²⁴ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 41.

or, as a Foucault will also note, the self.²⁵ The concept of weight, therefore, provides a primary function of analyzing the interplay of mass, so to speak, which can lead to moral claims regarding the value claims functioning within these relationships.

Following the notion that the theological is a weighted discernment from outside the auspices of guild Theology, there is a necessary protocol to not dismiss such theological claims as wrong (trending toward shoring up a disappeared moral “rightness” in the name of disciplinary purity). Rather, the theo-ethical valence of weighing-in facilitates a deeper dimension of both theological and ethical reflection. As noted above, this can appear as a challenge to guild Theology, especially if such theo-ethical discernment locates moral bankruptcy within guild Theology.

Thus, for Taylor, weighing-in refers to the actions of the intentionally exploited when the concentration of weighted life pressed upon them irrupts. Taylor will often turn toward poetic and artistic expressions but does not foreclose what may be perceived as more mundane expressions of weighing-in (i.e., a bodily irruption can be interpreted as artful expression, but that is not the only way to interpret such action). Such weighing-in becomes a component of the content of the theological, beyond other philosophical rationale. I will highlight the force of the everyday, potentially quiet revolutions of queers in sexual relation by bringing Preciado into the conversation in part II. The dildo, the object in the sex lives of queers, becomes the quotidian object that is actively shaping an epistemic revolution. However, this project ends by interpreting a drag performance.

²⁵ I am also indebted to the work of Anat Matar, *The Poverty of Ethics*, trans. Matan Kaminer (London, UK: Verso, 2022).

Per Taylor, wounded bodies can stage somatic performance of the theological.²⁶ While I will be looking at a drag performance, when Taylor references somatic performance he means it more through a framing of Butler. While gender is performative (in the sense that it produces a series of effects), it is also performed: we enact gender, through our very bodies. Central to Butler's argument is how when we enact gender we are not enacting or drawing forth a performance of an identity that is internal to us (i.e., I am a being of a woman and thus I perform the being of a woman). More controversially, but also chiming with how Taylor understands the force of weighted bodies, we express the performative matrix (the scripts that say "be a man" or "be a woman," the policing of our bodily comportments that tell us "boys don't sit like that" or "you throw like a girl," the self-surveillance of "I can't have limp wrists" or "I should probably start wearing makeup," and so on) that constructs our being of a subject, and for Butler and much of queer theory the interrogation progresses to why gendered and sexed being is reduced to gender and sexual dimorphism. This subject is not the result of an interior essence that can be expressed. It is a social constructivist phenomenon.

Just as Butler's subtitle to *Gender Trouble* suggests, there is an ability to subvert these mechanisms, and this is where I see an affinity with the theological. Here, in Taylor's argument, he explores torture. While I do not want to minimize the suffering (some of it at the level of torture) that queer and trans people face, Taylor more earnestly writes toward survivors of brutal torture. The continuation of the body is the performance; it is the force of the theological. When

²⁶ See Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 199–202.

the body performs (speaks, writes, performs drag), this embodiment partakes in the force that “crucial to developing strength for survival and resistance.”²⁷

We can now transition to transimmanence, where Taylor, once again, employs Jean-Luc Nancy as the foundation. Transimmanence, fundamentally, is a scheme that bypasses the impasse of a binary relationship between transcendence and immanence. Therefore, transcendence is still in play, though perhaps referenced in a way we might not be used to.²⁸ Writes Taylor:

...we might highlight both transimmanence’s continuity with transcendence and its refusal. As to its continuity with transcendence, we can note the prefix *trans-* (from the Latin *trans*, “across”). In other words, transimmanence is a crossing, but not the kind of crossing at work in transcendence, the latter usually entailing a going above, or outside, the world(s) of society and earth. Nancy preserves from the ethos of transcendence the “crossing over” but without the ascendance (*scandere*, climb). The refusal can be understood as a refusal of the alchemy of ascendance and sovereignty at work in the agonistic political, especially when symbols of the transcendent in Theology support symbolic violence. The ascendance at work in symbolic capital of human practice is what is refused.²⁹

The complexity of transimmanence is already growing apparent. There is the first claim, transcendence and immanence are not a binary opposition. Second, in relation to the above quote, there is need to establish the correct conception of transcendence considering the initial claim. There is continuity, for there is retention of the *trans-* prefix, yet the refusal of the climb (*scandere*). Crucially, transimmanence is coming from the theological and *not* Theology.

Theology, as noted above, trends toward a form of transcendence that asserts the sovereignty of its own design, which Taylor does soften with the incorporation of “usually.” Nonetheless, Taylor’s project is privileging the theological, so we must interrogate the function

²⁷ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 202.

²⁸ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 125–128.

²⁹ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 128.

of ascendance. If we recall a previous example regarding Theology in relation to grace, there is ability to articulate how transcendence gives way to immanent living. Due to grace, our immanent life has inherent value. However, per Taylor, such articulation serves to prop up the sovereignty of Theology, without tangibly addressing the lived realities of people. The theological irruption then becomes cries of “what is grace when I do not have food,” “what is grace when my body is raped because I am female,” “what is grace when my family does not have shelter from the elements,” “what is grace when I am targeted by cops because I am Black and trans,” and so much more.

Notice, the theological does not negate Theology. As guild discipline with its own authority, Theology remains. The weighing-in has not simply caused a Theology of grace, staying with the present example, to disappear. What has occurred, however, is a powerful theo-ethical intervention with the theological. Such discernment is judging the ethical framing of Theology, which can lead to a value judgment of Theology. Again, such potential claims can be damning for Theology. “If this is what grace is, then grace is nothing.” Or perhaps a step further. “If this is what grace is, then grace is morally wrong as the material conditions of my life are not addressed by grace (i.e., my life is outside the framework of the Theology of grace).” The Theology may be disciplinarily correct, but the theological calls into question the theo-ethical and moral value of such Theology. Theology has climbed out of the mire of materially lived reality, thus calling into question the veracity of a transcendence that gives way to an immanence: it perhaps is nothing more than a powerplay for sovereignty.

Transimmanence carries within transitive functions of *trans-*. If we are to keep transcendence (in relation to securing the *trans-* while leaving behind the *scandere*),

transimmanence refers to a *crossing within*.³⁰ Taylor will draw upon Nancy's etymological play between "ek-sistant" and "ex-static," noting the focus of transimmanence is with ek-sisting.³¹ Writes Taylor, "Ek-sisting then is the continual transiting through the complexities of world, finding edges, but also new routes to edges, new dimensions of depth within, tracing the textures and layerings through which movement explores unceasingly."³² On the surface, this could appear to resonate with a continuity of transcendence, concerning these new edges and complexities could be understood by Theology. For Taylor, the big question remains: does this facilitate an absconding of Theology, resulting in the sovereign gesture where Theology seeks to ultimately climb out of this world?

Permutations of the Theological and Transimmanence

In 2021, *The Deconstruction of Sex* was published, a collaboration between Irving Goh and Jean-Luc Nancy, which would become Nancy's final publication before passing away. While the conversation between Goh and Nancy concerns sex, Nancy offers another way of thinking.

Nancy will note the following:

The word "chasm" troubles me. "Abyss" [*abyssse*] would work better but it is a word used [in French] in maritime contexts: it is the depth of the sea as immense and bottomless [*sans fond*] (*a-bussos* in Greek). However, this word has one advantage: it would permit us to think of an interminable descent into the oceanic element, which is to say, less into an empty pit [*gouffre vide*] than into an unfathomable but full, even overflowing, turbulent [*agitée*], vibrant [*vivant*], and inexhaustible depth. Chasm, on the contrary, has the connotation of a frightening void and a hopeless plunge [*chute désespérée*].³³

³⁰ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 129.

³¹ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 129–130.

³² Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 130.

³³ Nancy and Goh, *The Deconstruction of Sex*, 28. Brackets within quotation note translational excursus in original.

In transparency to Nancy and Goh's conversation, their rhetoric and conceptualization trends more toward psychoanalysis (also par for the course regarding sex, gender, and sexuality), yet Nancy's framing of abyssal chimes with Taylor's reading of Nancy's earlier material.

The abyssal depths, so to speak, could be interpreted as a contrast to *scandere*, and the flight to sovereignty. The abyss, rather than a mechanism of flight, is a mechanism of enveloping; it is the immanence of transimmanence. Leaning now on Nancy, in order to amplify Taylor, this immanence does *not* immediately translate into a knowable reality. The abyss is unfathomable, but full, yet we do not know the extent of its fullness. It is not static (ex-static), but ek-sistent. There is vibrancy and turbulence, all contained within the depths. Finally, we fall into this abyss, which is not a chasm, which Nancy likens more to an empty void. This abyss is marked by exploration of these depths; there is emphasis on new edges, new routes, and so on. Rather than simply writing off Taylor as another embodiment of a liberal progress narrative, I believe he is trying to capture a distinct stasis within Theology. The theological offers something different, which cannot be contained within Theology, according to the account of Taylor.

Beyond Nancy and Goh, but within gender studies, Jack Halberstam theorized trans* (note the asterisk) the following way:

I have selected the term "trans*" for this book [*Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*] precisely to open the term up to unfolding categories of being organized around but not confined to forms of gender variance. As we will see, the asterisk modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity. The asterisk holds off the certainty of diagnosis; it keeps at bay any sense of knowing in advance what the meaning of this or that gender variant form may be, and perhaps most importantly, it makes trans* people the authors of their own categorizations. As this book will show, trans* can be a name for expansive forms of difference, haptic relations to knowing, uncertain modes of being, and the disaggregation of identity politics predicates upon the separating out of many kinds of experience that actually blend together,

intersect, and mix. This terminology, trans*, stands at odds with the history of gender variance, which has been collapsed into concise definitions, sure medical pronouncements, and fierce exclusions.³⁴

For Halberstam, the theorization of trans* harkens back to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theorizations of queer.³⁵ This resonance also alludes to the blurry, yet capacious, edges of queer and trans*.³⁶ I want to continue to unpack this quote by way of connections.

One, it is possible to trace a vein from Nancy to Taylor (created by Taylor in *The Theological and the Political*) in relation to the capaciousness of ek-sisting, where we find new edges, or new routes, or new depths, or all the above. The vein can be retraced back to Nancy in conversation with Irving Goh in relation to sex. While the conversation is much more psychoanalytically inflected, Nancy's usage of "abyss" conceptualizes an enveloping unknown that necessitate movements *within* rather than movement that climbs out of. Furthermore, while this conceptualization concerns much more material matters (for the abyss is not an empty chasm), it still contends there are things that will be unknown, but that does not necessarily entail there is a necessity to climb out in order to know. Finally, trace this vein back to trans*, where there is a marked refusal to congeal into a stasis.

Two, as the quote alludes, this refusal is manifold: in relation to gender, to a perceived destination (this back to political goals from chapter two), a specific shape, or even a

³⁴ Jack Halberstam, *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 4–5.

³⁵ See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 8. This is the famous passage concerning "queer" as an open mesh of possibilities.

³⁶ See Jack Halberstam, "Nice Trannies," in *TSQ* 7, no. 3 (2020): 321–331. This article was penned after the publication of Andrea Long Chu's *Females* (London, UK: Verso, 2019), as well as her conversation with Emmett Harsin Drager "After Trans Studies," in *TSQ* 6, no. 1 (2019): 103–116. Responses to Chu, who is credited with launching a second wave of trans theory, comprised a third of this 2020 issue of *Transgender Studies Quarterly*.

configuration of desire. Crucially, trans* can also refuse in relation to knowledge. Halberstam has leaned upon Foucault's subjugated knowledges,³⁷ so it is no surprise a glimpse of unknowing appears in this conceptualization. To deepen this vein of thinking, Halberstam will traverse other discourses in relation to trans* throughout the text, both to reveal how as much as trans* can name itself, it is also named by others (often medico-juridical discourse). This is why trans* *can* appear at odds with histories of gender variance, for it is constantly escaping those boundaries. This will be integral to the project going forward, but we must continue with another resonance.

Three, by comparing Taylor and Halberstam, we can discern a reverberation of epistemological shift. For Halberstam, consider medico-juridical discourse as the language of the guild, with trans* being the lived realities that escape this enclosure. Instead of discrediting these lives, trans* operates as a mechanism in which people can weigh-in.³⁸ As explored with Taylor, this shift is deliberate *precisely because it is outside guild Theology*. While Taylor and Halberstam are both firmly entrenched in academia, their works nonetheless stride toward disciplinary and epistemic upheaval. To be fair, this disposition is far more par for the course concerning gender and sexuality studies, so this disposition may be more shocking for those more disciplined in Theology.

As explored with Taylor, the theological and guild Theology are not mutually exclusive. Just as Halberstam notes medical discourse was able to provide initial naming mechanisms, lived realities quickly outpaced these boundaries. Nonetheless, these realities can still impact the guild,

³⁷ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 11–15. Additionally, we can see how this also resonates in the more temporality inflected work in Jack Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

³⁸ See also Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (London, UK: Routledge, 2006): 221–235.

with a common example being the de-pathologization of transgender in the DSM-V (with gender dysphoria still on the books). This does not mean that de-pathologization *tout court* is wholly good (at this current time), precisely because a diagnosis of gender dysphoria allows people access to truly live-saving care. These realities were explored in the previous chapter. In this way, the theological takes its conceptualization of transimmanence to the very level of discourse, allowing for it to pass within guild Theology, without being erased by it, nor wholly subsumed by it.

This project is significantly indebted to Taylor, so another recapitulation is in order. Here, weighing-in refers to the mechanisms of the theological that escape guild Theology that nonetheless facilitate impressions alongside Theology. Taylor, in his conceptualization, is primarily indebted to political theory (both situated within and outside the turn to religion within continental thought). Secondarily, and where the rubber hits the road more, Taylor turns to artistic expressions of lived realities. We will explore these artistic expressions more below, but artistic expressions in relation to christotechtonics will also be articulated in part II.

Second, transimmanence conceives of movement within. Transimmanence eschews a common interpretation and usage of transcendence that can be distilled to a movement that climbs outside itself, a reiteration of sovereignty that Taylor is trying to sidestep. Rather, transimmanence as movement within, more so conceptualizes the still-hidden realities of our worlds. Rather than uncovering new edges and new routes leading to sovereignty, transimmanence opens into the political agonism. Here, I have also already linked the transitivity Taylor seeks with transimmanence with Halberstam's conceptualization of trans* (with the asterisk).

This long detour through such a specific thinker is necessary for this project.

Methodologically, Taylor provides the foundation of how theology (lowercase intentional) is understood throughout this project. While *The Theological and the Political* arguably veers toward continental philosophies of religion, I lean upon Taylor's training as a theologian. Pursuant to the argument set out in chapter one, there is something amiss with Theology if we are having to constantly be incorporating marginalized groups. I am reminded of comedic coming-of-age stories where a young teen is learned to drive a manual car. The car continually falling out of gear just when the teen enters an intersection. Latin American Liberation Theologies, stall; Feminist Theologies, stall; Black Liberation Theologies, stall; Womanist Theologies, stall; Queer Theologies, stall; Disability Theologies, stall; Eco-Theologies, stall; and so on. The theological, *à la* Taylor, demands an interrogation of guild Theology.

Pursuant to Taylor's claims, where he constructs a small archive of historical occurrences, the theological is not something new. The theological is something that has already been active. The theological can be glimpsed in academic discourse, but also in lived reality of ecclesial communities. Consider Mary Daly's famous exodus from Harvard Memorial Chapel in 1971.³⁹ While Daly veered more toward separatist lesbian theology, Daly's sermon (where she renounced the pulpit) occurred simultaneously with academic unrest at Harvard Divinity School. The concern was around the usage of "he" in relation to God (and also how "he" was still be utilized as the collective general, akin to how "man" functions within "mankind"). Dissent from students and Daly circulate in a theological fashion.

³⁹ See Mary Daly, "The Women's Movement: An Exodus Community," *Religious Education* 67 (Sept/Oct 1972): 327–33.

I bring forward this example for a couple of reasons. Taylor's argument is definitely still entrenched within academic discourse and communities. This student dissent and Daly are already circulating within a different community and access to knowledges outside the guild, outside the expertise of guild Theology. Nonetheless, such interventions resulted in change. It was in the Divinity School where the first Woman's Studies program was established at the institution. But the theological, Per Taylor's assertions, has movement outside these academic spaces.

Consider ecclesial communities. Here, I want to construe this to encompass mainline and non-mainline denominations. In this regard, a different chaffing occurs, but for the sake of the argument, I will encompass this with the usual culture/church divide. Far from the talking points of the so-called "culture wars," the very contextual theologies that struggle to be considered "real" Theology reappear, though through cultural inflection. The theological then appears in a different way: people assessing church and communities along the lines of women's ordination, inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people, how Black people are present and treated within predominantly white denominations, handling and coverup of sexual abuses, stance on abortion and birth control, and more.

As we will explore more in part II, there is recourse to the ethical comportment of Jesus in relation to marginalized and exploited bodies. The arguments usually trod along the following lines: "If Jesus said or did [X] in relation to [Y] population(s), why does [Z church or denomination] hold [X¹ stance] about [Y]?" The theological arises, again, through a theo-ethical assessment concerning guild Theology, in this case expressed through lived faith communities. While this project is not as concerned with ecclesial theologies, they nonetheless still operate in

the world. The above theological sentiment need not be articulated by someone trying to find a community but can be expressed by people outside Christianity. This is our concern going forward.

Social Theology

The second part of this chapter takes our explorations of Taylor and infuses the previous chapter into its conceptualization. While there may have been moments of critique concerning Theology in the previous chapter, I want to meet this critique with Taylor. This is where the conversation will begin. This conversation will address a large terminological difference, one between antagonism and agonism. I will then transition to resonances this project may have with Theology, and why I have chosen to not traverse these routes. This movement will yield a more social theology, with “theology” intentionally lowercase. The chapter will close with reflection on the framing of this section: social theology.

In the previous section, I spent time overviewing the outside nature of the theological in relation to guild Theology, as well as touching on the expansiveness of the word theology. Close readers will note that I have left out one of the reasons Taylor has preserved the word “theological.” This was the second reason noted by Taylor, “There is no antitheological anti-space that might be counterpoised to the cultural history that has been shaped and stamped by Theology and its practices in the West.”⁴⁰ What does this mean for our purposes here and for the larger project? Of greatest importance, the limitations of this project are confined to the amorphous categorization of the West. While the tendrils of the West reach far, a further limitation of the US context, informed by a US-Euro philosophical and theological discourse

⁴⁰ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 10–11.

demarcates this project further. Pursuant to trends within the academy, queer theory finds comfort within this archive and limitation. While fully acknowledging the explosion of queerness outside of the West, there is always need to interrogate how language of sex, gender, and sexuality often demand articulation through a Western lens.⁴¹

I employ Taylor to claim queer and trans studies misses out on vital conversations if and/or when it presents itself as offering an anti-theological anti-space in relation to Theology, more specifically, the Christian religion. The violences enacted by Christianity toward non-normative people (sex, gender, race, ability, etc.) could fill volumes, so it is understandable why such content would be ignored. But I am concerned by what is occurring when we deliberately ignore these conversations.

A caveat: I am *not* saying all queer and trans studies must attend to religion and Theology (or theology). All research, even inter- and transdisciplinary research, must limit its focus to make a claim. Nonetheless, writing off Theology (and, to some extent, religious studies) as having no bearing on analysis is negligent. It calls into question the very focus of intersectional analysis.

Following Taylor, therefore, if Theology has been deliberately ignored an ironic gesture has occurred. Pursuant to Taylor's claim we must question if there is a move to facilitate some

⁴¹ It is beyond the scope of this project to overview the specific terminology of sex, gender, and sexuality across the world. Nonetheless, I will provide a few sources. For a more general approach, see Wilcox, *Queer Religiosities*, 24. When introducing communities from around the world, Wilcox will defer to the language employed by the people under study. Conflating these realities under words like queer and transgender only serve to repeat colonial paradigms. For more extended studies on specific communities see Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, *Ezili's Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018) in the intersection of Black studies and religious studies. See Martin F. Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003) for research inflected by cultural anthropology. In all three cases, take note how texts geared toward U.S. audiences signal through their monograph titles resonances to Western and U.S. categorizations of sex, gender, and sexuality.

sense of an anti-theological anti-space. Peter Coviello's *Make Yourself Gods: Mormons and the Unfinished Business of American Secularism* may serve as an example. Within this text, Coviello will commence with an axiomatic introduction like Sedgwick, but note that recourse to secularism is both a biopolitical and normative move,⁴² which, in my opinion continues to call into question a functional position of many queer and trans theories: antinormativity (more on this below).⁴³ A secondary question arises. Is there a hidden sense that queer and trans studies are seeking to transcend Theology and/or religious studies? It is ironic, as queer seeks to shun sovereignty yet this mechanism only serves to assert its own form of inverted power dynamics. Additionally, this also reveals a deliberate misreading of Foucault's genealogical projects that work with transitions from religious (particularly Christianity) to secular.⁴⁴ To reassert Taylor, there is no anti-theological anti-space.

Of course, this project is heavily biased toward Theology, the theological, and religious studies in general because it is my primary training. For me, this creates a certain kind of baggage I travel with when I enter into gender and sexuality studies. There is emphasis on Foucault, Lacan, and even Freud, yet all their interests with religion (mostly Christianity, though Foucault partook in forms of Orientalism to varying degrees) are erased or ignored. I name

⁴² See Peter Coviello, *Make Yourself Gods: Mormons and the Unfinished Business of American Secularism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 23–47.

⁴³ While Coviello's work is more, this is not the first time antinormativity has been treated. See Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson, eds., *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies, Queer Theory without Antinormativity* 26, no. 1 (May 2015).

⁴⁴ We could also add to this list historically, Carl Schmitt. However, continental philosophy and the turn to religion has reinvigorated this genealogical fever, so to speak. From Jean-Luc Nancy to Giorgio Agamben or from Alain Badiou to Slavoj Žižek. Furthermore, it is beyond the scope of this project to explore the entirety of the secularization thesis, but I can say that my own sentiments fall in line with Talal Asad, Gil Anidjar, Anne Pellegrini, and Janet R. Jakobsen.

Foucault specifically as Christianity (Foucault himself being raised Catholic) often formed a major touchstone in his theories.

Another example is the medicalization of naming regarding homosexuality (and heterosexuality) in 1869. While a certain form of colonial thought was being created, we have bypassed the late 15th century and 16th century (which was a foundational period of study for Foucault as well) and colonial expansion that occurred both in religion (Christian expansion) and the state (national expansion). Latin American decolonial thinkers, in particular, have done immense work to articulate the 16th century as a dense transfer point concerning the construction of race (and the rise of the African enslavement industry), sex, and gender, which would soon become enveloped in the newfangled economic theory of capitalism.⁴⁵ While 1869 has proven to be its own dense transfer point, the matter of normative constructions of race, sex, and gender began much earlier.

This is an archival discrepancy, to be sure. Nonetheless, treating Theology within gender and sexuality studies would facilitate an abyssal expansion. What new borders of thinking reside in the depths? What new routes to insight are awaiting us? In this regard, here we experience another transitory drift into another discipline in this transdisciplinary methodological movement and the affective matrix of queer and trans life. This transition, for me, points to a reality that *some* queer and trans people are Christian! I do not consider this statement to function as a fine grain nuance trap seeking to account for every particularity, for I am not as concerned with *how* these queers are Christian, only that there are some queers that identify as Christian. For lack of

⁴⁵ See, among others, Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–580; María Lugones, "Heterosexuality and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 186–209; and even Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000), and *The Queer God*.

better words, there are some queer and trans people that do not interpret Christianity (in some cases even any whiff of religion) to be taboo once they come to understand their own gender, sex, and sexuality.

I also hold a critical disposition that is at odds with some theories of gender and sexuality, especially within queer and trans theories. This difference resides in the posture of antinormativity. Before teasing out this position more for this project, I will note I appreciate Janet R. Jakobsen's articulation of "critique of normativity" over anti-normativity. This project, specifically, will traverse *counter*-normativity. Historically, in queer scholarship, the sentiment of antinormativity carries with it the rigid anti-positions one would expect, and some of which are present within this project through modes of critical resistance (my perspectives concerning openness arguments, the "securities" of naturalization into the National Symbolic, the sense that Theology is what will help us, and more). However, Preciado will note a counter-sexuality, which, if conducted properly (in a counter normative way) would lead to the dissolution of sexuality, sex, and gender as we know it. And, why I find Preciado intriguing, he presents a political vision of what a countersexual society should be. For Preciado, politicality is where we must draw the line, politicality is where we can reclaim our agency and work toward transformational goals. But I am getting ahead of myself. We will return to this in part II.

For now, I will trace a concept of counternormativity/antinormativity I find in Foucault.

Writes Foucault:

There are movements whose objective is a different form of conduct, that is to say: wanting to be conducted differently, by other leaders (*conducteurs*) and other shepherds, towards other objectives and forms of salvation, and through other procedures and methods. They are movements that also seek, possibly at any rate,

to escape direction by others and to define the way for each to conduct himself [sic].⁴⁶

In my reading, here we glimpse two avenues; I will call them counter-conduct and anti-conduct. The first sentence expresses a counter-conduct, a movement to be directly differently, in new ways, by new leaders, toward new objectives or salvations. This is a strong call, and it is crucial that emphasize that counter-conduct *does* require a relationship to the hegemonic expression of conduct.

The second sentence expresses more what I would call anti-conduct. Here, one escapes a hegemonic conduct, opening the way to conduct themselves to their own accord. Recall from chapter one, during this time Foucault would begin rethinking *The History of Sexuality*, so we should not be surprised *The Care of the Self* would arrive within the series publication. It should also be noted that the framing of conduct and counter-conduct also occurs in relationship to the Christian pastorate.

Frustratingly, or perhaps appropriately, I am not concerned with determining which is better or which is worse. Rather, I wish to express that queer theory has been enamored with a more anti-conduct posture for quite some time (captured under the phrase antinormativity), so much so that people would also term a school of thought within queer theory as antisocial⁴⁷ (though this school of thought is much more indebted to Lacanian psychoanalysis). As it concerns the theorization of queer, associated alongside concepts like abnormality, non-docility,

⁴⁶ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 194–195.

⁴⁷ See Robert L. Caserio, Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and Tim Dean, “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory,” *PMLA* 121, no. 3 (2006): 819–828. In general, the panel is also indebted to the work of Leo Bersani, particularly *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

or even *jouissance*, the antinormative posture goes a long way to understand queerness' relationship to normality and docility of more institutionalized and hegemonic framings of conduct. To really put it in Foucauldian terms, queerness is at odds and/or escapes governmentality and biopolitics.

As the last chapter sought to articulate, I wanted to retrieve the language of the juridical (without making this project all about sovereignty) that governmentality sought to replace and well as the sociological component of biopolitics. An antinormative project seeks to break out of these boundaries, and while rigorous theory has provided us some excellent tools for thinking, we are still left with very real political realities with very little blueprint for political action. We will return to this in a moment, but first I want to note why I am enamored by counternormativity in relation to the previous chapter. We will explore more of Preciado's counter-conduct in part II.

Recall from the previous chapter Preciado's articulation of seeking a way out.⁴⁸ This "way out," on the surface, may appear to be antinormative (through a typical queer theory perspective), yet when understood in the context of the whole speech, Preciado's articulations hold much more counter-normative sentiments. Psychoanalysis, for Preciado (and others⁴⁹), possesses the tools to reimagine (or resignify) the world, yet it is too caught up in maintaining a sexual binary position. Psychoanalysis can be a powerful ally in larger projects and sexual and

⁴⁸ Preciado, *Can The Monster Speak?*, 27–33; Preciado, *Je suis un monstre qui vous parle*, 28–37.

⁴⁹ Why scholars, like Edelman, certainly broach psychoanalysis, I am suggesting a more apt comparison here be with Mari Ruti, who, like Preciado in *Can The Monster Speak?*, also looks to psychoanalysis as having clinical value. In general, see Ruti, *The Ethics of Opting Out*. Here, Ruti will engage major figures who she finds integral to psychoanalysis and queer theory, like Edelman, Butler, Žižek, and, of course, Lacan. See also Ruti, *The Singularity of Being*. Here, Ruti is less concerned with queerness, yet she remains adamant concerning the practical and/or clinical ability for us to use psychoanalysis to gain the tools of self-transformation as well as taking control of meaning-making. This is in contrast to the vast usage of queer theory that employs psychoanalysis for the ends of literary criticism or taking down pathologization.

gender revolutions. In this way, Preciado is urging a more counter-conduct aim in his speech; this would chime more with Jakobsen's framing of a critique of normativity rather than simply antinormativity.⁵⁰ Therefore, the "way out" Preciado speaks of, must be inflected within the register of psychoanalysis—it is acting in accord with the truth of one's desire and not ceding on that desire. This does not lead to political transcendence, but to political agonism.

Any close reader of this text would have immediately noted I spent a significant amount of ink writing toward the anti-trans/queer structuring antagonism, yet this chapter transitioned to language of agonism. What is going on here? Rather than an incoherency of argumentation, there is a relationship between structuring antagonism and agonism. It perhaps is easier to see this relationship at play through fictionalized examples (though to be clear, these are realities many trans people face on a day-to-day basis).

Recall the examples of administrative violence from the previous chapter (changing sex designation on one's driver's license, accessing hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for medical care, deliberate misgendering and deadnaming, and many more). While there is some elision between transphobia, transmisia, and trans antagonism, I want to highlight the socio-juridical mechanism that antagonize transgender and queer people. Framed within the socio-juridical, trans antagonism takes the shape of policing that demands compulsory cis-ness; a concept we will explore more in chapter six.

A salient example may be gender affirming care. This phrase (gender affirming care) can cover a larger swath of care. Most often this has been articulated in terms of medical care. For this example, let us consider HRT. Trans antagonism can speak toward the necessity of medical

⁵⁰ These mechanisms will be addressed through recent theorizations of metamodernism in part II. While theory has definitely facilitated deconstruction, this does not mean we cannot assert something new.

clearance to begin HRT, and usually various additional hurdles that call into question the gender of the person seeking care. This, of course, is if the patient is granted the ability to access HRT. As noted in the previous chapter, patients who may be cisgender can access this same medical care when it is being prescribed to reinforce the cisness of the patient.

The dynamics that are occurring is a structuring antagonism; the policing of bodies that are living outside compulsory cisness. Recall from the previous chapter my nuance regarding the political (i.e., framing the mechanisms through the socio-juridical rather than the socio-political). The structuring antagonism functions in relation to the socio-juridical. This does not mean we are not connected to the political. Per Taylor, the political is “a mode of being affected by our socially and historically mediated ontological constitution.”⁵¹ Concerning an antinormative disciplinary posture in relation to the political, an apolitical or antipolitical stance is often par for the course. The disruption of queer and trans ruptures the political (as well as other mechanism connected to the political, like the nuclear family, capitalism, race, and so on), as such. While this may be true in a theoretical capacity, this simply does not erase the political as a mode of life.

Counter-conduct better expresses the realities of the political expressed through politics. We are not simply plopped down into a stable politics (though hegemonic structuring tries to make it appear just so) but must strive toward a critical political disposition. In contrast to liberal progress narratives—founded upon the ever-progressive inclusion of people in the stable structure—I would note a critical political disposition more in line with the liberation ethics of

⁵¹ Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 6.

Enrique Dussel.⁵² While change does occur, the structure has been altered. There is a marked impossibility of simply bringing everyone into the liberal progress of something like rights expansion. Rather, we must inhabit a critical political disposition that questions the parameters around which rights are determined.

To be fair, the line between theory and politics is often blurry within queer studies. Especially within theory, there is a hesitancy to move beyond an initial negation. The relationship to negativity will be parsed in greater in part II, but for the time being it should suffice that this project does continue in trajectories established by feminist theologians, particularly the foundational work of Elizabeth Johnson.

Within *She Who Is*, Johnson takes the readers along a theological journey that, for some, introduces people to negativity and deconstruction. Far from a unique feature of queer and trans studies, deconstruction had its own vibrancy within feminist theory prior to its usage in queer and trans studies (in fact, many people often forget that Judith Butler's text was written in relation to feminist theory and not *for* queer theory). Johnson, attuned to political realities, articulates the necessary steps for her feminist theological project. Of importance to us here is her second step: "Negatives alone do not nourish."⁵³

What does this mean for queer and trans studies in relation to a structuring antagonism? For Johnson, deconstruction does not serve to erase the political viability of women. Rather, deconstruction opens the doorway to discern and locate the presences of the marginalized and exploited in the ruins of deconstruction. Hence, the negation alone does not nourish. There is

⁵² See part II of Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation*.

⁵³ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, 10th anniversary ed (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2002), 29.

work that must be conducted to find glimpses throughout where the marginalized have been present. Finally, for Johnson, the task then becomes reconstruction.

Importantly, this is not antithetical to all queer postures. While José Esteban Muñoz articulates queerness as a horizon with *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, he importantly constructs an archive of past queer ephemera. I turn to Muñoz because as it concerns the reconstruction phase of Johnson, queerness articulates that reconstruction is never complete. Here we are operating along the lines of transimmanence and abyssal movement. Muñoz, playing upon the inability to reach utopia, contests a movement, nonetheless, toward utopia. Without acceding to a liberal progress narrative, which plays upon juridical incorporation as noted in the previous chapter, this utopia plays upon a political hope.

This back and forth between political movement and apolitical or antipolitical shattering of the political may lead some to think that queer and trans studies is undecided on what it wants. But it is important to note that most queer and trans scholars oscillate across these positions. Nonetheless, when texts are penned, scholars will define their position in that present work. Per Muñoz' disposition regarding utopia: "The antiutopian critic of today has a well-worn chest of poststructuralism pieties at her or his [sic] disposal to shut down lines of thought that delineate the concept of critical utopianism. Social theory that invokes the concept of utopia has always been vulnerable to charges of naiveté, impracticality, or lack of rigor."⁵⁴ Why is this important for Muñoz?

In relation to the tendencies of unrelenting negativity, there is equal ability to invoke the charge of naiveté, impracticality, or lack of rigor; for who can live like that? While a

⁵⁴ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 10–11. Of note, Muñoz will also rest some of his conceptual framing in Jean-Luc Nancy.

philosophical position may warrant a rigor of the mind concerning the importance to think and theorize these spaces (of which I agree), Muñoz is calling attention to the lack of importance reserved for cruising utopia. Just as we need the radical negativists, we need the critical utopians. This edge of scholarship is the agonistic political that Taylor writes toward. This utopianism is in the struggle in relation to our socially and historically messy past, the quagmire of the present, and movement toward the futures which is all mediated by our ontological constitution.

While the socio-juridical produces a structuring antagonism, it does not (or we must hope it does not) produce absolute political foreclosure. The key word I want to stress here is absolute. The structuring antagonism is a real force that impresses upon people; from medical care to receiving one's driving license. But we can also see these mechanisms in the very structures that produce knowledge. One only needs to walk the halls of any academic conference for a few moments to locate a queer and trans contingent. The horror stories of some young scholars are heartbreaking and some downright abusive. There are stories of queer and trans students being told to leave queer and trans scholarship out of their work; mentors deliberately sabotaging projects because queer and trans students are not treating the discipline (in this case Theology and/or religious studies) as the mentor would want the discipline treated; mentors deliberately limiting scholarly explorations due to their limited knowledge of the transdisciplinary intersection.⁵⁵ This is another example of the structuring antagonism. It is the policing of not only bodies, but also knowledge that demands adherence to cis-normativity—in these examples it often operates under the guise of becoming properly academically disciplined.

⁵⁵ And it should be clear that queer and trans students talk. In this case, the medium of gossip functions as a survival tool for queer and trans people in the academy.

This is why Mark Lewis Taylor's conceptualization of the theological is so useful as a methodological starting point. It deliberately places a form of expertise outside the discipline of guild Theology as having value, if we want to use such a commodifying word. Put another way, despite not being part of guild Theology, it is capable of theological thought. To that end, it is not wholly necessary to continue to mine the archive within guild Theology to position this work. Here, it is also helpful to remember Linn Marie Tonstad's assessment regarding the quest for historical origins. If queerness can anachronistically be infused into Theology (usually resulting in the phrase "it's always been queer") then how is it precisely queer?⁵⁶ The arguments usually boil down identity politics-based inclusion or assimilationist Theology.

The theological opens an avenue to new horizons for queer and trans conversation with guild Theology. Additionally, the creates a rupture with needing to meet the needs of the guild discipline. So, it perhaps is worthwhile to note some of the avenues I am not taking in this project.

Roads Not Taken

First, there is apophatic theology, oftentimes referred to as negative theology. Within queer theologies, the apophatic often becomes the mode of theology, but it does often function in fun ways. We can, of course, look the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid. We can look at *The Queer God*, where I see apophatic thought working in the direction of excess. Rather than an apophatic thought that rejects categories of omnipotent or omnipresent to ascertain mystery, Althaus-Reid,

⁵⁶ Tonstad, "The Limits of Inclusion." Tonstad, further, is enjoining the vast majority of scholars of queer and trans theory who are 19th and 20th century scholars. For the mis/usage of "queer," see Peter Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013). See also, though not necessarily using the rhetoric of "queer," David M. Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004). This argument follows a genealogical archive, and reveals the multivalent and incoherent definitions that comprise "homosexual," and we should ask ourselves what are we asking "queer" to do when we traffick it across history.

instead, throws omnisexual into the mix.⁵⁷ If God is going to be all-something, we might as well go all in. The addition actually pushes into the mechanisms that breakdown divinity into theological mystery. We could also look at Linn Marie Tonstad's *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude*. Here, Tonstad is drawing from concepts of non-reproductive frameworks in her reassessment of doctrine. Granted, I don't consider her to go *completely* down the apophatic route. I would also contend you see apophatic thought occurring in James Alison. One of my favorite pieces is his double exegesis of the Gerasene Demoniac. Here, I will contend the apophatic gesture is in the unknown conclusion. I find affinity with this text too, as it presents a collapse of a binary.

As noted in my introduction, I do not find the hunt for binaries to engender a particularly worthwhile queer task, though it certainly has its place. Nonetheless, I think James Alison is doing something. Within his double exegesis he contends identities are challenged. Both the demoniac's (who is he without the demons) and the Gerasenes (who are they without the demoniac). Upon the demoniac's healing, the Gerasenes are frightened and the demoniac wishes to follow Jesus, but Jesus refuses. The demoniac returns to the city to spread this news. Here is the mystery of divine operations though: perhaps reading Alison's more pastoral scholarship against the grain, has inclusion occurred? I would contend no. There is no mention that the Gerasenes welcome the healed demoniac, nor was this demoniac able to follow Jesus. It appears the demoniac has some new sense of identity in Jesus, but there is no definitive explanation of a potential community that was constructed. The negative flairs, here, are by divine action, yet they become embodied in humanity, and arguably have facilitated the space *where* a new

⁵⁷ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 52–53.

community can be discerned.⁵⁸ Depending on the author, rooting this negative theology within thinkers of the tradition varies widely. Nonetheless, contemporary apophatic Theology, pursuant to Taylor's argument, reinforces guild Theology.⁵⁹

That is not to say that there are not flares of apophatic thought. Also pursuant to Taylor's argument that there is not anti-theological anti-space, conceptually—and I use this word broadly—there may be many moments where the theological, politically attuned to the socio-juridical, will trend toward gestures that appear apophatic. The concern for Taylor, and this project, is if we steamroll over the epistemic location of these people outside the guild discipline, we have destroyed any theological expression in favor of reinforcing the language and *modus operandi* of the guild. Therefore, rather than framing this project to be oppositional to guild framings, it perhaps is better to discern the tension such a project brings to the fore in relation to more defined guild methods.

Additionally, at its most base and commodified level, contemporary texts—especially ones that might be considered queer theology—are written for, and in the context of, jobs. Perhaps in an overly cynical way, capitalism has foreclosed the possibility of contemporary apophatic theology. This project is not exempt. Written from within the halls of academia—for jobs, promotions, speaking engagements, and more—there is a vast disconnect when we consider

⁵⁸ See James Alison, *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2001), 125–143.

⁵⁹ Cf. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 191–226. The detail in Taylor's argument is not so much that apophatic theology is not theology; rather, Taylor is inviting us toward disciplinary reflexivity. It is the discipline, the guild, that made apophatic theology, well, apophatic theology. Per a Foucauldian archive, such theology escaped the boundaries of theology (here we should think more so in ecclesial models) and it was an ecclesial structure that reabsorbed such counter-forms-of-life/faith into the tradition. Yet, and this is both Foucault and Taylor's points, such expressions of faith were often *excluded* from structuring logics. Thus, it is the disciplining of the guild that render apophatic theology, in contemporary times, a guild endeavor. Furthermore, I would also contend if apophatic theology arrives at an existential assertion of God, I question whether we could classify such work as apophatic.

apophatic thought from a historical perspective. Nowadays, we need to find the right publisher, so we need to edit and often change our apophatic insights to meet the market needs of a target audience and/or the moral piety of the publisher.

Second, there is feminist theology, which I have already alluded to in my argument. While I do lean heavily upon feminist theology, this is not a project that is indebted to feminist theological projects. For example, while I may have drawn upon Johnson in relation to negativity, the reconstruction will differ somewhat when drawing upon the theological insights from queer and trans studies. There are other touchstones that could also be explored but escape the boundaries of this project. I will note a couple.

Pursuant to Halberstam's usage of the asterisk with trans*, we could look at the feminist the*logy of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. How is this usage of asterisk similar or different? Additionally, how, despite the progress in the academy, is feminist theology still denigrated as a theology that is less than systematic thought? How does the asterisk speak toward latent theological capabilities still present within feminist theology?

Following the path of abyss, we could turn to the process theology of Catherine Keller, particularly *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*, which also has a strong eco-feminist bend. This, again, is an example of guild Theology work, yet it is still a text that still possesses much theological potential.

These avenues, while drawing on their own archives have recourse to guild Theology, often maintaining a position that shores up the gaps in Theology, so that Theology may continue.⁶⁰ Following Taylor's articulation, we must ask if this only shores up a certain form of

⁶⁰ Additionally, by need of articulating a method as part of this academic exercise, even utilizing Taylor reinforces the guild discipline. However, such thinking could be challenged by Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm,

transcendence concerning Theology as a discipline. While the formalization of the theological presented by Taylor surely reinscribes the work into the guild, it is still up for debate if the guild it is within is Theology. Likewise, this is nature of academic work. The charge that one's research has already outpaced the concrete realities of people is obvious. This is not for lack of rigor, but the nature of theory.⁶¹

The theological—in this case queer and trans theory operating in the capacity of the theological—is the poetic and artistic gestures of queer and trans life interrupting the scripts of guild Theology. This is also beyond how queer and trans studies already interrupts the scripts of even its own foundational thinkers (Foucault, Lacan, Freud, even Butler, Sedgwick, and Anzaldúa).

By way of playing upon the mechanisms of the socio-juridical and the theological, I arrive at social theology. Just as Taylor nuances his understanding of political theology to not reference “Christian Theology that unfolds its meaning for political life,” but as an analysis of the politicality of Theology⁶², this project follows in this vein. Here, I have opted for the language of the social from socio-juridical, the structuring mechanisms that make the political possible. This theology is less concerned with the social contexts of Theology—not to be confused with the social contexts of queer and trans people—and is more concerned with how Theology delimits the social, as we already saw in relation to the socio-juridical. In contrast, then, the theological, as socio-juridical attunement—comes to figure the mechanisms that discern the cracks within

Metamodernism: The Future of Theory (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021) (explored in part II). We are not re-entrenching the discipline, but able to speak and write about the discipline with the acknowledgment of how these terms function and operate on a larger scale.

⁶¹ See Healy, “Fuck Nuance.”

⁶² Taylor, *The Theological and the Political*, 3.

Theology. Rather than social theology noting how Theology unfolds in a social capacity—while it certainly does—it more so points to emerging theological insights that present forms of sociality (politicality) that have been foreclosed by guild Theology.

Conclusion

Mark Lewis Taylor's conceptualization of the theological, in contrast to guild Theology, opens an avenue for non-expertise voices (those outside guild Theology) to weigh-in. As Theology impacts the agonistic political, the organization of our socially and historically mediated ontological constitution, the theological functions as the operation of those impacted or outside guild Theology to impress their own weighted being regarding the world. Following Taylor's framework, I situate queer and trans theory to exist within the theological. To be clear, this is not a reduction of queer and trans theory to this singular mode. Rather, as it concerns a project of theology (lowercase intentional), situating queer and trans theory as the theological shifts the epistemological focus. Guild Theology, then, is being decentered in the process. Surely, as a work of academic discourse, this too becomes its own form of undisciplined discipline.

If the previous chapter presenting the socio-juridical served to express the anti-trans/queer structuring antagonism through pointed critique of guild Theology, and certain veins of queer theology, the present facilitated an inverse movement, critiquing a certain vein of queer and trans theory that abandons any political movement in favor of unrelenting negativity. Just as the previous chapter contended both perspectives are necessary (in the language on Tonstad, we do need both apologetics and beyond apologetics), this chapter also contends both perspectives are necessary. Queer and trans theory need both the research and scholars that break the structuring antagonism by rejecting political idealism *tout court*, as well as the research and

scholars that dare to offer an agonistic political vision, even if it embraces a critical utopian edge (keeping a sense of negativity present as any sense of political completion can never be reached). Both valences have, and still do, offer powerful routes to understand how ontologically negated categories of existence function (queer, Black, trans, woman, disabled, and more).

While I enjoy a radical negativity polemic as much as the next person, this project is more indebted to critical utopian projects. This does not mean negativity and deconstruction are absent, far from it. Rather, it means that there is attention dedicated to a reconstruction amidst the deconstruction, no matter how naïve it may appear, nor how it may eschew classic conceptualizations from other thinkers at critical moments. Hence, the importance of noting counter-conduct.

Such counter action functions as the agonistic political, for queer and trans politics advocate not for the oppression of those who has oppressed them but call for the disestablishment of structures that harm everyone. Yes, for some this does include religion, but what is often left uninterrogated is that this disestablishment of religion is often directed at Christianity and guild Theology. This call for disestablishment runs the risk of reinscribing a colonial imposition and erases the political action that has occurred precisely *because* of religion. Furthermore, the disestablishment of structures that harm everyone allude to fabricated structures that are then prescribed as natural. Within queer and trans theory this is often the nuclear family and its attendant juridical consecration in marriage. But also the claim there is only two sexes and genders ordered toward one form of sexuality. The muddiness of the present can lead people

to think movement away from these systems represents the dissolution of society, yet society had functioned for quite some time prior to these structures.⁶³

Articulation of a different organization of the political—a differing sociality—is an agonistic process. In full transparency, this project is less concerned with this aspect as it concerns Theology. I am more interested in how the organization of a political reality around an object of queer and trans life (the dildo) leads not to fetishistic dalliances of how exotic queer and trans life is but leads to the interrogation of the cisgender heterosexually ordered political. It results in the revelation that cisgender and heterosexuality is fabricated. While dildos are objects that are created that modify the sexuality of whosoever possesses it,⁶⁴ the language of fabrication alludes to both the object of the dildo and whatever is fabricated; namely, sexuality, sex, and gender. Crucially, *all* sexuality, sex, and gender. This reveals that trans and queer life is less a deviation from a norm than cisgender heterosexuality is a fabrication of a norm.

Rather than the concern of this project looking at what the political looks like in this agonistic process, I am interested in how the dildo plays a role in a theological assertion. Surely, there are agonistic political implications, yet it escapes the boundaries of this project to explore these veins. However, beyond simply drawing upon Preciado's dildo for this theological claim, I will also turn to art in part II to elucidate how queer and trans subjects *already have been weighing in*. As I contend in the previous chapter, queer and trans theology has already been happening, do not mistake the formalization of argument in this text as the proclamation of something new.

⁶³ This is why many scholars of gender and sexuality still reference Foucault's genealogical method to unearthing foundations, permutations, and creations of these structures we often assume as facts of nature.

⁶⁴ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 2; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 12.

The artistic and poetic gestures, I contend, do less constructive work in guild Theology than they do to provide access to the theological for others in queer and trans communities. This theological imagination is already alive and well, it is not the aim of this project to put it on fetishistic display so it can be understood in its totality to everyone. Instead, the theological extends in transimminent fashion, an invitation into the abyss, to explore new boundaries and edges. We will explore these artistic and poetic gestures at the close of part II.

For now, part I, and the transdisciplinary methodological explorations and positioning in the fields I am engaged, comes to close. As stated in chapter one, there is a certain abandonment of Theology that is occurring, guild Theology. I desire to leave Theology behind. Nonetheless, I am hopeful we may yet arrive at theology (lowercase intentional), or reside in—ever fleetingly—the space facilitated by a theological gesture, that is hopefully humbler in its scope, more fluid in its articulations, more ambitious in its aims to overthrow abusers of power, and more. Beginning, by already going outside guild Theology with the theological through the epistemic locus of trans and queer studies attuned to socio-juridical formations, in my estimation, is a good place to start.

This theology will be transitory and fleeting, which is why part II will focus more on the articulation of a hermeneutical lens. Thinking along the lines of Taylor's argument of the theological, I am less concerned with constructing a formal work that treats classical categories of traditional Theology. Rather, I am interested how this transdisciplinary methodological work allows us to ground part II in the reality that queer and trans theory is utilized to discern how queer and trans politicality is delimited within some regimes of theological thought. The hermeneutical lens in a critical reading disposition that evaluates theo-ethical significance. This, for me, is a shred of the way that I can give account of the theological, of theology, that is

already happening. Many queer and trans theories have already written off Theology, but that doesn't mean they all have. As we will see with Preciado, he is more than willing to flirt with Theology. This critical hermeneutic, this theo-ethical scrutiny, is glossed as theology, because it could be the critical position of queer and trans people. Nonetheless, and pursuant to Taylor's argument, because it is written by me, under the auspices of academic work, it is already a guild endeavor. All such work is.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHRISTOTECHTONICS: A THEOLOGICAL TECHNOLOGY

“In the beginning...”

...was the *gode*. That is according to Paul B. Preciado. The dildo (*gode* in French) is the origins of the penis. It is the object of utmost importance in this theological technology: christotechtonics.

Christotechtonics draws upon Preciado’s articulations of dildotechtonics, which is “the counterscience that studies the appearance, formation, and utilization of the dildo.”¹ It is the portmanteau of Christology and dildotechtonics. In this theological investigation, christotechtonics is a countertheology that studies the appearance, formation, and utilization of Christ. It is a theological disposition that derives from queer and trans lives that seizes the means of theological production.

Central to this chapter, and christotechtonics, is the assertion that Christ is a dildo. Christ is revealed to function as a biopolitical tool within the technology of theology. Christotechtonics names the prostheticity of Christ in relation to the surface of human bodies—the body becomes

¹ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 41; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 75; Paul B. Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual* (Paris, FR: Balland, 2000). The history regarding the translations and expansions of *Countersexual Manifesto* could constitute its own book-length and cannot be treated here. Due to the expansive revisions that occurred in the initial Spanish translation (more occurred in the 20th anniversary) and the English translation’s basis on the French edition (though the French was also consulted), the English and 20th anniversary Spanish editions will be the only referenced editions of this text in this project. Citations without a Spanish notation indicate the omission in the anniversary edition or a failure on the part of this author to locate the passage in the reorganization of the anniversary edition text.

the site of “displacement and emplacement.”² Pursuant to the reality that there is no anti-theological anti-space, christotechtonics engenders a haunting of Theology through the theological (here, reframed through the lens of queer and trans theory in chapter three). This theological insight is not made for the sake of embarking on a new theological paradigm (see the conclusion of this project) that counters the social ills of transphobia and homophobia. Rather, by drawing from queer and trans scholarship, the theological evaluations take the shape of exploring the appearance, formation, and utilization of Christ that counters Theology.

Per part I of the project, bodies are sites where a sense of identity congeals. Despite the epistemic foundation of the dildo stemming from queer and trans life, the analysis, in fact, interrogates the structures that have delimited the politicality of queer and trans bodies *by determining them to be queer and trans bodies*, as such. Following how I have been framing gender, sex, sexuality, queer, and race, this project is not indebted to a substance ontology, but to a social process ontology. This will be explored more in the interlude of this chapter dedicated to “metamodernism.” Within the context of christotechtonics, I must overview how I am understanding this concept.

Christotechtonics is both hermeneutic, a lens through which sexual ideological constructions are interrogated, and a heuristic, a technique that intervenes in these sexual ideological constructions. Simultaneously, christotechtonics is neither a new universal method vying for hegemonic control,³ nor simply a contextual theology, which only serves to uphold

² Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 41; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 75.

³ Though *Countersexual Manifesto* can be read as a counter-hegemonic exercise, this does not mean the goal is to secure a new hegemony, despite the possibility that a new hegemony could arise. See later in this chapter in relation to metamodernism. Cf. in relation to counter-conduct—especially in terms of the Christian pastorate—see Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 191–226.

partitioned theological spaces for “identities” (woman, queer, Black, trans*) that name the “catachresis of this nothing, of this ontological negation.”⁴

Catechresis describes the, at best paradoxical and at worst deliberate, misnaming of something. Examples can include usages of Orwellian modulation (the shift from homelessness to unhoused to housing insufficient) to transformation of rhetoric from medical to colloquial (like the movement from homosexual to LGBT to queer). Utilizing the positioning of queer that I have been drawing from queer and trans theory, this is why we receive such trenchant criticisms of hegemonic systems. Queer and trans theory names how “queer” describes a multitude of realities askance to hegemony. Again, this why queer and trans theory will contend queerness is not an identity. But this doesn’t mean the effects of queer are thrust onto bodies.

This will be the most theoretically rigorous of the chapters in part II. This chapter facilitates a transdisciplinary synthesis of Paul B. Preciado’s *Countersexual Manifesto* and its relationship I am aligning with Christ. I will frame this work as appositional. Apposition refers to the positioning of things side by side: in this case, Christ and a dildo are placed side by side. Rather than the tired argumentative strategy of theories of gender and sexuality to be in opposition with theology, appositional framing contends there may yet be new ground that can be covered by theorizing together. I envision Christotechtonics to be both a deconstructive and constructive framework. Due to the limitations of this present project, the argument will

⁴ Edelman, *Bad Education*, 19. The argument of *Bad Education* proceeds from Edelman’s articulations in *No Future*. For a concise articulation regarding the social relations queerness engenders in *No Future*, Edelman has glossed the main points in *Bad Education*, 45-57. While the politics of a countersexual society are not coterminous with Edelman’s formulations, Edelman has produced some of the most robust theories regarding queerness and negativity that are not wholly dissimilar to Preciado. See also, regarding *catechresis* in political theology, Lawrence E. Hillis, “Catechresis in the Margins: Notes on Theologico-Political Method,” in *Political Theology on the Edge: Ruptures of Justice and Belief in the Anthropocene*, eds. Clayton Crockett and Catherine Keller (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2022), 109–136.

primarily focus on the deconstructive potential of a hegemonic Theology dependent upon heterosexualism. This will make it appear as though christotechnics is only a deconstructive skeptical hermeneutical lens, but one example from contemporary queer and trans culture will point toward heuristic intervention potential. A constructive edge would entail further explorations of social process ontology, which we will overview in the interlude of this chapter, but this escapes the negative force of this project.

Clarity with how I am using the term Christology is needed. Christology, in this exploration, is concerned with the trafficking of the logics of Christ (recall the etymological parsing of “theology” from chapter three), which produce a structural theo/logic—a *systemic* Theology, if you will, rather than a Systematic Theology. The words regarding Christ function.⁵ While Systematic Theology has busied itself with the doctrinal development of Christology and other systematic topics, I follow sentiments articulated by Marcella Althaus-Reid in *Indecent Theology*:

I have already said that theology is a sexual act. Theology is a sexual ideology performed in a sacralizing pattern: it is a sexual divinized orthodoxy (right sexual dogma) and orthopraxy (right sexual behavior); theology is a sexual action. Theologians, therefore, are nothing else but sexual performers who need to take many ethical and sometimes partisan sexual decisions when reflecting on God and humanity, because theology is never innocuous or sexually innocent or neutral. Systematic Theology can be considered as the case of an arbitrary sexual theory with divine implications.⁶

⁵ I follow the early trajectory set by Johnson in *She Who Is*: “The symbol of God *functions*, and its content is of the highest importance for personal and common weal or woe,” 36. Also see Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 111–143. These pages comprise the focus God-talk and sexual discourse. While I find Douglas conflates Jesus and Christ too much, the text does address sexuality more than *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994). While directly related to history of enslavement, the Black Christ (like most Black liberation theology) reaches beyond identity politics to address the function of Blackness with Christ. In this regard, I see Douglas also interrogating how Christ is used.

⁶ Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 87; see also 95–96.

For Althaus-Reid, the pervasiveness of sexuality in theology is all-too-real for those who find themselves on the receiving end of theological violence. I continue in the vein of Althaus-Reid's provocative statement: a hidden subject of Systematic Theology are the theologians who determine "arbitrary sexual theory with divine implication." Going deeper, while Systematic Theology has determined some human bodies to only be worthy of being considered theological objects (meaning theology is done to them), christotechtonics shifts an epistemic foundation to trans and queer life, allowing trans and queer persons to be theological subjects (meaning they do theology).

Here, the concern is not necessarily Systematic Theology, for I am not concerned with the archive of these formal theological paradigms, so I diverge from Althaus-Reid. Nonetheless, I shift to a more diffuse form of theological articulation that often gets brought into theological communities (churches, dioceses, or simply just read because they are presented in a less obtuse manner than the philosophical gambits of most Systematic Theology) through the interrogation of a Vatican document. Fundamentally, and this will be touched on more in the next chapter, christotechtonics maintains that queer and trans life are part of the human response to Theology, even when this response to Theology takes the shape of critical theology. Additionally, as we will soon see with Preciado, the dildo confounds the sex/gender system; therefore, this is not a critical theology that then touts a supremacy of gender and sexuality studies. There is mutual deconstruction that is occurring.

I also am indebted to Althaus-Reid's work in *The Queer God*, which produced some of the most novel constructive flares for queer theology, particularly:

Theological prostheses form a restless body in movement challenging the contextual limitations of political and divine character, while at the same time

surpassing them. They also form the unbeliever's body, that is, a body which has stopped believing in divine sexual grand narratives, or the atheists of heterosexually based theologies. They bring impatience, irony, and a capacity to destroy by imitation.⁷

Christotechtonics, by its fabrication, leaves Theology behind—it offers an/other/ed theological trajectory, its own haunting of Theology. Note that prosthesis forms a restless body, it is a body that moves and becomes foreign to oneself,⁸ what Althaus-Reid will conceive of through Deleuzian articulations of nomadism. When the body becomes restless and moves, so too does the divine. It causes us to rethink divinity and theology; it demands that we ask different or new questions of theology; new people are asking and responding to said questions and theology; and all this is occurring outside the grand narratives of heterosexuality.

The dildo, as sexual prosthesis, breaks the sex/gender system. Making this connection clear (which will be parsed out in greater detail in the chapter), if Christ is a dildo, then we are also breaking this facet of Theology. Furthermore, the dildo “generates difference far and wide, but is not identified with difference itself. It is transit, not essence.”⁹ This project reveals Christ to function like sexuality, sex, and gender. By extension, we must contend that Christ does not exist, yet Christ, simultaneously produces a series of effects.

The dildo “is transit, not essence,” and theological nomadism makes us foreign to ourselves. This is the process of deterritorialization, where the dildo is not offering a new center that replaces sexual dimorphism; rather, the dildo “den[ies] the center's centrality, multiplying it

⁷ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 30–31.

⁸ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 8; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 28–29.

⁹ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 70; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 107.

until the very notion of center doesn't make sense."¹⁰ In the sense that Christ is a dildo, the dildo Christ does not offer a new center (transit, not essence), but denies the center's centrality (it breaks Christ, just as the dildo breaks the sex/gender system). Paradoxically, this breaking is what facilitates the rhizomatic multiple multiplicities. But this produced situation is not Christ, because it does not exist (transit, not essence).

Christotechtonics draws upon various archives of gender and sexuality studies.

Christotechtonics asserts the following performative utterance: Christ is a dildo. As prosthesis, Christ the dildo sloughs off attempts of essentialization. This function of Christ, which produces effects, also reveals the plasticity and prostheticity with which the supposed immutable essence of God is wielded.¹¹ As anti-identitary function, christotechtonics names the catechresis of the void around which marginal "identities" coalesce. Yet, despite this negativity, christotechtonics, still maintains a positive constructivist claim over a positive identity claim: Christ *is* a dildo.¹²

¹⁰ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 71; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 108.

¹¹ To see how plasticity is displaced onto bodies see *Social Text* 143 (2020) "The Biopolitics of Plasticity," eds. Kyla Schuller and Jules Gill-Peterson. Compare along line of biopolitics with Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, particularly 66–92.

¹² I follow the trajectory of Butler, *Gender Trouble*: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results," 34. See also Edelman, *Bad Education*: "At a moment when the profligate use of the term [queer] prompts the question, 'Is everything queer?' this book has an answer: 'No.' Insofar as queerness pertains to ab-sens [outside meaning, particularly in relation to sex], it argues that nothing 'is' queer, while maintaining that *nothing*, the ontological negation figured by queerness, *is*," 43. If it appears I may be pointing to an empty signifier with Christ the dildo—as in, Christ more so functions as that which has been co-opted for theological biopolitical ends instead of a potentially stable theological philosophical category—this is entirely intentional. Outside the functionary theological biopolitical role, Christ has no use and no identity—other than the legible identities a hegemonic regime has *placed onto Christ* (colonial, white, male, European, heterosexual, and more), which will come to form an ordered theological community and which christotechtonics calls into question (it has been arbitrarily managed). Nonetheless, Christ functions and thus maintains an "is" which it "is not"—an "is" as if it was. Put another way, this is playing with the limitations of the English language verb "to be", able to be employed in both a predicative manner (Christ is a dildo) and an existential manner (there is no Christ). Additionally, it should be stressed that just because something is said not to exist, does not mean that is not real. Both Butler and Edelman (and nearly all of queer theory) assert that while the existence of "gender" or "queer" is dubious at best, the produced effects of gender and queer are very much real.

Simultaneously, christotechtonics is indebted to projects of counter-conduct—the revolutionary theories of Preciado are derived from the material realities of the revolution that are already happening. Christotechtonics is not an eschatological hope, a traditional historicism, or an unobservant presentism; rather, it describes the trafficking of theological concepts, the permutations and translations that become written onto bodies—it is none of these, yet all of these. Critical interrogation of structuring theo/logics opens avenues of counter-conduct.

In what follows, I will dive into some fundamental points regarding this deconstructive theological hermeneutic. Once an overview of *Countersexual Manifesto* has been established, the conversation will turn toward matters of the penis, phallus, and dildo, as well as distinctions that are being articulated between Jesus and Christ. A brief philosophical interlude regarding metamodernism will situate Preciado for a contemporary project, overviewing my own struggle to place this text in a philosophical landscape beyond its initial publication at the turn of the millennium (which it likes to defy). Finally, the conversation will return to Marcella Althaus-Reid. As arguably one of the most influential thinkers in the field of queer theology, I seek to point out resonances with this theology in conversation with trans theory.¹³

Oh, My Gode!

Preciado's *Countersexual Manifesto* is a wide-ranging *tour de force*. At its core, *Countersexual Manifesto* is a theory of counter/sexuality, employing dildotechtonics to discern and interrogate various somatic techniques of the heterocentric regime.¹⁴ Sexuality “can’t be reduced either to

¹³ Halberstam, “Nice Trannies,” 328.

¹⁴ Another contemporary and accessible text that strikes at the heart regarding the coercion and resistance of somatic techniques, see Bel Olid, *Hairless: Breaking the Vicious Circle of Hair Removal, Submission and Self-Hatred* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2022).

sexual difference or to gender identity. Sexuality is defined here as a political and yet sometimes unconscious aesthetics of the body and its pleasure.”¹⁵ Preciado describes sexuality as something akin to language, a complex network that communicates and reproduces; therefore, sexuality possesses a residue of historical contingencies assumed to be natural. In this analogy, monolingualists may be more predisposed to assume their language is simply the natural language, often not understanding the contingency of their primary language until encountering another language. Language, as many of us are aware, is also something that can be learned.¹⁶

To that end, sexuality must also be understood along another register: prosthetic. In this analogy to language, where Preciado has emphasized that sexuality (all sexuality) is *learned*, the prostheticity of the dildo operates as anything that modifies the subject—in this case, the sexual subject.¹⁷ A learned monosexuality can range to the false binary of homosexual and heterosexual, to attraction, to “what can go where,” to licit and illicit, and more. Sexuality, like language, can produce a worldview, which we know can traffic across innocuous ideas to violent ideologies.¹⁸ Additionally, when learning a *new* sexuality (or language), there is a displacement and

¹⁵ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 8; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 28.

¹⁶ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*: “Sexualities are like languages: they are complex systems of communication and reproduction of life. As languages, sexualities are historical constructs with common genealogies and biocultural inscriptions. Like languages, sexualities can be learned. Multiple languages can be spoken. As is often the case within monolingualism, one sexuality is imposed on us in childhood, and it takes on the character of naturalized desire. We are trained into sexual monolingualism,” 8; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 28.

¹⁷ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 2; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 12. In preview challenging the morphology of the dildo, Preciado will contend even a book can be a dildo—if it modifies the sexual subject who wields it.

¹⁸ This is the pervading charge toward psychoanalysis in *Can The Monster Speak?*

emplacement that disrupts monosexual (or monolingual) worldviews. The possibilities of what is possible can suddenly erupt.¹⁹

Crucially, in the vein of *countersexuality*, the sexualities facilitated by the dildo open new constellations of sexual affect. When sexual affect is sundered from the heterocentric regime—in this case via the dildo—we can reassess our bodies, ethics, capitalism, race, and yes, even Theology. Nonetheless, despite these utopic visions, Preciado knows we cannot escape the prostheticity of sexuality—even countersexuality must be learned.

Prostheticity forecloses a reduction to sexual difference, for how is such difference to be determined other than through fabrication of somatic techniques that categorize the body—this would already be a learned expression of sexuality. Gender, as well, functions in similar fashion. Sexuality, therefore, is a biopolitical tool²⁰ that has molded a sexual aesthetic, producing the effects of “natural,” “normal,” “useful,” and/or “ordered”—among other terms and the opposites of these terms (“unnatural,” “abnormal,” “useless,” and “disordered”)—bodies, pleasures, and desires.²¹ Writes Preciado, “To the end of denaturalizing and demystifying traditional notions of sex and gender, countersexuality takes as its foremost goal the study of sexual instruments and apparatuses and, thereupon, the sexual and gender relationships and becomings that are

¹⁹ Cf. Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 55–58.

²⁰ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, “It’s time to stop studying and describing sex as if it forms part of the natural history of human societies. The ‘history of sexuality’ would be better served by renaming itself ‘the history of technologies’ because sexual and gender apparatuses are inscribed in a complex biotechnological system. This ‘history of technologies’ shows that ‘human nature’ is an effect of the constant border negotiation not only between human and animal, body and machine, but also between organ and prosthesis, organic and plastic, alive and dead,” 22; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 49.

²¹ This is rooted in the now classic *Gender Trouble* by Butler.

established between body and machine.”²² Christotechtonics reads Theology as a machine, or technology, that interacts with the body, producing “sexual and gender relationships and becomings.”

As a manifesto, *Countersexual Manifesto* engenders a revolutionary flare, yet, from the outset, contends, “It doesn’t start with a call for revolution, but with the realization that we *are* the revolution that is already taking place.”²³ Preciado considers the dildo as a technical philosophical intervention—while theoretically rigorous, it is derived from the material lived realities of queers’ sex lives.²⁴ The dildo, then, functions as the object of catechresis that names or describes the sexual lack of those who fall outside the sexual aesthetics of the heterocentric regime; not to be confused as an object that confers identity.

As revolutionary countersubjects, countersexualists use their bodies to produce sex and art. Outrageous in scope, *Countersexual Manifesto* fabricates a countersexual society, complete with guiding principles²⁵ and a contract that can be signed.²⁶ While fictitious, at best, this contract elucidates a deliberate assertion toward the mechanisms that seek to erode the heterocentric regime. With performance art pieces provided as “countersexual reversal practices,”²⁷ Preciado’s theorizations push the dildo beyond the scope of plastic sex toys (often

²² Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 24; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 50–51.

²³ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 4.

²⁴ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, “Making the most of Marx’s strategy [surplus value], this investigation of sex takes as its thematic axis the analysis of something that could seem marginal: a plastic object in certain queers’ sex lives that until now has been considered a simple prosthesis invented to palliate lesbians’ or transpersons’ sexual disability. I am talking about the dildo,” 20; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 46.

²⁵ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 32–39; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 60–69.

²⁶ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 40; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 70–71.

²⁷ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 41–55; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 75–90.

imagined as a parody of a penis). As prosthesis, the dildo can be translated onto various sites of the body; countersexuality does not confine itself to genital stimulation. Rather, the anus is elevated to a more privileged erogenous zone over the genitals,²⁸ yet countersexuality is not reduced to anal work. Within the performances listed, the dildo is translated onto an arm²⁹ and the head.³⁰ Chapter seven will overview how the dildo is translated onto a cross. However, apart from such provocative performance pieces, countersexuals are dedicated to sexual practices that run counter to the heterocentric regime, including, but not limited to the destitution of the penis, the separation of sexual activities from reproductive activities, and the abolition of the family.³¹

Dildotechtonics is derived from the words “dildo=plastic penis” and “téktón=builder, generator.”³² As previously noted, “[d]ildotechtonics is the counterscience that studies the appearance, formation, and utilization of the dildo.”³³ Téktón (τέκτων) should not be foreign to those versed in Greek or the New Testament, for this is the noted profession of Jesus (Mark 6:3—in fact, there is also potentiality to read into the definite article (ὁ); *the* builder. We also see reference in Matt 13:55; however, the constructed phrase is rendered as “the carpenter’s son.” The profession (τέκτων) has shifted to a different person in the narrative, but also leads scholars to infer Jesus took up the profession of his father Joseph, which would be common for this

²⁸ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 30; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 58.

²⁹ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 48–51; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 83–86.

³⁰ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 52–55; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 87–90.

³¹ On this matter, see also recent work by Sophie Lewis, *Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation* (London, UK: Verso, 2022).

³² Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 41; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 75.

³³ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 41; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 75.

time.). *Téktón* is often glossed as a carpenter; just as glossed by Preciado, *téktón* notes a general sense in relation to a builder (craftsperson in general). It can also note a mastery in a particular art form (examples from Liddell and Scott include gymnastics, but also poetry). It can also be metaphorically stretched to be glossed as maker (perhaps what Preciado was aiming toward with “generator”) or even author.³⁴ No mere theological interruption on my part, this acknowledgement of *téktón* in relation to Jesus will be important when we transition into the distinctions between Christ and Jesus.

Christ, for this construction of christotechtonics, becomes aligned with the dildo. Following the glossing of *téktón*, Christ is deployed—is that which is used to build—to fabricate theological worlds. This project is not an exhaustive genealogy; meaning, I will not spend time picking apart every single historical development of doctrine regarding Christ—such work may yet be completed at a later time. This exploration of christotechtonics is far less concerned about a “proper” Christology—the branch of Systematic Theology dedicated to the formation and study of Christ—and far more concerned with more contemporary interrogations vis-à-vis how *Christ is deployed and functions in a contemporary theological imagination*. We need not take recourse to a “proper” metaphysical understanding of Christ. While such work is important, christotechtonics, in this research, concerns the realities that a metaphysical and historical orthodoxy does not fundamentally address the structuring antagonisms that apotheosize included “identities” in relation to necessary excluded “identities.” Christotechtonics contends this deployment of Christ functions along lines of sex, gender, sexuality, race, class, ability, and much

³⁴ See Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1940).

more. This will be explored more in the next two chapters where a countertheological reading exercise will be staged.

Therefore, the performative utterance of “Christ is a dildo” names and reveals these functional theo/logics. If the dildo is the prosthetic dangerous supplement,³⁵ this performative utterance calls into question the arrangement of bodies aligned toward heterosexuality. By naming the deployment of Christ, the fabrications of theology and ethics become plastic. Any sense of sexual stability or security that has been construed as natural falters as it stands before Christ the dildo.³⁶ Recall from chapter two, when a structuring antagonism has been created and the hegemonic power expresses its authority through its disappeared sovereignty under conceptual framings of nature, any deviation from nature is an aberration. A body that is outside the parameters of nature becomes a body where sites of violence are disappeared. Furthermore, appeals to expand the parameters of nature only maintain the structuring antagonism; as long as the hegemonic authority of white colonial heteropatriarchal cisgender sexual mores is maintained, the most vulnerable populations of “non-normative” sexual and gender expressions (in addition to race, ability, capitalist exploitation, and more) will still be outside the parameters of nature, outside the law, and disappeared. Christ the dildo lays bare these mechanisms of

³⁵ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 66–68; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 103–105.

³⁶ The focus of this research limits the archive of sexual expression from the 19th century onward, with the rise of the classification of homosexuality and sexual disorders. I do not mean to suggest our historical interlocutors outside of this period always adhered to sexual mores antithetical to contemporary sentiments; rather, to suggest that if we take Foucault’s genealogical project seriously, we must attune ourselves to the way in which the rhetoric of sexuality is deployed in our contemporary times. Recourse to a particular historical contingency of sexual mores as a foil to the contemporary periods can broaden horizons, but they do not delimit current evolutions of sexual mores; history—in this example—runs the risk of functioning similarly to a metaphysical orthodoxy, where a “proper” understanding can facilitate a larger picture, but ultimately fails to address the contemporary material conditions. For more on the development of sexuality studies see Halperin and D’Emilio, Janet R. Jakobsen and Anne Pellegrini, Tim Dean, and Peter Coviello. By no means an exhaustive list, these voices loom large within queer discourse.

prostheticity and plasticity. This prostheticity of Christ and the plasticity of the body will be explored in greater detail in the proceeding chapters, where the human body is considered as the content of theology.

Gode Almighty

The dildo adds in order to replace,³⁷ which means there are necessary conversations regarding the penis, phallus, and dildo. Christotechtonics contends Jesus and Christ must be understood appositionally to the conversations regarding the penis, phallus, and dildo. Additionally, we must cross-examine implications when we recognize the dangerous, perverse, and all-too-visceral reality that Christ adds in order to decenter (perhaps a perverse interpretation of Gal 2:20, or Gal 3:28's baptismal confession and somatic re-arrangements, or even Phil 2:5-11). It bears repeating, the contemporary deployment of Christ is of greater concern than rigid historical accuracy to theological doctrine. Put simple, bad theology kills and is actively killing in the present through contemporary deployments of Christ.

Christotechtonics, in this project, is intervening on a contemporary construction of a theological imagination (which already exists in its own relationship to historical accuracy vis-à-vis theological doctrine), which has produced certain theological worlds.³⁸ Additionally, this intervention occurs simultaneously within the spheres of gender and sexuality studies. This in no way seeks to devalue historical intervention (as such projects must also be conducted), but

³⁷ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 66–67; Preciado, *Manifesto contrasexual*, 103–104.

³⁸ While appeals to contextualized interpretations of biblical passages are incredibly crucial, christotechtonics contends we cannot fall into the trap that such contextualized interpretations hypostasize in the contemporary imagination, resulting in a form of immutable truth residing within history. Nor, despite the projects *focus* on the contemporary, can we reduce christotechtonics wholly to the present. Put simple, multiple directionalities are needed, but no project can undertake all directionalities simultaneously.

merely asserts the limited scope of the present investigation. The privileging of the contemporary moment seeks to interrogate the processes of near life and slow death of queer and trans people in the present at the hands of Theology; more on this in the next chapters.

The destitution of the penis is critical for countersexuality. Writes Preciado, “The penis’s centrality as the axis of power’s meaning within the framework of the heterocentric system requires that a tremendous amount of effort be directed toward resignification and deconstruction.”³⁹ Preciado’s attunement to the power the penis possesses within the heterocentric regime is nothing new, this is feminist and queer theory 101. However, when the dildo (in this case a dildo fabricated as a parody of a penis) enters the theoretical landscape, Preciado must account for this fabrication. The orgasm, then, becomes one site of this signifying intervention (the fabrication of the orgasm through parody); the paroxysm observed in the penis in men and the “even dubious existence”—and thus questioned—existence in women.⁴⁰ As previously noted, Preciado includes examples of performance art works that push the dildo beyond the representation of only the penis.

These practices also serve to short-circuit genital privilege concerning the determination of sexuality and sexual praxis. The destitution of the penis as a privileged site of determining “nature,” also serves to call into question the supposed transcendental qualities often associated with the penis. Preciado demands we rethink heterosexuality:

³⁹ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 33; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 62. Additionally, the flairs of psychoanalysis are prevalent with *Countersexual Manifesto*, and will become more developed in *Can The Monster Speak?*

⁴⁰ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 34; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 62–63. It should also be noted how Preciado “plays” with the words “man/men” and “woman/women.” When writing from the perspective of the heterocentric regime (which we must intervene) the logics of heterosexuality are noted precisely to note their fabrication.

Countersexuality says: the logic of heterosexuality is the logic of the dildo, invoking the transcendental possibility of giving an arbitrary organ the power to install sexual and gender difference. “Extracting” the organ that establishes the body as “naturally male” and calling it a dildo is a decisive political act in the deconstruction of heterosexuality. With the invention of the dildo, the penis ceases to be the root of sexual difference. If the penis is to sexuality what God is to nature, then in the domain of sexual relationships the dildo brings about God’s death as foretold by Nietzsche. In this sense, the dildo can be considered a critical act in the history of countersexual technology.⁴¹

This formulation of the logics does not unravel countersexuality; rather, it illustrates the collapse of the essentialism/constructivism (false) binary. In the above formulation, the penis is the arbitrary organ that has been utilized to determine sexual and gender difference. The key word is “arbitrary,” and the dildo intervenes to reveal the mechanisms of fabrication, which is why Preciado goes as far as to state “all is dildo. Even the penis.”⁴²

Heterosexuality is also a slippery word in gender and sexuality studies. Introduced into the English lexicon at the end the 19th century (just as homosexuality came into terminological existence⁴³), many scholars note it had a rather short, albeit impactful, run. Crucially, *heterosexuality* should not be confused with heterosexual, often glossed as merely the sexual term utilized to designate attraction to a person of the opposite sex. Within this glossed definition, the mechanisms of *heterosexuality* already function, through the usage of “opposite,”

⁴¹ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 65; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 102.

⁴² Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, “To unmask sexuality as an anatomopolitical ideology, it is necessary to understand the dildo (its separation from the body) as a deferred center of sexual and political signification. The dildo is not an object that replaces something that’s missing. It is a cutting-and-pasting operation that takes place within heterosexuality, displacing the supposed organic center of sexual production onto a space outside the body. The dildo, as a reference of power and sexual arousal, betrays the anatomical organ by moving into other signifying spaces (organic and inorganic, male and female) that are resexualized by dint of their semantic proximity. From that moment on, anything can become a dildo. All is dildo. Even the penis,” 66; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 103.

⁴³ For historical explorations from a queer temporality angle on this matter, see Coviello, *Tomorrow’s Parties*.

with the implied understanding that there is only a complementary pair. We stumble into similar problem with homosexuality, which was sometimes noted as same-sex attraction. In both cases, there is still a presumption of sexual difference.

The history of sexuality is far too expansive to cover in this project;⁴⁴ however, Preciado, within *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, draws upon Butler's theorizations of performativity to note that heterosexuality is in its end game. Preciado pushes beyond the linguistic bind of Butler and turns to pharmacology as a means in which performativity enter the materiality of the body.⁴⁵ The synthesizing and usage of hormones are physical means by which the body enacts performativity. Recall from chapter two, there is often administrative violence regarding access to said hormones for trans individuals. Conversely, cisgender individuals have greater access to hormone replacement therapy (HRT), which are utilized to stabilize a desire of cisgender performativity. This calls into question whether or not these individuals are cis-male or cis-female to begin with.⁴⁶ This follows in the trajectory of thinking that *there are no heterosexuals outside of heterosexuality, just as there are no homosexuals outside heterosexuality*;⁴⁷ though, as Preciado notes these still exist as generic

⁴⁴ Concerning the United States, the context most under investigation in this project, see D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*. I slight Foucault's project here, for it becomes clear as it progressed that it was more interested in the biopolitics of sexuality and circulations of biopower than necessarily a history of sexuality.

⁴⁵ For more on this, see Elliot Evans, *The Body in French Thought from Wittig to Preciado: Queer Permeability* (London, UK: Routledge, 2020), 40–74.

⁴⁶ This matter of HRT to stabilize one's desire cisgender performativity has also been explored in contemporary trans-dystopian literature. See Torrey Peters, *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones* (CreateSpace Independent, 2016). Initially published online at www.torreyepeters.com, with a forthcoming revised edition through Random House.

⁴⁷ This extends to theology. Cf. Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*: "The Trinitarians do not need to have heterosexual relations, nor so-called 'same-sex relations' since no same-sex relations in reality ever exist. The invention of the concept of 'same-sex' relationships is heterosexual, since it is based on the notion of a limited number of sexualities and also their equivalences. The fact that two women may have a sexual relationship does not imply that they belong to the 'same-sex' at all, even if generically they may be called lesbians or bi. The difficulty for *heterosexuality* is to

terms, just as trans- and cis- remain generic terms, even though they are technically produced.⁴⁸

Hence, for Preciado in *Countersexual Manifesto*, the eschewing of all these terms for “countersexual.”

The introduction of the Pill and rapid medical expansion across many sectors reveal the stabilization of a heterosexual (particularly white) aesthetic.⁴⁹ The deployment of these medical processes and procedures act as another form of prosthesis. While they may be sought to stabilize a gender expression in relation to one’s sex, it is still doing the work of modifying the sexuality of whosoever possesses it. When this relates back to *Countersexual Manifesto*, the meaning of heterosexuality does, in fact, revolve around a model of sexual difference ordered around the penis—even if this model is facilitated by pharmacopornographic means. As such, heterosexuality *already operates by the logics of the dildo*. The penis (and all that seeks to attain the power it purportedly possesses) has disappeared its own prostheticity.⁵⁰

grasp the fact that not all sex has a name or a date or place of discovery,” 59, emphasis added. For more, see Thia Cooper, *Queer and Indecent: An Introduction to Marcella Althaus-Reid* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2021), 110–122.

⁴⁸ Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 127.

⁴⁹ Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 122–129.

⁵⁰ There is no essential sexual and gender expression dependent upon the penis that does not operate outside the mechanisms of constructivist realities. Simultaneously, we cannot reduce everything to constructivist mechanisms, for this disappears the violence of the somatic techniques of heterosexualism; in other words, materiality has been jettisoned. These are some of the early critiques of Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, which also point toward historical misreadings of Butler. They addressed this at the beginning of *Bodies That Matter*. Throughout the years, this theoretical sticking point has haunted gender and sexuality studies. Regardless of where one falls in this debate, it is certain Judith Butler has done immense heavy theoretical lifting to provide such a foundation. Preciado notes, “My task consists of an attempt to escape the false essentialism-constructivism debate by bringing both queer theory’s and post-structural philosophies’ analytical tools (including Derrida’s deconstruction, Foucault’s genealogy of power, Deleuze and Guattari’s schizoanalysis, and Butler’s gender performativity) face to face with certain unfitting becomings, with improper bodies, organs, and objects to which neither feminism nor queer theory has wanted to or been able to respond. This was the aim of throwing a dildo into the grammatological machine,” 77; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 117–118.

It is on this previous claim which Preciado also mounts countersexuality's critique of feminism; particularly, "Separatist lesbian theory and transphobic feminism, which criticize dildo use because of its complicity with the symbols of male domination, still believe in the ontological reality of the penis as hegemonic genitalia."⁵¹ Of note, this is not a wholesale critique of feminism. Dedicated to Monique Wittig, *Countersexual Manifesto* will state that "speaking bodies shall be called *postbodies* or *wittigs*."⁵² Within the original French, "postbodies" was "*corps lesbiens*" ["lesbian bodies"]. This allusion to Wittig and the lesbian body gestures to how Wittig theorized lesbian both as a semiotic vacuum and political position. In essence, Wittig pushed feminist theory to consider feminism without the political referent of sex understood within a heterosexual matrix. Preciado follows in these trajectories that name how some feminist positions are still reliant upon somatic techniques of genital morphology and who has what genitals.

This brings us to the sticky subject of the phallus, a notorious subject matter in gender and sexuality studies. Writes Preciado:

The dildo is not the phallus and does not represent the phallus because the phallus—let's just say it once and for all—does not exist. The phallus is nothing but the phantasmic and political hypostasis of the penis within heteronormative patriarchal culture. The real question is the inscription of male hegemonic power within the cartography of modern anatomy.⁵³

True to form, Preciado is tearing apart the alignment of the penis and phallus, by rendering them both obsolete. Admittedly, *Countersexual Manifesto* does not delve into the minutiae of the

⁵¹ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 71; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 107.

⁵² Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 39; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 69.

⁵³ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 63; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 100.

phallus/penis debate; however, there is feminist and queer scholarship that overview the relationship between the penis and phallus.⁵⁴ Per the conversation regarding the denaturing of the phallus (i.e. not irrevocably linked to the penis), the dildo enters as the non-center that decenters both the penis and the phallus.

Nonetheless, the dildo perhaps more so tools with the philosophical mechanisms of the privileged signifier rather than simple running beyond it. Unlike Preciado, this does not serve to be a deciding voice on the matter once and for all regarding the penis and phallus. This debate is decades old, with compelling evidence on both sides. However, taking seriously Preciado as a starting point of this theological hermeneutic, I see an appositional relationship of the penis:dildo and Jesus:Christ.

Not a simple matter of opposition (which would imply a seemingly irreconcilable gulf between sexuality and theology), apposition alludes to the tandem constructions of abstract conceptual tools. By way of intervening into some Theology, an appositional framing also serves to call attention to the abstracted language of Theology, in this case Jesus and Christ. This does not mean I am replacing abstracted terms for non-abstracted terms; the penis and dildo have been abstracted to a more generalizable function for theory. In other words, we cannot invoke Jesus or Christ if they are not abstract terms that may or may not point to something real or an existential

⁵⁴ See, among other, Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982); Jane Gallop, *Sexuality, Disability, and Aging: Queer Temporalities of the Phallus* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019). With these two cases with Gallop, she notes how she was once critical of the phallus and its proximity to the penis, yet had returned to the phallus through queerness. See also Jan Campbell, *Arguing with the Phallus: Feminist, Queer, and Postcolonial Theory* (New York, NY: Zed, 2000); Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. Finally, see a contemporary primer of this debate in Wilcox, *Queer Religiosities*, 176–181.

function—just as the penis and dildo may or may not point to something real or an existential function.⁵⁵

A perennial question in early presentations has centered around meaning making regarding the figure of Jesus. Put simple, what about Jesus? This *is* an important question, and one that launches us into the oscillating realities of nonidentitary functions and identity realities.⁵⁶ Just as Christ is a theological construction—a theological function if you will—so too is the dildo. Again, this still leaves the question of Jesus. My responding question is: what is Jesus being asked to do? To what ends or reasons is Jesus being employed or invoked?

As noted, in similar fashion to how the dildo can be modeled on the penis, but not be understood as the penis, I am concerned with the theological category Christ, often associated with the potentially historical figure of Jesus, elevated to the Christ (Phil 2: 5-11). If the theological function fully resides on Jesus (forgetting the gospels are narratives each writing toward their own theological ends and not biographies and do not present a coherent picture of Jesus), we run the risk of getting lost in identity politics, in the sense that we have blurred the etymology of Jesus (a rendering of Joshua – “God saves”) and a theological category and title

⁵⁵ Furthermore, and this would be a future project altogether, restating the abstractness of theology should always be of importance. Abstract theological terms are thrown around all the time as if they were the content of theology (here, Jesus and Christ; but also, even God, salvation, grace, and so many more). Christotechtonics, arguably more a theological biopolitics than a Systematic Theology, shifts the content of theology onto human bodies (also an abstracted term), which will be explored in the next chapter. For this project I am not hinging christotechtonics upon prescriptive elements, risking a foreclosure of future expansion. Of note, while Preciado provides three performance art pieces, the intention is to spur more, yet currently unknown, countersexual practices. This project is more so constructing new mechanisms of *descriptive functions and realities of theology situated from sites of non-normative sexuality*. These functions can weigh in, to recall the language of Taylor. I am not contending this is the *only* way to weigh in; rather, from the perspective of academic exercise and rigor, this is the necessary presentation of a logics to understand how one can weigh in regarding christotechtonics. Again, in similar ways how Mark Lewis Taylor’s text against guild Theology is created to be intelligible to guild Theology.

⁵⁶ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 7; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 27.

Christ (messiah) to be completely synonymous.⁵⁷ I am also not seeking to assert we can arrive at a theological construction of Christ (within Christianity) without Jesus. However, this matter of distinction follows more the trajectory of historical doctrinal developments. We need both Jesus and Christ; not synonymous, but also not mutually exclusive. To think alongside Preciado, we run the risk of getting lost in the somatic techniques of the hegemonic order, what Preciado refers to as the heterocentric regime in *Countersexual Manifesto* but will later be termed the *petro-sexo-racial* regime.⁵⁸

I return to my initial question of response: what is Jesus being asked to do? Is Jesus being utilized to justify an identity? If so, for what reason? Which Jesus are we referencing? For we receive at least four different versions from the gospel alone. Are extra-biblical accounts of Jesus credible? Or is canon the only name in this game? Are we employing Jesus to conflate Jesus and Christ, as if these two are and have always existed synonymously? What *is* the relationship between Jesus and Christ? There are no easy answers to these questions, and Christianity, quite frankly, has been debating them for quite some time. Put simple, this is the heart of theological interpretation.

My concern regarding Jesus is that its deployments can all too quickly be recaptured by a hegemonic framing of theological thought. Jesus, in this example, is appealed to on the basis of identity. If this is the case, the theology might only get as far as “stir in X identity to theology; problem solved.” To use Linn Marie Tonstad’s framing, we may still be engaging apologetics.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ It is a matter of another study altogether, but there might be value in exploration this propensity to conflate Jesus and Christ, especially in relation to assertions of Chalcedon in 451.

⁵⁸ See Preciado, *Dysphoria mundi*, 40–44.

⁵⁹ See Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 1–15. It is important to note that Tonstad is stressing a form of *queer* apologetics, which derives its conceptual framework from traditional apologetics.

From a queer perspective, we would need to interrogate the disruption that causes us to rethink Theology, and not simply expand it. As indicative from my position elaborated in chapter two, such apologetic strategies only foment the problem, because the incorporation of an ontologically negated category into the totality of a structural system does not complete or perfect the system:⁶⁰ this is, in my opinion, the myth of the liberal progress narrative. To connect to other formulations, this could also be understood as the limits of tolerance as explored by Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini; though, to be fair, their analysis is much more rooted in political and juridical structures than in theological discrepancies.⁶¹

I am more concerned with the suspension of identity because it calls into question the very mechanisms and logics of representation within the social and theological structures that have produced the identity as such. The theological category of Christ—as well as the dildo—facilitate this suspension of identity, while simultaneously offering opportunities of bodily comportment and life outside these categories. This does not mean Jesus has left the picture, but I would render the importance of Jesus as serving a different function, one that perhaps seeks to glean ethical comportment to systems of domination from the position of exclusion. We can keep the potentially historical Jesus in his social location and critically ask what we can learn ethically from such accounts, and we can ask if the theological category of Christ is serving a different function within the Christian imagination.

⁶⁰ This way of thinking also runs counter to the foundational liberation ethics of Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation*. See the opening pages of the Part II (“Critical Ethics, Antihegemonic Validity, and the Praxis of Liberation”) for a snapshot of the liberatory critical political ethics, 205–214.

⁶¹ See Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2004).

The appositional framing thus calls attention to pitfalls contained within the question of Jesus. In terms of Preciado's critiques of separatist lesbian and transphobic feminisms, by clinging to Jesus as the terms of the theological intervention runs the risk of not breaking free from the somatic techniques of the heterocentric regime but doubling down on their terms through inversions of somatic privilege (e.g., the vagina or anus replaces the penis).⁶² Just as Preciado does not rid the world of penises,⁶³ and how we cannot rid the world of the particularity of the historical Jesus, it is important to understand how these constructed realities function.

Yes, the penis (also the vagina and anus for Preciado), as well as Jesus, are *constructed* too—in terms of how heterosexualism demands they function. Remember, the logic of heterosexualism already is the logic of the dildo. The penis—or absence of penis—has been constructed within the heterocentric regime to claim genitals are the determinate difference of sex (the definite article used intentionally), with the penis wrapping itself around the phallus (once again, despite this alignment to be theoretically in question).

Theologically, even Jesus is a constructed category. The gospels are not strict biographically narratives but exist in a different genre that already blends narrative, a form of history, and theology. Additionally, in matters of Theology, the gospels are *not* presenting a

⁶² See Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, “The dildo deconstructs any form of sexual authority. Inverting binaries to turn the subordinated terms (*vagina, anus*) into the privileged term (*penis*) leaves the hierarchal, authoritarian structure of meaning in tact, but the dildo (the alien, the object, the unsexual) defers authority indefinitely,” 67; Preciado, *Manifesto contrasexual*, 104–105.

⁶³ Preciado does not take the route of radical feminists like Valeria Salonas. Yet other trans theorists have taken up Solanas' work in wild ways. See Chu, *Females*. See also *TSQ* 7, no.3 , where other trans theorists responded to the growing presence of Chu in trans theory.

Christian Theology, as such a tradition did not exist at the time.⁶⁴ The accounts presented, then, serve a particular purpose and seek to convey a particular message; this being the bind of biblical history and interpretation and later Christian theological development—after all, canon determined which gospels would be elevated and which would fall to the wayside.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the Jesus presented by the gospels functions; it serves a purpose. While I lean more on Christ, it should also be noted the gospels do engage Christic formation; however, it should be stressed this Christic formation is still occurring *prior* to a Christian theological imagination. While the Johannine account is certainly fraught with Anti-Judaism, this text still functions within a time period when Christianity—as a discreet, seemingly immemorial tradition—simply was not fully-formed.⁶⁶

Invoking Jesus, especially in terms of the potentially historical person, for the purposes concerning radical inclusion *à la* queer (among others) run into dubious impasses.⁶⁷ Here, one of the most pressing concerns in relation to Christic (and Christian) formation is the portrayal of Jesus as the radically inclusive religious leader. This foments Anti-Jewish readings of Jesus, and

⁶⁴ This goes together with the tendency to read Pauline Christic formations (which were also *not* written as Christian theology) *ex post facto* into the gospels—the narratives thus becoming illuminated through Paul’s words. This is, plain and simple, a theological interpretive choice.

⁶⁵ It is also important to note the matter of a stable canon is arbitrary as well. Martin Luther historically *removed* texts from the “official” canon when he translated the bible into the common language. Again, these actions call into question the purpose and function of texts and resulting theology.

⁶⁶ For Anti-Jewishness with the Gospel of John, see Adele Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant: Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John* (London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018). For messianic construction with biblical literature and antiquity see, Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008). A special thanks to Olivia Stewart-Lester for conversation and aid concerning New Testament scholarship.

⁶⁷ I will not address these pitfalls here, but Tonstad has given a wonderful overview in “The Limits of Inclusion.”

in contemporary times, can lead to Anti-Semitism as Judaism has be framed as the perpetrators of exclusion.

The function of Christ becomes the concern for this theology,⁶⁸ alongside the function of the dildo concerning sexuality. It bears repeating, the central aim of this project is to not chart a total genealogy of this conceptual apparatus; rather, I am concerned with exploring contemporary deployments of sexual theology.

Recourse to Jesus or the penis only reveals the hypostatization—or apotheosization—of the somatic techniques of the heterocentric regime. Christotechtonics is asking us to *unlearn* these techniques. As noted, Preciado has located countersexual reversal practices derived from performance art as heuristic techniques that short-circuit the system. This will be the focus of chapter seven. The emphasis of “counter-conduct” derived from Foucault means this is not a project of *unrelenting* negation (though it is certainly shot through with negativity), nor does it settle on a sense of hopeful longing. It involves action. Simply wanting—desiring—something different and longing for that elsewhen and elsewhere is not enough. I contend that perhaps the most challenging aspect of *Countersexual Manifesto* is that it provides the mechanisms for a way out amidst its deconstructions. This oscillation between idealized countersexual framework and deconstructionism of the heterocentric regime is the concern of the interlude.

Interlude

It perhaps may be apparent now, but *Countersexual Manifesto*—its theories, its calls to action, the ways in which each translation and edition of the text itself is modified—is a hard text to pin down. I have wrestled for some time regarding how to position this text among its

⁶⁸ See Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 95–96.

contemporaries, for Preciado names the philosophical schools that inform *Countersexual Manifesto*; nonetheless, he deviates from them and also engages them in a non-Anglo-American reception.

No doubt, *Countersexual Manifesto* is a text of trans theory. However, it side-steps—what will become—some trends within queer theory; most notably, unrelenting antinormativity. Make no mistake, a *critique of normativity* is still occurring,⁶⁹ yet Preciado has provided a vision for the beyond. Such a vision is a daring move, perhaps even naïve. This articulation elsewhere and elsewhere facilitates a both-neither project. While I researched around *Countersexual Manifesto*—and later expanded to his corpus of works—I kept chaffing against a pronounced aesth-ethical disposition. In analyzing Preciado’s work, and perhaps in contrast to his intentions, I currently place Preciado’s ideas into the philosophical camp of *metamodernism*.⁷⁰ It is beyond the scope of this project to present a comprehensive overview of metamoderism; however, I will bring forward a few salient markers. These will be taken from the landmark contribution to the school of thought by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, as well as the notable monograph *Metamodernism: The Future of Theory* by Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm.

⁶⁹ I take this framing from Jakobsen, *The Sex Obsession*, 41.

⁷⁰ This categorization explains a certain difficulty deriving theological insight from Preciado—in the sense of striking similar beats along the way: you cannot recreate an affective regime that is a perfect facsimile into another realm. Methodologically, I am more interested in queer and trans theories as starting points of theology which produce—for lack of better words—a new theology; not a methodology that starts from more traditional or normative theological positions and seeks to absorb queer and trans. These sentiments are parsed in greater detail in chapter two. Nonetheless, by way of analysis, it serves to dissuade, perhaps in vain, charges that christotechnics is only a gimmick of evocative gestures.

There was a time I had also considered *Countersexual Manifesto* from the perspective of Object-Oriented Ontology. While Graham Harman’s foundational text, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London, UK: Pelican, 2018), also touches on the prefix “meta-,” I found OOO to be insufficient to account for the oscillations within Preciado’s work. While the dildo is certainly an object of utmost importance, it fails to truly displace the sexual subject; instead, more so advocating for a rethinking of the subject. See also Storm, *Metamodernism*, and his treatment of New Materialism (often considered alongside OOO), 191–192.

To begin, the “meta” in metamodernism plays upon the multiple definitions from Greek (“with,” “between,” and “beyond”), leading Vermeulen and van den Akker to state the following: “[M]etamodernism should be situated epistemologically *with* (post) modernism, ontologically *between* (post) modernism, and historically *beyond* (post) modernism.”⁷¹ In similar fashion to how the dildo necessitate undoings, for this theological project some ideas of metaphysics may need to be tabled. Storm, who is not precisely following an affective-aesthetic sentimentality charted by Vermeulen and van den Akker, works toward articulating what comes after postmodernism⁷² and presents a more formal structure of thought.

Vermeulen, van den Akker, and Storm are all interested in what comes after postmodernism, and all avoid the “syntactically correct but semantically meaningless term post-postmodernism.”⁷³ Additionally, they are not contending postmodernism, or even modernism, are done with. Metamodernism, rather, articulates the existence—but importantly the oscillation—of all three of these sentimentalities. There is, put simple, “a new *sens*, a new meaning and direction.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, “Notes on Metamodernism,” *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 2 (2010), 2. <https://doi.org/10.3402/jac.v2i0.5677>.

⁷² To be clear, the project of determining what comes after postmodernism is also a driving concern for Vermeulen and van den Akker.

⁷³ Vermeulen and van den Akker, “Notes on Metamodernism,” 3.

⁷⁴ Vermeulen and van den Akker, “Notes on Metamodernism,” 4. From Storm, see *Metamodernism*: “From the vantage of modernism, metamodernism may look like postmodernism: because it rejects table-slapping appeals to objectivity; because it rejects the purifying of values from facts; because it undermines Eurocentrism; because it is so skeptical that it has even become skeptical of skepticism. It may look like postmodernism because it grants antiessentialism, discards realism, radicalizes doubt, and deepens the linguistic turn. And most fundamentally, it may look like postmodernism because it actually takes postmodernism seriously, trying to articulate and work through postmodern philosophical claims instead of rejecting them as mere obscurantism. This practice is a necessary first step to working through postmodernism’s failings.

From the vantage of postmodernism, metamodernism may look like modernism: because it doubts the skeptical doxa and negative dogmatism of postmodernism; because it returns evidence to the appraisal of values; because it undermines Eurocentrist universalism without altogether rejecting generalizations. It may look like

Vermeulen and van den Akker will employ the language of feeling, evoking *sentire*—to feel; to sense, as it were. This sentimentality (any sentimentality), I contend, can structure affective regimes. Recall part I of this project and charting the oscillations out of and into Theology and gender and sexuality studies. Oscillation is par for the course when it comes to metamodernism. “The metamodern is constituted by the tension, no, the double-bind, of a modern desire for *sens* and a postmodern doubt about the sense of it all.”⁷⁵

Countersexual Manifesto reads as a calculated naivety. The dildo disrupts our sense of it all, disrupts our epistemology and ontology, yet it also provides a *sens* to help us understand the disruption that is occurring. The dildo can be used, but never possessed in the sense of ownership, but we can also be overcome through a possession of the dildo—a “loss of sexual sovereignty in order to finally gain a plastic pleasure.”⁷⁶ The dildo stretches toward an impossible possibility.

When *Countersexual Manifesto* is positioned along other works of Preciado, like *Can The Monster Speak?*, there appear other resonances. As noted in chapter two, Preciado is seeking a way out, especially in the somatic techniques of heterosexualism that psychoanalysis upholds.⁷⁷ Storm’s hope for a metamodernism project states, “We must seek the way out and forward,

modernism because of its attempt to articulate a system, grant the possibility of translation, and provide productive theories, and because of its call for compassion and emancipatory (if humble) knowledge. Most fundamentally, it may look like modernism because it articulates itself clearly and with a minimum of jargon—a communication style that is necessary for cutting through bullshit and finding a path forward out of the trap of endless, eternal (re)turns and superficial re-brandings,” 277.

⁷⁵ Vermeulen and van den Akker, “Notes on Metamodernism,” 6.

⁷⁶ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 69; Preciado, *Manifesto countersexual*, 106.

⁷⁷ Preciado, *Can The Monster Speak?*, 27–33; Preciado, *Je suis un monstre qui vous parle*, 28–37.

because once we do we will be able to build a better world together.”⁷⁸ The way out can be understood as an ethical comportment and vision. Later, Storm provides the following: “[I]f you have been reading this with a mind turned only toward critique and without a conscious and thought-out alternative, I would like you to think about the following question: if not this, then what?”⁷⁹ Storm’s concerns derive from the bind the human sciences have found themselves in concerning postmodernism.⁸⁰ Per Preciado, he has given us a schematic to countersexuality, despite how outrageous it may appear; Preciado has provided the “what then.”

A component of Storm’s formal construction addresses this bind, or hesitancy, to say anything. Within his chapter regarding a process social ontology, Storm critiques the posturing of postmodern skepticism for the sake of postmodern skepticism, especially in relation to the constructed nature of social phenomena and fear of saying anything that possesses a whiff of essence. Writes Storm:

When all we were doing was destabilizing essences, we often left ourselves unable to say anything at all for fear of accidentally essentializing. But when we realize that we were really reacting to the perceived opposition of the processual nature of the social to the supposedly fixed and rigid identity of natural kinds, we can relax in the insight that to exist as a social entity is to be conditioned, to be the product of causally unfolding processes. Thus, we can make certain generalizations while also recognizing that we are talking about processes in flux, and that whatever we

⁷⁸ Storm, *Metamodernism*, 8.

⁷⁹ Storm, *Metamodernism*, 256. Storm will arrive at a revised version of virtue ethics. I think this is indicative of the Neo-Aristotelean turn of these past years in relation to virtue ethics. While the discernment of the good is all fine and well, perhaps metamodernism—with its oscillation of modern and postmodern—will have better luck at mediating this tension of what “the good” is. The concept of “the good life” was also central to Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism*, for what happens when our cluster of promises does not give us what we want?

⁸⁰ Storm also notes the slipperiness of the term postmodernism itself (and its friends poststructuralism and French theory). Throughout the text, Storm appeals to a history of Anglo-American reception of continental theories—often resulting in taking the flashiest pieces and assembling them under names like poststructural or postmodern, despite this language not being deployment by the thinkers that supposedly undergird these schools of thought. We can look toward queer theory and the notion of Edelman’s antisocial theory, yet this was an external term said of Edelman’s work, not necessarily the guiding theoretical positioning Edelman was articulating.

say now can and will likely be subject to change in the future. Nevertheless, our observations can be incredibly useful—they can help us to gain a more accurate picture of the stage of unfolding we are in now, as well as those that have come before.⁸¹

For our purposes here, salient features of metamodernism include process social ontology and hylosemiotics. It is also important to note the recent publication of this text (2021) and Storm's passing mention of nearly a half-dozen follow-up texts continuing to flesh out metamodernism. This above quotation comes from the chapter dedicate to process social ontology, which works through the negation of the negation regarding social construction. As the above allude toward, the posture of postmodern skepticism all the way down is *passé* at best, and downright dangerous at worst, if we consider that a postmodern disposition could foreclose any meaningful claim on the present. Rather, a process social ontology allows us to arrive at possible articulations in the continuous unfolding social process.⁸²

Additionally, Storm overviews what he terms hylosemiotics (a larger project in collaboration with his brother and one of the several future projects noted) to connote matter and forest semiotics, which they hope will render the hermeneutics-semiotics divide moot.⁸³ Storm is pushing beyond what he sees as the bind of the linguistic turn⁸⁴ and the impasse that meaning and translation possess some impossibility attached to them. Rather than completely throw the linguistic turn out the window, Storm notes the skepticism the linguistic turn has provided is not useless. However, hylosemiotics asks us to push beyond human constraints of signification and

⁸¹ Storm, *Metamodernism*, 99.

⁸² Halberstam, "Nice Trannies," 328.

⁸³ Storm, *Metamodernism*, 151–152.

⁸⁴ See Storm's "Opening" regarding his thoughts on these disciplinary "turns," *Metamodernism*, 3–4.

meaning making. Hylosemiotics, then, is a panspecies network of signification and meaning making.⁸⁵ Of these two salient features from Storm, christotechnics concerns itself more with process social ontology.

There are a couple resonances I want to bring forward. First, part one of this project framed this research exploration as a social theology, writing toward how guild Theology produces the limiting factors of sociality under heterosexualism. Pursuant to political attunement via discernment of socio-juridical mechanisms that produce the social and political restraints of heterosexuality, part I contended that weighing-in functions to allude to counter forms of sociality. Rather than calling for the complete dissolution of the sociality of Theology, part I primed us to consider counter-conduct as a form of sociality that operates in a fashion akin to Storm's framing of process social ontology.

Enjoined with Storm, it perhaps is more apt to look at the social process that is occurring. Put another way, there is no clean break. Per metamodernism, modernism and postmodernism have not vacated the intellectual landscape and knowledge production within these realms still occurs. Thus, from a metamodernist perspective, we might say that the sense of stability with sexual dimorphism that heterosexualism upholds shifts into the register of social process, a more fluid understanding. This is hardly a scandalous utterance, yet Storm takes it a step further.

A more fluid ontology does not leave us in the position to bar speech and writing. Rather, we can continue to explore these unfolding processes, knowing full well they will change. By way of anecdote, when I teach my religion and gender course, I facilitate a day researching the

⁸⁵ Storm, *Metamodernism*, 152. Storm, noting future work, will lean upon C.S. Peirce, Ruth Millikan, Deirdre Wilson, Dan Sperber, Richard Boyd, and Martin Heidegger. From a gender and sexuality studies perspective, I would love to see conversation with Jacques Derrida, Donna Haraway, and Jack Halberstam.

various ways in which gender, sex, and sexuality have been discussed. We can take the route of discrediting dated definitions wholesale, or we can fold these definitions into broader movements of social process. We end the day by discussing the emergence of social media and the internet, which has opened countless avenues that also create new vocabulary—what was an acceptable term at the start of the semester could be a dated and misinformed term by the end of the semester. Nonetheless, the naming, misnaming, and unnamng of these processes does not leave us unable to say anything; rather, it unveils the mechanisms of social process itself. Bringing forward something noteworthy in the midst of this *process* should not be confused as an essentialization.⁸⁶

Second, I want to suggest that Preciado's theorizations around the dildo also point toward a form of social process. *Countersexual Manifesto* contains a genealogy of sexual prostheses, and how the dildo, as prosthesis, need not represent a clean break from what has come before—even though the force and shock of the dildo may lead people to assume otherwise. But the logic of the dildo is already the logic of heterosexuality. What has occurred within heterosexuality is the creation of sexual stasis; *this*—heterosexuality—becomes the disruption of nature, not the myriad expressions of sex, gender, and sexuality. We will see in the next chapter why intersex, transgender, and queer people represent such a vexing conundrum for this desired stasis. Nonetheless, it can already be noted that such a stasis has never really existed, and this *sens(e)* of stasis is also a contemporary fabulation.

⁸⁶ Furthermore, this disposition also allows Storm an avenue to address how the very categories employed in the academy to describe (religion, art, politics, and more) impact the very thing they are trying to study. Storm will thus argue for more “reflexive human sciences,” *Metamodernism*, 127.

By way of brief wrap-up for this interlude, informed by a both-neither disposition, Vermeulen and van den Akker liken metamodernism to *metaxis*, the “between.”⁸⁷ Just as in their article, there is not ample space to parse out the history of this term; however, it has been strategically chosen to note the in-betweenness regarding modernism and postmodernism; metamodernism is both, but neither. Writes Preciado, “The dildo occupies a strategic position somewhere between the phallus in the penis.”⁸⁸ This sentiment is written in relation to Teresa de Lauretis’ psychoanalytic work; nonetheless, we have already surveyed how the dildo adds in order to replace—it is the dangerous supplement. It is both the penis and phallus insofar as it can be modeled on the genital organ and be a privileged signifier, yet it also neither the penis nor the phallus insofar as the dildo need not be modeled on a genital organ (this is the confusion of the penis as having role in determining sexual difference) and the dildo resists any attempts to transfigure it into the privileged signifier. It volleys between a form of modern idealism and postmodern skepticism, being deployed in a new manner within a metamodern sensibility.

To restate, I read Preciado’s *Countersexual Manifesto* through this lens of metamodernism. Preciado’s theorizations around the dildo and construction of a countersexual society bear the affective oscillations described by Vermeulen and van den Akker, with the openness of the process social ontology of Storm. While the presentation of the “other side” of the negation of the negation (negating heterosexuality often through queerness, but here even negating queerness through the means of the dildo) is quite utopic—we obviously do not live in a

⁸⁷ Vermeulen and van den Akker, “Notes on Metamodernism,” 6.

⁸⁸ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 61; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 97.

countersexual society—we have, nonetheless, gained ethico-aesthetic frameworks to judge the present.⁸⁹ Per metamodernism, the dildo can be read as that which is charting a way out.⁹⁰

Gode from Gode

We finally return to Marcella Althaus-Reid. As noted in the project's interlude prior to this chapter, this is not a project about Althaus-Reid; nonetheless, I am informed by her work. Here, I want to reprise a previous quotation in relation to prosthesis:

Theological prostheses form a restless body in movement challenging the contextual limitations of political and divine character, while at the same time surpassing them. They also form the unbeliever's body, that is, a body which has stopped believing in divine sexual grand narratives, or the atheists of heterosexually based theologies. They bring impatience, irony, and a capacity to destroy by imitation.⁹¹

By this point in *The Queer God* the movement of the theological subject has already been aligned with concepts of nomadism.⁹² Additionally, Althaus-Reid has drawn upon a rhizome ordering of knowledge present with Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*.⁹³ The structure of the rhizome is indicative for Althaus-Reid's project. Rather than a perspective like a tree, appeals to the rhizome challenge an ordering and structuring of knowledge, information, and even coherence. This, subsequently, also facilitates a challenge of authority when thinking of hegemonic institutions.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Future work could even chart conversations with Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.

⁹⁰ Cf. Preciado, *Can The Monster Speak?*, 27–33; Preciado, *Je suis un monstre qui vous parle*, 27–37.

⁹¹ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 30–31.

⁹² Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 28.

⁹³ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 88.

⁹⁴ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 88.

While Althaus-Reid invokes the rhizome in relation to biblical hermeneutics, I reference it here to return to our thinking of prostheses—the object that forms the restless body and produces the permutation of the sexual theologian or theology itself. When the arborescence of a “root-tree” model is sundered in relation to a chain of authority, hitherto unnamed and unknown sexuality and divinity can be discerned. This characteristic of permutation—challenging contextual limitations—de-centers the subject.

Following the argument of metamodernism and Preciado, this subject is not to be confused with the unmarked universality of the heterosexual cisgender European white male. Rather, this subject is derived from locating subject formation otherwise—in this case, in relation to the dildo. We could recall the language of the shifting to a location and economy of desire. This subject, also, is incompatible with the projects of Systematic Theology, for it reveals the heterosexual fabulation that resides at the heart of the project. Systematic/Cis-tematic Theology partakes in the grand sexualized and racialized narratives that disappear their fabrication behind words like nature. Worse yet, in connection to God, these sexualized and racialized narratives are disappeared into the very essence of God.⁹⁵

Prostheses, though, confounds these narratives; it creates a form of impatience, irony, and a capacity to destroy by imitation⁹⁶—a dangerous supplement.⁹⁷ Rather than this destitution represent the destitution of the entirety of theology (here, this could be either uppercase or lowercase), the dissolution of these grand narratives allow theology to happen anew. In respect to

⁹⁵ See recent challenges to these disappeared narratives and ascertaining the centrality of queerness in the essence of divinity in Miguel Díaz, *Queer God de Amor* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2022).

⁹⁶ Cf. Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 31 & 87.

⁹⁷ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 66–68; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 103–105.

The Queer God, this is a more open-ended project. Althaus-Reid provided more contemporary interventions concerning gender and sexuality, but did not provide a historical reassessment of the entirety of Theology through this lens.

Far from locating queerness in history (I follow the claims of Tonstad and Coviello), this framing from Althaus-Reid allows a reassessment of sexual narratives that pervade Christian imagination. To date, arguably the greatest compiler of these genealogies has been Mark D. Jordan. I follow a similar trajectory as Althaus-Reid. I am not seeking, in this project, to provide a historical reassessment of the Christian project; but offer another hermeneutical lens derived from the epistemic location of queer and trans life to critically interrogate the contemporary moment. The role of the dildo, here, means that, even in the contemporary moment, our understanding of our own subjectivity becomes foreign to us.

Gode, That's Good

Christotechtonics; the paroxysm complete.

This chapter presented the initial theological and philosophical underpinnings of christotechtonics. Rather than a theology informed by sexual and gender expressions, it is a theology *derived* from sexual and gender expressions, which reveals that *all* theology therefore is derived from sexual and gender expressions and managements.⁹⁸ The centrality of the dildo allows us to interrogate the emplacement and displacement of Christ concerning the biopolitical technology of Theology.

Christotechtonics says that Christ is a dildo. Challenging existential essentialisms of Christ, christotechtonics concerns itself with contemporary deployments of Christ rather than a

⁹⁸ See Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*.

faithfulness to doctrinal development. Nonetheless, these are not mutually exclusive endeavors, but tasks that are simply too large for any single project.

Christotechtonics takes its starting point from quotidian objects of queer, trans, and feminist sex lives. The ordinary, in this instance, can hold extraordinary potential. The dildo need not be fashioned in the likeness of a penis, though it can be. The dildo is anything that modifies the sexual subject. This text, if it has proven to cause you to re/think of your sexuality, is also a dildo. It challenges and excites erogenous zones across the body outside the parameters of genitalia.

Christotechtonics has been read alongside metamodernism, therefore oscillation between *sens(e)* occurs. There is interplay between a form of modern idealism and a form of postmodern skepticism. It is both and simultaneously neither. Following in trends of gender and sexuality studies, Christotechtonics is strategically in between various binary distinctions to reveal how many of these various binary distinctions are, in fact, false. Simultaneously, this does not mean christotechtonics cannot articulate a reality of the present moment, even though it too will be subject to change over time.

Christotechtonics is not perfect, it cannot be perfect; it cannot be stasis. Following Storm's articulation of metamodernism, christotechtonics describes a theological lens regarding this fleeting contemporary moment. It is not a matter of if, but when, christotechtonics will become inadequate to analyze and propose interventions to our understandings of sexual theology—this, for me, is process social ontology in action. By writing about theology, and functions of theology, in this way, christotechtonics is participating in a process that outpaces itself. We can see this process easier looking backward rather than forward. In an extreme

example, provide a church father with some Jürgen Moltmann informed by Ernst Bloch, the atrocities of World War II, and the Nazi death camps and there would be some disconnects. Looking forward, it is simply the necessity of humility. Any good theory must be debatable and refutable. What is important is if the necessary abstraction attending theory allows us to make meaningful assessments of what is under study. For now, I contend christotechtonics does this; however, the future is always uncertain. Nonetheless, there is much more to still be said vis-à-vis christotechtonics.

The next chapter will be a case study of a christotechtonic analysis in action. The document under scrutiny will be the 2019 Vatican document “*Male and Female He Created Them*”: *Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*. The analysis will reveal that a particular (s)extual aesthetic has been constructed, but that such (s)extual aesthetic hinges upon the function of Christ to determine the lines of inclusion/exclusion. This will serve to deepen the biopolitical function of this theological category. All is dildo. Even Christ.

CHAPTER FIVE

A COUNTERTHEOLOGICAL READING EXERCISE

In 2019, The Congregation of Catholic Education, a curia office within the Vatican,¹ published “*Male and Female He Created Them*”: *Toward a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education* (hereinafter abbreviated to *MF*). This chapter conducts a critical reading of *MF*, utilizing both a social theology hermeneutic of christotechtonics, as well as decolonial insights from Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Phrased more colloquially, this is a queer and trans reading of *MF*. Utilizing a social theology hermeneutic of christotechtonics, I contend the paranoia of perceived crisis regarding the ideology of “gender theory” inverts itself into an interpretation of Christian anthropology and the reification of the authors’ own gender ideology that is expressed through sexual dimorphism and the unequivocal primary of the family as filiated through biological complementarity which is discerned, fulfilled, and unified in Christ. Christotechtonics interrogates how Christ functions to sanction this *fabricated* anthropology that arbitrarily privileges colonial cis-heteronormative sexualities, while simultaneously calling for violence to be enacted toward intersex and transgender people explicitly, and bisexual and queer people implicitly.

This chapter will progress in two stages. First, some preliminary remarks regarding the scholarly anchors that inform this chapter are in order. This section overviews my framing of social theology and the hermeneutic of christotechtonics. Additionally, I root my thinking for this

¹ Since its publication, the Congregation of Catholic Education has merged with the Pontifical Council for Culture, creating the new Dicastery for Culture and Education.

chapter in the theories of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, primarily his conception of abyssal and nonabyssal exclusion as it relates to ontological erasure. I will then transition into the interrogation regarding how Christ functions, with reference to a lone mention of Jesus in *MF*. Due to internal logics of *MF*, this section will oscillate across the document. This allows examination of the document's coherence for some, and the displaced violent incoherence for others, which upholds the fabrication of heterosexuality as the only possibility within natural law. *MF* represents a deployment of Christ and a social theology hermeneutic of christotechtonics subverts the logics of heterosexuality.

Scholarly Anchors

A major definition is in order. Namely, what exactly is a social theology hermeneutic of christotechtonics? I will parse the two components of this phrasing.

Recall from part I that social theology concerns itself with theological thought that delimits sociality. A social theological framework, then, can allow for the discernment of competing socialities. In this case, social theology is also inflected by forms of catholic social teaching. I follow in the trajectories articulated by Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar that note the alignment of social teaching with liberal democracy.² Through such endeavors, a unique (though unsurprising) alignment of Catholic and evangelical political theological goals emerge that are embedded within both the social sphere and the theological sphere. For Sullivan-Dunbar the focus has been abortion, for this chapter the focus is in relation to trans and intersex people. Despite these differences, I chime with Sullivan-Dunbar in the recognition that particular interpretations (or conceptions) of the human person have the power to erode or vivify

² Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar, "Catholic Abortion Discourse and the Erosion of Democracy," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 43, no. 1 (2023): 245–263.

democracy (recall from chapter two). If Sullivan-Dunbar's analysis tracks abortion (and the theological assertion of human life beginning at conception and ending at natural death); here, the analysis tracks the theological assertions of biological complementarity and the erasure of non-heterosexual aligned people (trans, intersex, queer, bisexual, etc.).

Sullivan-Dunbar's argument serves as helpful reminder that though one may not identify as Catholic (denomination), it does not mean one should ignore documents that are catholic (universal). Through the entanglement of liberal democracy and Catholic and Protestant (predominantly evangelical) Theology, a social theological analysis emerges. This social theology is also a political theology, and it is the elision of theology and politics (here, referred to behind the abstract concept of democracy). This social theology eschews the classic standards of Systematic Theology. While reference to God and Christ is contained within *MF*, there is little sustained denominationally Catholic orthodoxy regarding these dogma and doctrine. Rather, there is a gesture made to a vaguer notion of these abstract theological concepts, which ideally transcend a denominational fingerprint and can pass into catholic mores that are shared between Catholic and Protestant.

Second, christotechtonics is a framework I have developed, which is derived from the trans theories of Paul B. Preciado. In brief, christotechtonics is a countertheology that studies the appearance, formation, and utilization of Christ. Christ functions as a biopolitical tool within the technology of theology. Christotechtonics names the prostheticity of Christ in relation to the surface of human bodies—the body becomes the site of “displacement and emplacement.”³ Christotechtonics is both hermeneutic, a lens through which sexual ideological constructions are

³ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 41; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 75.

interrogated, and a heuristic, a technique that intervenes in these sexual ideological constructions. Simultaneously, christotechtonics is neither a new universal method vying for hegemonic control, nor simply a contextual theology, which only serves to uphold partitioned theological spaces for “identities” (woman, queer, Black, trans*) that name the “catachresis of this nothing, of this ontological negation.”⁴

This chapter will focus on the hermeneutic of christotechtonics. Thus, the phrase can be understood in whole. A social theology hermeneutic of christotechtonics functions as the hermeneutical lens that analyzes both social theology and the biopolitics of Christ. Specifically, it interrogates how Christ acts as a fulcrum within social theology. Therefore, any concern regarding orthodoxy is bypassed for the performativity of Christ.⁵ While the notion of performativity may lend itself to rhetorical function, we cannot lose site of the reality that this rhetorical function calls for somatic interventions. To that end, we must hold the following in our minds. How does the rhetoric function to render Christ as prosthetic? Who can wield Christ, and who cannot? Who is within the function of Christ, and who is outside it? Finally, what does it mean to be outside the function of Christ?

Additionally, this chapter is indebted to Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and his work concerning epistemologies of the South.⁶ De Sousa Santos’ project concerns the shuttering of critical frameworks from the global (geopolitical economic framings) and epistemic (cognitive

⁴ Edelman, *Bad Education*, 19.

⁵ For performativity, see Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 34, 183–193.

⁶ See, in particular, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014); Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

framings) North. De Sousa Santos helps dissolve some tendencies to discredit epistemologies of the cognitive South coming from the global North. This is deepened through his formulation of abyssal and non-abyssal exclusions.

Abyssal and nonabyssal exclusions exist as porous boundaries within the postcolonial realities of metropolitan sociability and colonial sociability. Forms of nonabyssal exclusion within metropolitan sociability may include Black students learning from strictly white canons, Muslims and other religious minorities' modes of life devalued amidst the backdrop of Christian hegemony, or women receiving a lower salary than men.⁷ Within these examples there are clear inequalities present within the metropolitan sociability, yet there is still the possibility of movement toward equitable ends. Hence, non-abyssal exclusion. An exclusion has still occurred, but it has not transitioned into abyssal exclusion.

Nonetheless, these examples can transition from nonabyssal to abyssal exclusion. The Black individual stopped by police and indiscriminately abused, or worse, murdered, simply for being Black. Islamophobic attacks simply due to practicing Islam and their existence in proximity to terrorist rhetoric. A woman being violently sexually assaulted simply because she is a woman. These examples cross from metropolitan sociability to colonial sociability, from nonabyssal exclusion to abyssal exclusion. Writes de Sousa Santos, "The crucial difference between abyssal and nonabyssal exclusion is that only the former is premised upon the idea that

⁷ Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 22–23. These are solitary examples to illustrate the movement across nonabyssal and abyssal exclusion. In reality, intersectional analysis shows there are myriad factors that function to enact nonabyssal and abyssal exclusion.

the victim or target suffers from an ontological *capitis diminutio* [a diminished capacity] for not being fully human, rather a fatally degraded sort of human being.”⁸

Abyssal exclusion transitions into the colonial territory of ontologically negated existence. This sense of ontological negation chimes with Edelman’s notion of queerness naming the void of this negation as noted above. Additionally, and for the purposes of this chapter and a reprisal of chapter two, legal intervention via rights expansion does not suffice, as it simply reconfigures colonial sociability and continues to disappear the abyssal exclusion of those who cannot or refuse to assimilate to an expanded rights conception of the human (i.e., the acceptable Black person, model minority, and docile woman).⁹ Such reconfigurations fail to address the ontological void of these “categories” that reside at the center of coloniality.

These scholarly underpinnings and dispositions shape this critical interpretation. The social theology hermeneutic of christotechnics demands an epistemic shift, one that is indifferent to the systems—or the “theo/logics”—of the cognitive North. In this regard, we can reconsider Althaus-Reid’s interrogation that contextual theologies need to delink the Third World (what Santos denotes at the geographic or global South) solely as a geographic description and expand into epistemology.¹⁰ Therefore, I consider Althaus-Reid’s archive adjustment in *The Queer God* reflects this movement.

This also sheds lights on Althaus-Reid’s pointed criticisms of hetero-patriarchy within *Indecent Theology*. Within, Althaus-Reid notes how hetero-patriarchal domination has enjoyed

⁸ Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 23.

⁹ See Spade, *Normal Life*; Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence*.

¹⁰ Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 25.

many luxuries associated with the First World (she takes aim mostly at theologians, ecclesial authorities, and politicians—people who have access to the cognitive North through the language of Santos), while being geographical located in the Third World. Althaus-Reid will then privilege the epistemic situatedness of women within the Third World, survivors of sexual abuse, survivors of state-sanctioned violence. What this shows is that there are pockets of the cognitive North in the global South, just as there are pockets of the cognitive South in the global North. *The Queer God* contends it is perhaps dismissive to assume the global North does not possess any pockets of the cognitive South. This opens many doors for transnational collaboration.

Finally, an important terminological note regarding *MF*. I follow the lead of Mark D. Jordan and note there is a semantic necessity of abstraction regarding “church” employed to note a network of bureaucracy and “Catholic” to refer to Roman Catholic.¹¹ While neither fully reducible to these terms nor fully capturing the complexities indicative to both, such terminological shorthand is required to discuss these matters. Pursuant to Jordan’s argument, while the definition of these terms is always up for grabs, we must ask for whom do the squabbles regarding definitional boundaries serve? Additionally, what conversations are being silenced in favor of a highly nuanced attention to definitional parameters?

Concerning Christ and Jesus

Since this chapter contends a social theology hermeneutic of *christotechtonics*, it is only fitting that Christ is treated first. “Christ” only appears in one paragraph in *MF*. Therefore, plenty

¹¹ Mark D. Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1.

hinges on this deployment, which is tucked away in the church's construction of a properly ordered Christian anthropology. Due to its importance, the paragraph shall be quoted at length.

The primacy of the family in educating children is supplemented by the subsidiary role of schools. Strengthened by its roots in the Gospel, "The Catholic school sets out to be a school for the human person and of human persons. 'The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching; this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school.' This affirmation, stressing man's vital relationship with Christ, reminds us that it is in His person that the fullness of the truth concerning man is to be found. For this reason the Catholic school, in committing itself to the development of the whole man, does so in obedience to the solicitude of the Church, in the awareness that all human values find their fulfillment and unity in Christ. This awareness expresses the centrality of the human person in the educational project of the Catholic school."¹²

Questions rise to the surface with this paragraph, for it functions as a dense transfer point of ideological construction and implication. These following questions are but a snapshot of questions that can be gleaned from the above quotation. What is the relation of the family to the school? What is its importance? How is the human person being defined? How does Christ relate to this human person? What is the development of the "whole man" and how does Christ sanction human values? What human person is the centrality of the educational project of the school? Finally, and aiming toward a question not explicitly from this paragraph, is Christ functioning the same way as Jesus?

As noted, these questions are far from exhaustive regarding this paragraph from *MF*.

They do, however, carry a dense matrix of implications, which will be elucidated below. These

¹² Congregation for Catholic Education, "*Male and Female He Created Them*": *Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*, Vatican website, February 2, 2019, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20190202_maschio-e-femmina_en.pdf, sec. 39.

questions then serve as a vehicle for a close reading of *MF*, in particular, its deployment of Christ.

What is the Relationship of the Family to the School? What is Its Importance?

Lauded in its initial publication as a fantastic resource for schools (which, it was and still may be), a necessary reassessment is in order. Within the above paragraph, the school plays a subsidiary role in relation to the family. What does this mean? This entails a closer reading of the text. The text is not as focused on the specific deployment of its anthropology in Catholic schools as one might think, though it certainly is a component. Rather, the text is focused on reinforcing educational institutions in general, taking care to present their importance in a hierarchical fashion.

It would also be a misunderstanding to read subsidiary as simply secondary to the family, resulting in the family fulfilling a primary role. While the family is most certainly privileged in this hierarchical construction, it is key to note the hierarchy of educational institutions finds its origins in a more fundamental location: creation itself.

Recourse to creation takes a decided turn toward the natural law tradition, which is not a surprising move for church documents. Additionally, though there have been powerful revisionist approaches to the natural law tradition, they rarely—if ever—are acknowledged as viable revisions to natural law.¹³ A rejection of revisionist natural law frameworks solidifies the

¹³ See Cristina L. H. Traina, *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law: The End of the Anathemas* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999); Vincent C. Llyod, *Black Natural Law* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016); and Craig A. Ford Jr., “Transgender Bodies, Catholic Schools, and a Queer Natural Law Theology of Exploration,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 7, no. 1 (2018): 70–98.

ideological enclosure of colonial cis-heteropatriarchy, which becomes apparent through a choice interpretation of Genesis.

The title of *MF* is derived from the Genesis 1:27 passage (glossed in the text as “God created man in his own image [...] male and female he created them.”).¹⁴ It is the only biblical passage referenced in the text. While it is certainly not necessary to exhaustively proof-text the bible for every argument, there is at least one passage within the New Testament that can complexify this statement: Galatians 3:28 (“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”). We will return to this Galatians passage later.

For now, the concern is how Genesis has been utilized to articulate a Christian anthropology, which is to be understood as a fundamental human anthropology,¹⁵ revolving entirely around biological complementarity (male and female). As such, this *anthropology*, what the authors will later intensify through the language of *Laudato Si'* as an “integral anthropology” (a phrase pairing which never occurs in *Laudato Si'*), holds an intended catholic force of creation.¹⁶ The *oikos* of the earth and the *oikos* of the family must resonate; therefore, the fundamental difference of male and female demands the family must be comprised of this fundamental difference, then the school, and eventually society.

The initial question was slightly misleading, for the concern never *really* resides in either the family or the school, but rather nature itself. Nonetheless, we are left with a noticeable gap.

¹⁴ *MF*, sec. 31.

¹⁵ *MF*, sec. 30.

¹⁶ *MF*, sec. 55.

Despite this anthropology of biological complementarity, the school still fulfills a subsidiary role *to the family* (and not nature) as it concerns educational intuitions. Recourse to nature to properly educate us is not part of this educational equation, yet functions as the fundamental and hierarchical backbone of education. I contend this is not an oversight, but a first step in the fabrication of heterosexuality in *MF*. This recalls how natural law, especially in a revisionist lens, has the ability to understand this beautiful multiplicity within the natural; however, the natural law framework deployed ignores these avenues.

Reason is a necessary component of the natural law tradition, residing in the faculties of the human person. While the family, school, and eventually society should educate toward the end of producing humans capable of reason, the next questions emerge from the paragraph: what is a human person and how are they being defined? How does Christ relate to this human person?

How is the Human Person Being Defined? How does Christ Relate to this Human Person?

The answer to this question is quite simple: male and female. The arrival at the answer, however, is fraught with violence and ontological erasure. I contend recourse to the family, *and not nature*, stems from scientific research that undermines the fundamental difference of male and female, which is *integral* to this anthropology. Additionally, to understand why the definition of the human person is of such importance, we need to explore “gender theory”—arguably the reason for the urgency of this document.¹⁷

¹⁷ *MF*, sec. 1.

“Gender theory” is a complex term, utilized differently by different people.¹⁸ Writes *MF*, “Gender theory (especially in its most radical forms) speaks of a gradual process of denaturalization, that is a move away from *nature* and towards an absolute option for the decision of the feelings of the human subject.”¹⁹ When *MF* writes toward “gender theory” it is writing toward a vague straw argument. Per usual with documents in relation to culture, the church only argues from within its own ideological enclosure; it does not actually seek to give space regarding the matter toward which it is writing.²⁰

There is a very clear vision of what is intended concerning “gender theory” in *MF*, which is any anthropological theory that suggests “sexuality [sic] identity and the family become subject to the same ‘liquidity’ and ‘fluidity’ that characterize other aspects of post-modern cultures.”²¹ As it will succinctly note at the end of the paragraph, this is encapsulated through any theory that is “opposed to anything based on the truth of existence.”²² The ideological enclosure of the church’s position is clear, yet this leads to bodily violence.

¹⁸ See Sara Garbagnoli, “Against the Heresy of Immanence: Vatican’s ‘Gender’ as a New Rhetorical Device Against the Denaturalization of the Sexual Order,” *Religion & Gender* 6, no. 2 (2016): 187–204. <https://doi.org/10.18352/rg.10156>.

¹⁹ *MF*, sec. 19, emphasis in original.

²⁰ We can point to the history surrounding *Humanae Vitae*, where the committee assembled overwhelmingly urged the adoption of contraceptives within Catholicism. What we received as *Humanae Vitae* were the sentiments of a handful of dissenting opinions. Then the justification for its logics was hedged only in relation to the insularity of the church. We see this occur again in relation to the *Pastoral Letter* by Ratzinger; again, couching the argument framed through the insularity of the church. This can also be coupled with other protocols in relation to HIV/AIDS, where the dissemination of contraceptives was rejected (see *Humanae Vitae*) to save human life. We can fast-forward to *Querida Amazonia*, where, despite the church’s dialogue with people, it reinforced the primacy of maleness in relation to community. In these examples, we are seeing the justifications of positions that are not properly taking into consideration the lived realities of peoples.

²¹ *MF*, sec. 19.

²² *MF*, sec. 19.

Let us begin with intersex people (it should be noted that *MF* refers to intersex within scare quotations). The church only references medical discourse (though not cited) which recognizes the binary of XX and XY chromosomal difference. However, even a cursory of research would reveal this is far from the case. Furthermore, this is not limited to the medical sciences, but also research in theology.²³ *MF* acknowledges that one's sex may not be clearly defined, yet it falsely presumes the stability of the XX and XY binary. This means the church has effectively reduced sex (and by extension, gender and sexuality) to be entirely determined by genitals. In cases where genitals are not clearly defined, *doctors* are to intervene toward therapeutic ends as “parents cannot make an arbitrary choice on the issue, let alone society.”²⁴

This culminates in *MF* advocating for church-sanctioned genital mutilation, though it would never frame the matter as such. Furthermore, we see reasons why recourse to nature is bypassed in favor of the family concerning education (though, in this case, even parents are bypassed in favor of a medical system that is willing to uphold the violence of the church). What is occurring is a form of heterosexuality that is dependent upon a visual regime of genitals, meaning, we must see the difference. However, despite being able to see the difference, the church chooses to erase the multiplicities of human nature. Intersex people, determined through a

²³ See the introduction within Susannah Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology* (London, UK: Equinox, 2010) for a survey of literature existing in 2010, 1–23; as well as the glossary of intersex/DSD (Disorders of Sexual Development), 237–246. For more recent scholarship, see Stephanie A. Budwey, *Religion and Intersex: Perspectives from Science, Law, Culture, and Theology* (London, UK: Routledge, 2023). Budwey's text, obviously, would not have been available to the church; however, Cornwall's and the various other texts she cites would have been.

²⁴ *MF*, sec. 24.

visual regime, are rendered invisible.²⁵ The violence done to the human body is not seen as violence, because the body is not yet properly human.

Concerning transgender people, the conversation shifts. Framed in contrast to intersex people, transgender people are presented as selfish individuals who mock intersex people. “This oscillation between male and female becomes, at the end of the day, only a ‘provocative’ display against so-called ‘traditional frameworks,’ and one which, in fact, ignores the suffering of those who have to live situations of ‘sexual indeterminacy.’”²⁶ Much is happening in this statement. For starters, by conjoining intersex and transgender people, *MF* creates a false equivalency of intersex and transgender people. While not mutually exclusive, they are certainly not synonymous. However, such elision is necessary, as sex, gender, and sexuality *must* exist in alignment (male, man, masculine and female, woman, feminine, both under the auspices of heterosexuality).

Secondly, *MF* incorrectly assumes that transgender only refers to the binary formation of male and female; however, it *must* assume this limitation if it is to maintain its own argument. In reality, while some transgender people transition between male and female, many eschew these sexual categories altogether. For this reason, this is why non-binary, queer, and bisexual (and other forms of gender and sexual expression) are implicated within these overt attacks toward intersex and transgender people.

Finally, the conversation transitions to the matter of rational philosophy. While *MF* is poised on the precipice of its invocation of Genesis, here it references Greek and Roman

²⁵ See Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 112; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 160.

²⁶ *MF*, sec. 25.

thinkers. It is a convenient cherry-picking of male-female relationships that order the rational human. However, again, there is a specific intention as this demands a virtue ethics paradigm as well; one where we cannot give ourselves over to our appetitive desires. This is the charge leveled toward transgender people, via *MF*'s assessment of "gender theory" in sec. 19.

Resultingly, *both* intersex and transgender people are effectively rationalized philosophically (but also medically) out of existence. This is the ontological negation of the abyssal exclusion as expressed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos. As is made explicit by *MF*, this opens the door for violence toward the human and the human bodies of intersex and transgender people who have been defined outside the category of human.

This brings us to Christ. If Christ operates as the fulcrum regarding *human* education, where does this leave intersex and transgender people? Furthermore, where does this leave all other people of non-normative sexuality, sex, and gender? I contend that *MF* has effectively rendered non-normative sex, gender, and sexuality outside the function of Christ. Christ the dildo means this function of Christ occurs via dildonic logics, where the logic of heterosexuality already is the logic of the dildo. In this case, in this critical reading of *MF* with the hermeneutic of christotechtonics, the dildonic function of Christ vivifies sexual dimorphism that can sexually reproduce without the need of fertility treatments that would manage embryonic cells. But what simultaneously occurs is the fabrication of the categories of intersex, trans, queer, bisexual, and frankly, all sexualities, genders, and sexes that escape naming and categorization. The embodied realities are outside the vivifying function of Christ afforded sexual dimorphism and are rationalized outside of humanity. This question of what a human is, is not merely language

games of continental philosophy, but the visceral realities that demand the erasure of human life.

However, now we must turn to the next questions.

What is the Development of the “Whole Man” and how does Christ Sanction Human Values?

What Human Person is the Centrality of the Educational Project of the School?

The abrupt summation of the previous questions dovetails into explorations of these next questions. In contrast to intersex people, we can intuit the most ideal formation of sex is clear distinction of male and female through the clear distinction of the penis and the vagina. While genital representation does not always correspond to chromosomal realities, this discrepancy does not seem to concern the church, so long as the visual regime of sexual difference is maintained.

This ideal formation of sex then corresponds to gender and sexuality. Here, sex and gender are conflated, so male=man and female=woman; any breach of this reality reverts to the church’s constructions of transgender as noted above. Concerning sexuality, although never mentioned, the famous *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* appears to still be in play. People attracted to the same sex would then be placed within a form of nonabyssal exclusion. While they may be “intrinsically disordered,” these individuals still maintain a proper sex/gender alignment; though, it should be noted that “homosexuality” is not so easily reducible to simply same-sex attraction.²⁷

But should bisexuals not be placed in this category? While bisexuality is often assumed to infer the attraction to both men and women, a wider accepted definition simply notes the attraction to two *or more* genders. Bisexuality is out of the question, for it cedes ground

²⁷ Cf. Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*, 59.

concerning the stability of male and female, and it becomes a deviant sexuality. Additionally, this would complicate matters in a different direction *à la* the *Pastoral Letter*. Are bisexuals only sometimes or partially intrinsically disordered? This inability to “pin down” the desires of bisexuals that cannot be contorted into the anthropology of sexual difference only results in the usual erasure of bisexuality. This, effectively, is also what has occurred with the framing of queer (a word used only once in *MF* yet imbued with such blatant disregard concerning decades-long conversations, both academically and colloquially, that we cannot treat it here). This is why *MF* takes such direct aim toward intersex and transgender people. They are the explicit target, with bisexuality and queerness as implicit targets. None of these non-normative sex, gender, and sexuality expressions comprise the “whole man.”

The ideal conditions for the “whole man” are found within a properly ordered heterosexual arrangement; namely, the family.²⁸ Thus we return to our centering paragraph. Once nature has been bypassed (for the church is already aware that nature itself does not possess the rigid stability it so desperately needs for its ideology of biological complementarity), the centrality of the family comes into focus. It is a convenient placeholder that reflects contemporary constructions of social life. Writes *MF*, “In the family, knowledge of one’s mother and father allows the child to construct his or her own sexual identity and difference.”²⁹ On the surface, this may appear to be more in alignment with “gender theory.” The church, however, is clear that such nuclear arrangements would lead to the proper sexual outcome, as children can

²⁸ *MF*, sec. 27.

²⁹ *MF*, sec. 27.

see who they are through a relationship with who they are not—the relationship being reduced wholly to the genitals.

This is articulated in the subsequent paragraph: “The physiological *complementarity* of male-female sexual difference assures the necessary conditions for procreation.”³⁰ This may seem a rather bizarre rupture; however, we have progressed from intersex violence to transgender psychopathy, and then from the philosophical erasure of both intersex and transgender people to the reassertion of the primacy of the family through biological complementarity all in the span of five paragraphs. For clarity, this occurs *prior* to the church’s own proposal of Christian anthropology.

Nonetheless, the “whole man” that is alluded to is one that participates within the project of reproductive futurism (not the rhetoric used by *MF*), both ideologically and sexually. Derived from Edelman, reproductive futurism alludes to the foreclosure and regulation of political discourse in favor of the figure of the Child. The Child becomes placeholder to a fantasy of futurity, one which is threatened by those who pose a threat to this futurity through disruption of the regulated political.³¹ Ideologically, then, reproductive futurism secures a unique assemblage and hegemony of the state, or in this case, a religious institution. Importantly, the Child need not be confused with children, for queer children also threaten the Child of reproductive futurism through a disruption of the “just-so” *nature* of the world. Simultaneously, institutions both secular and religious, operating under the bastion of reproductive futurism and the Child, can

³⁰ *MF*, sec. 28, emphasis in original.

³¹ Edelman, *No Future*, 11. While Edelman draws his overall argument from Jacques Lacan, particular his Sinthome lecture, it is possible to also tease out a flare toward Louis Althusser’s formulation of ideological state apparatuses. See Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capital*. An in-depth overview regarding these connections is beyond the scope of this chapter.

profoundly threaten the safety and innocence of children.³² Within *MF*, we can read the suggestion to surgically intervene in genital morphology with intersex infants. From a secular perspective, we can note how migrant children are not seen under the banner of whiteness, so while there is desire to tout the importance to secure the safety and future of children, it is white (ideally straight, but time will tell) children who figure the Child, and it is migrant children that engender the specter of the queer.

To complicate the matter further toward sexual reproduction, such activity should not partake in reproductive technologies, as there is a severing of the unitive bond and “the manipulation of human embryos.”³³ Such technologies fragment parenthood and threaten the stability of the family. While *MF* alludes to reproductive technologies utilized in more capitalist commercial capacities, it fails to even attempt to interrogate why some heterosexual couples (because in their framing homosexual couples are completely out of the question for child-rearing) might seek reproductive technologies.

Potential inabilities to participate within reproductive technologies notwithstanding, there is the added component of Christ sanctioning these human values. It is through Christ where humans find fulfillment and unity. Yet, where does this come from within the document itself? Paragraph 39 is nearly a word-for-word excision from *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997). The function of this paragraph in that document is beyond the

³² Here, we can think of the phrase “Think of the children!” Children, in this case, become the mythic Child, when policies—or lack thereof—fail to pass that actually would ensure the safety of children. This can be thought along the lines of sex and gender, but also racism, or even gun violence.

³³ *MF*, sec. 28. Additionally, *Humanae Vitae* (1968) remains in play. Fast-forward to the 2023, and the United States Council of Catholic Bishops will also publish their “Doctrinal Note on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body” (2023).

scope here; nonetheless, through its usage here, we receive the quotations concerning Christ employed in *MF*.

Again, this is the *only* paragraph when Christ appears, with each of its three instances being quoted from another Vatican source. It is oddly fitting. A document that effectively rationalizes intersex and transgender people out of existence through a choice quotation expressing a deliberate function of Christ, has not even deigned it appropriate to utilize novel arguments concerning Christ for the task. As *MF* implies this is a movement toward dialogue, there seems to be a hesitancy to reflect on what Christ means for us in light of “gender theory,” not against “gender theory.” Intersex and transgender people are not worth the effort, it seems. Regardless of its extraction from another text, this fulfillment and unity through Christ resonates with another document also published in 2019.

As noted earlier, there is no recourse to Galatians 3:28; however, the verse is treated in “*Che cosa è l’uomo*” (*Sal 8,5*): *Un itinerario di antropologia biblica* (henceforth, *CC*), released in September of 2019 by the Pontifical Biblical Commission. Genesis 1:27 is treated in *CC*, and it is deepened through alignment with Sirach 42:24–25.³⁴ This connection facilitates an interpretation of creation via a two-by-two formula, the pair that faces each other. However, we are not free from the complications just yet, for the biblical pairing is telling.

Sirach has been fused with the *first* creation account. Within the first account of creation, God creates humankind, a general term and not necessarily the connotation we receive in the

³⁴ Pontifical Biblical Commission, “*Che cosa è l’uomo*” (*Sal 8,5*): *Un itinerario di antropologia biblica*, Vatican website, September 30, 2019, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20190930_cosa-e-luomo_it.html, sec. 262. At the time of writing this article, the document is still only available in Korean, Italian, and Polish.

second creation account of a single person. While Genesis 1:27 does provide the phrasing of “male and female”, there is interpretative precedence this could be interpreted as a merism. A merism is utilized to express a sense of “this, that, and everything else.” Therefore, it is not beyond reason this could be interpreted to mean that God created humanity, which is male and female, and everything else.

While the second account of creation may lend itself more toward an interpretation of a single man and then a single woman, it appears the authors of *MF* are familiar with the critiques of sexual subordinationism, despite its own masculinist rhetoric within the document. Therefore, there is necessity to limit Genesis 1:27 to the *pairing* of male and female, rather than a merism in reference to the category of humanity. Hence, the incorporation of Sirach. This addresses the allusion to Sirach, and now Galatians must be treated.

Galatians 3:28 is only partially treated within *CC*. While I disagree with *CC*'s assessment of Gal 3:28, they still provide some interpretation. They opt for the tertiary creation of a third entity captured under the “new man” in Christ. The slave and free, as well as the Jew and Greek are unified. Problematically, this erases difference. Ironically, *MF* has foreclosed this problematic interpretation of the tertiary option, albeit through different means. “The *process of identifying sexual identity* is made more difficult by the fictitious construct [sic] as ‘gender neuter’ of ‘third gender,’ which had the effect of obscuring the fact that a person’s sex is a structural determinant of male or female identity.”³⁵ A tertiary reality made possible through Christ in relation to sex would dance too close to the church’s perceived specter of intersex and transgender people.

³⁵ *MF*, sec. 25.

There is biblical scholarship that allows the church to keep the categories of male and female. However, there is a catch. This catch is rooted in the scholarship of Judith M. Gundry.³⁶ Gundry does not adhere to an interpretation of Gal 3:28 that simply erases difference. Erasure would mean the categories of Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, and female would cease to exist, being eclipsed by Christ; rather, Gal 3:28 “refers to the adiaphorization of sex difference in a new creation where being male and female is no advantage or disadvantage in relation to God and others and where man and woman are reconciled and united as equals.”³⁷ While this certainly is not an explicit interpretation regarding intersex and transgender people, it aims toward a foundational axiom within queer theory by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: “People are different from each other.”³⁸

Adiaphora refers to matters that have no moral merit or demerit. As Gundry refers to Gal 3:28, she is asserting that rather than erasure of the difference or the unification of difference for a tertiary option (which is still a form of erasure), the adiaphorization renders these categories as losing a moral valence. It is not better or worse to be free or slave, or Jew or Greek, or male and female. Additionally, Gundry also investigates the Christological undercurrents in this passage and assesses that there is no evidence of erasure of difference.³⁹ This returns to Sedgwick and the misunderstandings of “gender theory” by the church. The focus concerning the denaturalization

³⁶ Judith M. Gundry, “Christ and Gender: A Study of Difference and Equality in Gal 3,28,” in *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift: Studien zur Hermeneutik des Evangeliums*, eds. Christof Landmesser, Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Herman Lichtenberger, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft: und die Kunde der älteren Kirche, Band 86, ed. Erich Gräßer (Berlin, DE: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 439–477.

³⁷ Gundry, “Christ and Gender,” 439.

³⁸ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 22.

³⁹ The explication of these reference is beyond the scope here, see Gundry, “Christ and Gender,” 460–467.

of sexual difference is only in reference to an interpretation of sexual difference that forecloses anything outside the binary of male and female. Following Sedgwick, there are as many unique and discrete sexes as people on this planet. This difference, cinching these two thinkers together, is not a moral hindrance where it concerns Christ. This, therefore, can cause problems for *MF*.

MF is dependent on the moral merit of sexual difference dependent upon biological complementarity—it is a genital essentialism and the function of genitals ordered toward reproductive futurism. Furthermore, as noted from the outset with Sullivan-Dunbar, the elision of politics and theology entails a morality that must extend beyond Catholic. Following an interpretation of Gundry, a catholic interpretation of sexual difference would not place moral merit regarding male and female. However, the moral merit regarding male and female cannot be ceded concerning the church, which is why we see the omission of “there is no longer male and female” in the treatment of Gal 3:28 in *CC*. This omission reverberates and informs the logics of *MF*. It determines the shape of the “whole man” toward which education must be facilitated. This is of great importance for our final question.

Is Christ Functioning the Same Way as Jesus?

Up until now, the questions have deliberately revolved around Christ, as that was invoked in the selected passage. However, what of Jesus. Within my own work I consider Jesus and Christ to be distinct, though not mutually exclusive. Put another way, they both function, but differently. I do not interpret *MF* to be exempt from this framing. Jesus, the discrete (potentially historical) person who existed in relation to systems of colonial domination and power, functions as a powerful entry point concerning ethics. Here, ethics is glossed as simply the ways in which bodies relate to other bodies. Christ, in distinction to Jesus, serves a specific theological

function—this would become the Christian interpretation of the messianic quality that becomes attached to the specificity of Jesus.

The distinction between Jesus and Christ then yields another question: how is Jesus addressed in *MF*? Jesus, similar to Christ, appears in only one paragraph. For context, its reference appears in the subsection regarding “points of agreement.” Write *MF*:

It cannot be denied that through the centuries forms of unjust discrimination have been a sad fact of history and have also had an influence within the Church. This has brought a certain rigid *status quo*, delaying the necessary and progressive inculturation of the truth of Jesus’ proclamation of the *equal dignity of men and women*, and has provoked accusations of a sort of masculinist mentality, veiled to a greater or lesser degree by religious motives.”⁴⁰

No doubt, there is much to consider. While unjust discrimination is noted as part of human history, there is a lack of recognition that some of this discrimination has come from within the church itself. *MF* presents itself as a victim of the external world infiltrating the hallowed sanctity of the church. There is no recognition regarding the ideological enclosure of the sacred in contrast to the profane which ironically creates the very external world that penetrates the church, nor the moments when sacred and profane agendas coincidentally aligned throughout history like colonial expansion, which many scholars point to as a dense transfer point regarding the construction of race, sex, and gender. Notice, also, how there is no apology, and it appears the church has fabricated its own sense of absolution in this matter.

It is not surprising a rigid status quo would be in place, yet the church does not question the violence of this status quo. Rather, the church must continue to promote Jesus’ proclamation of the equal dignity of men and women. While the gospel accounts work in their own registers of Christic formation, there is an ample biblical account of ethical conduct beyond the equal dignity

⁴⁰ *MF*, sec. 15, emphasis in original.

of the men and women. This does not devalue this ethical conduct but calls into the question its invocation in the context of *MF*. Importantly, we must remember that there can be *no* relationship outside of the male/female binary. This normative ethic is dependent upon the exclusion of what is usually glossed—or identified—as non-normative bodies.

This means that intersex people, trans people, and more have been framed outside of ethical consideration. As has already been noted regarding intersex people, this opens the door for church-sanctioned violence toward the human body that forcibly aligns bodies to a sexual binary. Christ functions as the theological and philosophical mechanism that results in ontological erasure, while Jesus functions as the normative ethic for a properly ordered human community.

Ironically, sec. 16 references ethical discernment that is shared by both the church and “gender theory” to educate children and young people to respect every person—the irony being the church fails to adhere to its own ethical imperative. In the same paragraph, they note, “Essentially, this involves educating for active and responsible citizenship, which is marked by the ability to welcome all legitimate expressions of human personhood with respect.”⁴¹ While on the surface this appears like a strong connection, we must dig into the complication.

The problem with the church’s discernment of affinity with “gender theories” comes down to their understanding of political engagement concerning citizenship. Yet, more often than not, the necessary political discourse and action embodied in “gender theories” comes down to the ways in which bodies have been determined to be illegitimate, unintelligible, and/or beyond recognition.

⁴¹ *MF*, sec. 16.

By no means am I saying scholars of gender and sexuality have always been right in their assessments. Nonetheless, most authors' assessments already function through the understanding that any theory will create a remainder.⁴² A theory offers a paradigm of thinking, and the totality of humanity cannot be contained under *one* theory, which is precisely the end goal of *MF*. The admission of the perpetual remainder leaves gender and sexuality studies as open projects that, I argue, function in precisely the opposite as presented by the Church: it involves educating for active and responsible citizenship, which is marked by the *inability* to welcome all *illegitimized* expressions of human personhood with respect.

The ethical framing of respect can still be present, but it is framed instead through the lens of counter-normativity. Ethical norms are not necessarily thrown out the window; rather, they become understood and/or framed by those people to whom the norms have not extended. There is a decentering that interrogates the hegemonic framing: if we are to have norms, who defines these norms? The Church both misleads readers of the document unfamiliar with “gender theories” and simultaneously misrepresents itself to “be on the same side” in relation toward respecting every person. Indeed, as we have seen, *MF* is very concerned about defining what exactly “makes” a human person a legitimate human person, and by extension now, determining what ethical consideration is owed both to human persons and non-persons.

There can be no doubt that *MF* presents a problematic theological anthropology. The rigidity of the male/female binary forecloses not only contemporary understandings of sex,

⁴² To recall Spade's critical trans politics, he notes: “We must remember that whenever we propose new systems of distribution and imagine a better world, we also—often unknowingly—establish disciplinary and population-management norms that marginalize and/or vilify. Even if we reject certain existing state forms, process-oriented and relentlessly self-reflective practice must attend all of our work if we are to resist the dangers of new norms that we invariably produce,” *Normal Life*, 113.

gender, and sexuality,⁴³ but also forecloses *any* anthropological framework that challenges a fixity of biological essence. *MF* may take direct aim at “gender theory,” yet any anthropology that expresses a whiff of social construction becomes implicated and negated. However, *MF* does not stop at this negation. It goes one step further and reifies the rigidity of the male/female binary through enjoining it to the function of Christ. In summation, this renders intersex and transgender people (explicitly) and bisexual and queer people (implicitly) as outside the function the Christ. But for now, we must turn toward some further implications.

Conclusion, or Heterosexual Fabulations

The elision between politics and theology is apparent. While this precise reading focused centered around the deployment of Christ, there are still more sections within *MF* that could receive attention. However, concerning the social theology hermeneutic of christotechnics, the selected passages suffice. As a reminder, christotechnics studies the appearance, formation, and utilization of Christ. Beyond being an incredibly anti-intersex and transmissic⁴⁴ document, *MF* was deliberately selected to show how Christ is a powerful prosthetic in the technology of Theology. While only being referenced in one paragraph of *MF*, the emplacement of Christ for people who exist in binary alignment (male, man, and masculine and female, woman, and feminine) in a heterosexual union ordered toward reproductive futurism reverberates throughout the entire document. This is the coherence *MF* is trying to convey.

⁴³ It should be noted, the focus in this chapter proceeds from the 19th century. A genealogy of the sex, gender, and sexuality throughout history is beyond the scope here, as has been treated by other scholars.

⁴⁴ From “transmisia,” a more appropriate term than transphobia. Rather than a fear transgender people, open hatred toward transgender people is exemplified, thus the usage of transmissic over transphobic.

To that end, due to how Christ has modified the heterosexual binary of sexual difference, this document expresses a liberation for some. However, this biopolitics of Christ also expresses its shadow-side: the dual necropolitical function of Christ regarding those who exist outside the binary of sexual difference. These are the necessary violent incoherencies displaced onto non-normative bodies to secure the coherence of the privileged few. Put another way, the salvation of heterosexuality is earned at the expense of non-normative bodies. This is a dubious theological position that has effectively reduced the use of Christ to determine anthropology (no mention of salvation, forgiveness, or even events like the resurrection—in my opinion, topics much more pertinent to theological understandings of Christ) with the expressed intention there should be wider social ramifications. Therefore, this is also a dubious political position, for the concern passes from internal theological discussions to socio-juridical implications.⁴⁵

The valence of social theology cannot be lost, nor the elision of theology and politics. This theological salvation, then, becomes expressed in the political through the security and protection of heterosexuality at the expense of non-normative bodies. The abyssal exclusion, especially of trans women of color, expresses this ontological negation at the heart of such colonial deployments of Theology. Put another way, this is the entanglement of politics and Theology and the quagmire of catholic (universal) documents. It is certainly far from fun to intervene in such vitriolic rhetoric and advocacy of violence toward human bodies, but the stakes are too high for such documents to be ignored.

But it need not be this way. This is what a social theology hermeneutic of christotechtonics helps us uncover. The great irony of *MF* is that it pathetically participates in the

⁴⁵ This point could be explored further, *à la* Foucault's *dispositif* or Althusser's ideological state apparatuses. However, this conversation escapes the scope of this chapter.

very “ideology” it seeks to unseat. *MF* is playing a participatory role in “gender theory” through its own assertions of an anthropology rooted in biological complementarity. The colossal fabrication of *MF* is that heterosexuality represents the unique expression of human sex, gender, and sexuality. But christotechtonics reveals how heterosexuality is *also* constructed.

If we follow the logics *MF* employs to discredit socially constructed anthropologies, then even heterosexuality—as a constructed social reality—is incompatible with Theology. This results in the complete shuttering of the document. Since a whole theological structure is hedged alongside heterosexuality, this potentially shuts Theology—if this is what all Theology is meant to do. While I seriously doubt such recognition concerning the constructedness of heterosexuality is forthcoming from the church any time soon, christotechtonics points toward a more liberatory theology.

This chapter sought to be a case study of a social theology hermeneutic of christotechtonics. Of foremost importance was tracking the deployment, and subsequent reverberations, of Christ within “*Male and Female He Created Them*”. This exploration was aided by the insights of Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar, reminding us of the elision between politics and theology, especially in matters of sex, gender, and sexuality. Additionally, Boaventura de Sousa Santos provided the powerful framing of abyssal and nonabyssal exclusion, allowing us to determine that *MF* has positioned intersex, transgender, and queer people in the zone of abyssal exclusion, resulting in their ontological negation and opening dangerous doorways where only violence exists beyond the threshold.

The argument progressed through a precise line of questioning regarding the paragraph in *MF* when Christ is invoked. This, rightly so, formed the most substantial portion of this chapter,

as it was important to reveal how Christ reverberates throughout the chapter. This revealed how intersex, transgender, and queer people were rationalized outside the ontological category of human. This ontological erasure is twofold and is exemplified in the document through advocating for intersex genital mutilation and rendering transgender people to lack a proper rationality to be considered fully human. Simultaneously, *MF* ensures the family is poised to hold the burden of the ideological enclosure of the church's own "gender theory". A brief journey through biblical passages in relation to "male and female" complicates the rigidity of the male/female binary. And finally, this section ended with noting the distinct function of Jesus. While Christ functioned to meet the needs of ontological erasure, Jesus was concerned with ethical relationships. Following the document, however, *MF* erases the need for ethical concerns when bodies are outside male/female sexual difference.

Finally, we come full circle by returning to the hermeneutic that undergirded this reading. While derived from trans theory, this hermeneutic also reveals how heterosexuality is constructed. As noted regarding the hierarchy side-step, *MF* bypasses the multiplicity expressed in nature for its own enclosure of the family. Nature reveals so much more than the binary *MF* presents to its readers. Nonetheless, it is apparent the Christ is utilized in *MF* as a biopolitical tool in a technology of Theology, which only asserts a heteronormative anthropology. A social theology hermeneutic of christotechnics interrogates how the emplacement and displacement of Christ occurs.

Admittedly, while this chapter highlights sex, sexuality, and gender nods toward coloniality also point toward race. The next chapter will deepen our analysis of the stakes of *MF*

in relation to cisgender and blackness. This will be explored through the emerging work of Marquis Bey.

CHAPTER SIX

INTERROGATING CISGENDER: BLACKNESS AND CHRIST THE DILDO

The previous chapter followed in the trajectory of Preciado's *Countersexual Manifesto* by naming how sex, gender, and sexuality are actively fabricated within the Vatican document "*Male and Female He Created Them*": *Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education (MF)*. Christ was located as the fulcrum that determined legitimate, but more importantly illegitimate, expressions of sexed embodiment, while intersex and transgender people received a privileged ire from *MF*. However, all non-normative expressions of sexual embodiment were also implicated in these mechanisms, including, but not limited to, bisexual, queer, non-binary, and asexual people.

The utilization of Christ by the church reveals its functionary role in imbuing cisgender heterosexual embodiment as the only legitimate expression of the human body. *MF*'s recourse to rational thought plays upon Aristotelean virtue ethics to justify the humanness of cisgender heterosexuals at the expense—therefore, to nullify the humanness—of any person that falls outside these parameters.

A hermeneutic of christotechtonics upholds the logic of the dildo, most importantly, the reversal presented by Preciado: "Countersexuality says: the logic of the heterosexuality is the logic of the dildo, invoking the transcendental possibility of giving an arbitrary organ the power to install sexual and gender difference."¹ In the fashion of queer and trans theory, Preciado is not

¹ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 65; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 102.

here to present a fetishistic or voyeuristic usage of queer and trans lives. Rather, he takes a mundane object from queer and trans lives and transforms it into an epistemological tool that allows us to analyze and question the structure (of violence toward queer and trans bodies, but, in reality, any way in which the human body is disciplined into the heterocentric regime) of the world. Christ as a dildo expresses the ways Christ is deployed in reference to sexual and gender difference that serves to determine inclusions/exclusion mechanisms. In the case of *MF*, the inclusion/exclusion is not only in relation to an institutional structure (i.e., not just the Catholic church). The Christian anthropology asserted in *MF* determines this inclusion/exclusion to be in reference to a legitimate humanity.

While the analysis takes its trajectory from Preciado's interrogation of sexual and gender difference, race is notably lacking within *Countersexual Manifesto*.² In seeking to both extend Preciado's work and to deepen the analysis of *MF*, this chapter turns to Marquis Bey's work regarding cisgender and blackness³ to arrive at a more intersectional analysis of *MF*. Without the need to justify this intersectional work through recourse to white scholars, I reiterate the foundational claims of "queer theory" that name how sexual subjectivity is sexed, gendered, racialized, and much more. I bring the focus of this chapter to race as this was integral to these

² This is not to say that race is wholly absent. Rather, it usually appears in the lists of somatic techniques that are akin to sexual and gender difference. Furthermore, race is not considered through a US perspective, as Preciado is not writing toward the context of the US. That is not to say Spain and France are devoid of racism, but to note that conversations of race around the world do not always intervene in historical particularities of the US.

³ I will adhere to Marquis Bey's usage of lowercase "blackness" when referring to Bey's scholarship. Bey draws upon various thinkers to arrive at the following: "I come to blackness and trans*-ness by way of refusal, fugitivity, anoriginality, para-ontology, and eruption. *Trans** and *black* thus denote poetic, para-ontological forces that are only tangentially, and ultimately arbitrarily, related to bodies said to be black or transgender. They move in and through the abyss underlying ontology, rubbing up alongside it and causing it to fissure. *Trans** and *black*, however, as fundamentally para-ontological do not discredit the materiality of ontic subjects who are characterized by and through these identificatory markers," "The *Trans*-ness* of Blackness, the Blackness of *Trans*-ness*," in *Transgender Studies Quarterly* vol 4, no.2 (May 2017), 276–277. See also Marquis Bey, *The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Gender* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 11–28.

early theorizations, but also they speak to me on a personal level as a person inhabiting a multiracial body. Certainly, as the analyses of “queer theory” has progressed other intersections have been noted, but no project can explore everything. Bey will allow us to see how cisgender is entangled with whiteness and how blackness needs to open itself up to more coalitional camaraderie.

Again, *MF* has been selected for a specific reason. Beyond Christ functioning as a dense transfer point of sexual and gender difference, the present inflection via Bey will reveal disappeared racial logics behind the assertion of cisgender heterosexuality as the only legitimate expression of humanity. This deepening of the analysis, thus, renders *MF* as a document that upholds and generates a vision of *white* cisgender heterosexuality.

The first part of this chapter will explore cisgender *à la* Bey. Rather than a complete second analysis of *MF*, each of the subsections of this chapter will contain an inflection in relation to *MF* in order to note racialized cisgender logics that are occurring. These examples highlight how Blackness has historically been constructed as already functioning outside the categories of gender (man/woman binary) and how this presents a profound ontological threat, as well as Black bodies in relation to the medical sciences, of which the church appears eager to offer its own teaching in relation to surgical interventions of intersex infants. What I hope to make apparent is that queer and trans theory provides insights into queer and trans life, but they are not reducible to it for they also provide powerful tools to interrogate cisgender. As we saw in the previous chapter, the church will go to great lengths to shore up the bulwark of cisgender, to the detriment and exclusion of many.

The second part of this chapter will point toward some implications regarding Christ the dildo. I am concerned with how Theology is deployed; how it produces and ethical and moral disposition that circulates in the world. These implications reveal that Christ as a dildo extends beyond *just* Theology and weaves its way into everything touched by Theology.

Interrogating Cisgender

Some basic definitions are in order.⁴ Cisgender expresses that one's gender identity aligns with one's biological sex. This is often contrasted with transgender, which expresses that one's gender identity does not align with one's biological sex. Over the past few decades, many trans studies scholars have pushed and pulled these definitions and understandings of gender identity.⁵ For our purposes here, these highly basic definitions will serve us well, as Bey will also stretch these terms to new locations.

Cisgender does not describe a sexual orientation. A lesbian couple may be comprised of two cisgender women; a polycule may be comprised of cisgender people. Likewise, a lesbian couple could be two transgender women or also a cisgender woman and transgender woman (often, when attributed to a gender, the word "gender" drops out and "cis" and "trans" will appear as a prefix to the gender—ciswoman, transwoman).

As many in trans studies note, the prefixes "cis" and "trans" are not new—even if their usage in relation to gender may be more recent. Cis and trans referred to geographic regions in

⁴ The following is a snapshot of terms and history most relevant to the project. For more expansive understandings of terms and history see Stryker, *Transgender History*, 1–44.

⁵ For great snapshots of this movement, see Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London, UK: Routledge, 2006); Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (London, UK: Routledge, 2013); and *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, published through Duke University Press. By no means exhaustive, these volumes gather scholars that explore the past, present, and future of trans, both in terms of history and theory.

the Roman Empire. Cis referred to the portion of Gaul that resided on the same side of the Alps as Rome. Trans, then, referred to the portion of Gaul that resided on the other side of the Alps in relation to Rome.

When we shift to contemporary uses of cis and trans in relation to gender and sex, it often helps to denote a proximity to power. While access to medical healthcare in the US for many cisgender women has been greatly curtailed post-Dobbs, transgender women also face problems concerning access to medical healthcare, oftentimes in more restricted ways than cisgender women. These discrepancies only deepen when we employ more intersectional analysis of race, socio-economic status, ability, and more. Far from getting lost in the identity politics of who is the most oppressed, cis and trans have served to articulate both the similarities and differences encountered.

Additionally, trans is used in relation to sex, not only gender. To some, encountering queer and trans scholarship that utilizes the term transsexual may appear jarring, outdated, or simply regressive. Historically, though, transsexual was used to diagnose people who could then medically (in this case, operative surgery) transition to the opposite sex, and sometimes today is still utilized by people who seek to interact with those aspects of bureaucracy in medical healthcare. While we may scoff at the idea of oppositional sex—holding whiffs of biological complementarity—such transitions afforded a survival for many.

Sandy Stone's landmark 1987 essay "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" is lauded as opening the door for transgender studies within the academy. In addition to being a response to Janice Raymond's *ad hominem* attacks toward Stone in *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, Stone's essay intervened on transwomen's ability to

represent their own authority and discourse (i.e., the discourse around transwomen does not need to be mediated by medical authorities, which would often frame transwomen in pathological and negative terms, leading to psychic, social, and medical exclusions).

There would be, in time, movement away from binary framings concerning transition. Attendant with this shift is the notion that one does not need to transition medically (either via surgery or HRT) to be trans. In this regard, there is expansion of trans as it concerns social transitioning. This could involve the pronouns one uses, how one dresses, or how one generally comports their body. Without a doubt, queer and trans scholars are forever interrogating whether these social iterations challenge or reassert harmful gender stereotypes and binaries.

To complexify matters, there are recent calls from young trans scholars to reclaim transsexual when we mean transsexual, to note, once again, the ways transsexuals experience a relationship to power differently than others.⁶ It is yet to be seen if such a shift will take root.

All these developments concerning trans (and sometimes trans*) led to the linguistic traction of cisgender in the twenty-first century. Being utilized in academic setting, activist work, and, in general, younger people, cisgender is not without its own problems in how it is used. In essence, getting lost in identity politics can lead to the binary of cisgender/transgender, as if there is incommensurable difference between the two.

You may have noticed this section is titled “Interrogating Cisgender” yet, so far, only trans is really being discussed. This sometimes happens, but to excise the complex and ever-evolving development regarding trans as identity would be negligent. Nonetheless, this is why queer and trans theory often seeks to eschew identity politics in favor of theoretical function of

⁶ See Chu and Harsin Drager, “After Trans Studies.”

these terms. Much anti-identitarian criticism flips the script—just as we have seen with Preciado—to analyze not just queer and trans *as* queer and trans, but to analyze how a particular normativity produces queer and trans as excess. Here, this means the criticism shifts from forming a “right” conceptualization of trans to interrogating how cisgender has produced trans.

Keep in mind, just as queer and trans are not monolithic terms, neither is cisgender; there is no singular cisgender experience. Rather, in this engagement through trans theory, we are attuning the criticism toward a demand for cisgender and/or a desire for cisgender. While the project follows a decidedly Foucauldian power analysis, conversations of desire can quickly progress down psychoanalytic routes. I do not take these routes, and instead discern how desire manifests as an assemblage of power.⁷ This intervention is less about cisgender people (as an identity of people whose gender and sex happen to align) and more about what it means to demand or desire cisgender (as a structure).

With this miniscule primer addressed, we can now more intentionally interrogate cisgender. Working with Bey, this will be treated in three smaller subsections where cisgender is paired with blackness, then violence, and finally as structure. While we may use cisgender in a contemporary way, Bey highlights a history where blackness is outside cisgender; therefore, trans*-ness and blackness can learn from one another. As indicated, each exploration will end with an inflection concerning *MF*.

⁷ Additionally, this is not to say Foucault and Lacan cannot converse. A notable addition to the field concerning this dynamic is Ruti, *The Ethics of Opting Out*, 162–168.

Cisgender and Blackness

A sustained conversation of blackness is notably lacking within *Countersexual Manifesto*. I deviate from the language of race here to note how race also functions as a somatic technique, a category of description that partitions bodies into neat and tidy groupings. Blackness, drawing from Marquis Bey and the scholars they lean upon, and in addition to transness:

...assert[s] radical invention, so much so that what is invented cannot abide grammars of intelligibility in this terrain [the terrain of “race” and “gender”]. There is then a *transitivity and transversality of blackness and transness, wherein making (sense of) the text requires contravening commonsense notions of the body*—in other words, blackness and transness do not “look” like a particular thing; rather, they dislodge the logics that structure lookedness. Indeed, they assert other ways to be that do not quite “look” like anything in particular.⁸

To be clear, this does not mean that Bey eschews the language of race and gender altogether, but demands we question what these words, and the somatic categories they represent, are being asked to do. Philosophically, yes, one could make the case this boils down to language games. While this may be true to some extent, this acknowledgement, by this point, is so banal, that we mistake this assertion as insight rather than ask how this notion structures bodily comportment.

Within the history of the United States, this erasure of gender as it concerns blackness began during the colonial project of enslavement, with Africans being tallied as numbers and quantities to be bought and sold, not as gendered subjects. This can most forcefully be understood in photographic evidence when bathrooms were classified as “Men,” “Women,” and “Colored.” Blackness, and proximity to blackness, shifts blackness away from cisgender.⁹ In

⁸ Bey, *Cistem Failure*, 25–26. Here, Bey is drawing on the landmark work of C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

⁹ For recent and instant foundational texts regarding in the intersection of race, gender, and history see Snorton, *Black on Both Sides* and Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

other words, “It is to say that implicit in our understanding of cisgender is the requirement to adhere to, to approximate, whiteness.”¹⁰ In this regard, it is only whiteness that can legibly be cisgender.

These mechanisms also developed alongside sex and sexualized propaganda surrounding Black bodies. Black bodies—and blackness—are de-gendered, yet simultaneously reduced to sex. Ongoing research from Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality has found that young Black girls (ages 5–14) are subjected to processes of “adultification” in contrast to their white peers.¹¹ Adultification leads to false presumption that these young Black girls need less protection and support, and simultaneously are more independent and know more about sex. This process of adultification coalesces the three most stereotyped representations of Black women: the desexualized Mammy, the hyper-sexualized Jezebel, and the masculinized Sapphire. While I am using the gendered language of “woman/women,” it is precisely white femininity (however defined) that Black women cannot be.¹²

Some connections are in order. Recall from the previous chapter the church’s admission of harms in the past, though also recall it seemed to absolve itself of the structuring mechanisms. As noted, one of these structuring mechanisms was the church’s participation in colonial expansion. While Catholicism is certainly a global religion, Bey’s articulation is key: the

¹⁰ Bey, *Cistem Failure*, 25.

¹¹ Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia J. Blake, and Thalia González, “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girl’s Childhood,” (2017): <https://genderjusticeandopportunity.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/girlhood-interrupted.pdf>.

¹² See also Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 64–81. Cf. María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2010): “If *woman* and *black* are terms for homogenous, atomic, separable categories, then their intersection shows us the absence of black women rather than their presence. So, to see non-white women is to exceed ‘categorical’ logic,” 742.

requirement to adhere to, to *approximate*, whiteness. In this function, compulsory cisgender serves to approximate whiteness, in a way blackness can never do. Resultingly, *MF*, while violently enforcing a compulsory cisgender anthropology, also progresses narratives and ideologies of antiblackness. It is disheartening, though I will honestly say unsurprising, repetition of logics that justified the enslavement of Africans the world over: while the condition of your race—which we have fabricated—represents an ontological deficiency, adherence to this mechanism—in this case a compulsory cisgender anthropology, which we also fabricated—you can be fabricated to approximate whiteness.

The crux of the matter for this project (for there are *many* problems) concerns how these positions are justified and mediated through the function of Christ. Pursuant to our reading, the only licit expression of sex/gender is cisgender. Following the research and history of scholars of race and gender, this resultingly partitions blackness as outside cisgender. While *MF* attends to the “provocative” instability of transgender and seeks to correct this transgression of cisgender, the document is also tacitly reinforcing a fabrication of white supremacy. All the while, the fabrication of a compulsory cisgender anthropology makes recourse to Christ.

It may sound inflammatory, though I would contend the claim is in alignment with the previous chapter: *MF* is a document that advocates a white supremacist theological anthropology. As asserted in chapter five, *MF* fabricates an ontological negation outside the parameters of cisgender being, and now our explorations with Bey further reveal that this fabrication of cisgender has also led to the ontological negation of blackness. This ontological negation will be explored further as we turn to cisgender and violence.

Cisgender and Violence

Marquis Bey chimes with Jack Halberstam's definition of trans* noted in chapter three¹³ and I would argue the expansive terrain of countersexuality as articulated by Preciado: "In these ways, trans is not merely, or even primarily, about having a certain bodily expression or sexed history. Rather, trans marks the ways that one *transes* gender, how one relates to the normativity of the gender binary in subversive and critical ways."¹⁴ Trans, much like queer, is growing to escape what we colloquially have in mind when we articulate trans—that is, a person who identifies as a transgender person.

Critically, this does not mean trans scholarship has abandoned trans people, far from it. It does, however, share in the multiple meanings such a word can convey. This also means that identity politics are not useless, even though scholars doing more theoretical work will often name when their work is being misconstrued as identity politics. Especially as these mechanisms brush up against other disciplines in the academy, this misconstrued framing often serves the aims of weaponized incompetence (how is this for me, if I am not queer or trans?) or demanding intelligibility in a differing key of rigor (but what about this scholar or this vein of thinking?). These tactics mimic the initial and ongoing perceptions of feminism, Black studies, and ethnic studies (how is this for me, if I am not a woman, or Black? Or I see you have provided a rich and complex tapestry of thinkers, but how does this compare to this one insight from this thinker that

¹³ See Halberstam, *Trans**, 4–5.

¹⁴ Bey, *Cistem Failure*, 65. See also Robin Dembroff, "Reimagining Transgender," in *Trans Philosophy: Meaning and Mattering*, eds. Talia Bettcher, Perry Zurn, Andrea Pitts, and P.J. DiPietro (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming).

I happen to be an expert in?). These are academic examples, but point to policing, and ultimately violent, mechanisms.¹⁵

Trans, in an ever-growing theoretical vein, comes to represent one's relationship to normativity. Bey references how bodies are pressured to confess their legibility.¹⁶ As Bey describes relationships to normativity, what do trans and cis mean when they have been relegated to only reference a seemingly stable binary reality? In fact, for Bey, acceding to these confessional tactics is what makes these categories function in relation to gender. Here, the reference is to Foucault, yet the academic conversation does not yield to Foucault, because this specific confessional aspect of trans and cis was not treated by Foucault. Therefore, demanding an academic adherence to Foucault only reinforces the policing mechanisms. Bey, therefore, refuses to confess.¹⁷ Trans, then, is a refusal to show up to the processes or constrictions of normativity, both in the confession of gender and in relation to academic knowledge production.

¹⁵ The power dynamics reflect ongoing movements concerning epistemology, justice, and decoloniality. See Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*; Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*; and Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007). Within TSQ we see two articles expressing Black feminist thought as the foundation of Black trans* studies. See Treva Ellison, Kai M. Green, Matt Richardson, and C. Riley Snorton, "We Got Issues," in *Transgender Studies Quarterly* vol 4, no. 2 (May 2017): 162–169. Here, Ellison et al. position Black feminist thought as the epistemic foundation of Black trans* studies, eschewing the usual dependence of white male European thought as legitimizing discourse. A few years later, Joshua Aiken, Jessica Marion Modi, and Olivia R. Polk in "Issued by Way of 'The Issue of Blackness,'" in *Transgender Studies Quarterly* vol 7, no. 3 (August 2020): 427–444, Aiken et al. will deepen this call for the epistemic foundation of Black feminist thought, and will infuse more insights regarding undisciplinarity in relation to the various field employed to conduct Black trans* studies. We see Preciado also more actively engaging this archive (in addition to his European tradition) more earnestly in *Dysphoria mundi*, 28–32.

¹⁶ Bey, *Cistem Failure*, 62.

¹⁷ See Marquis Bey drawing upon Hortense Spillers in the refusal to accede to these confessional logics in "Black Fugitivity Un/Gendered," *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research* 49, no. 1 (2019): 55–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2019.1548059>. Cf. concerning fugitivity Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*. Cf. Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God*: "This is Foucault's ethical hermeneutics in a nutshell: by confessing, the subject allows itself to be re-presented and interpreted by an Other who has followed a similar pattern before. Confession is, therefore, the closest image we may have of hell. It is the true effect of sacred power; a colonial practice to observe mismatches in the symmetrical organization of power in societies but also to measure the consequences of options.

We can see these dynamics at play when Bey asks us to consider “sides.” Rather than concede simply to a trans and cis binary, Bey will utilize the conception of sides to express a differing set of mechanisms. Importantly, this is not Bey rejecting the terminology of “trans” and/or “cis,” but introducing ever-more registers to conceptualize relationships. They will note:

Being born does not cut it, its language too passive and a disservice to how having been born cis is more truthfully a having been thrown onto this side. We have been hurled into this territory as a violent and forceful gesture to perpetuate a prevarication: that this side is the right side, the only side, the side you—and everyone—just happen to be on, nothing you can do about it, so rep your set. I call bullshit.¹⁸

There is a deliberateness that Bey is articulating. For starters, birth does not cut it. Such an occurrence does not reveal much, other than our (hopefully) living and breathing selves. Gender is the name of the game and not sex.¹⁹ Gender captures our thrownness and thus mediates the confirmation of sex. In this way, one could say they we are all born cisgender. We will unpack why this is a problematic framing.

One, this would claim that we are all born into a proper normativity. Again, born doesn't cut it; we are, rather, thrown into the policing mechanisms of normativity. This produces a just-so narrative of thrownness. Everyone, every single person, just so happens to be thrown to the same side, “the right side,” and there is nothing we can do about it. It is a prevarication (i.e., a fabrication). As Bey has already demonstrated through blackness, we (a collective humanity) are

Is that what the theologian is supposed to confess, her desire for hell as an alternative and a right against a Sexual Theology behaving as authoritarian ideology? Or an escape from prescriptive hetero-hells of love?,” 18–19.

¹⁸ Bey, *Cistem Failure*, 33.

¹⁹ Drawing from Butler, Bey will note: “‘Sex’ cannot pull its weight, nor any weight, for gender is what is always operative. One cannot ‘arrive’ at sex as understood as unmediated and obvious. Sex cannot get outside of language, of gender, of investments and political meanings, thus ‘sex’ as such, a coherent, systematized axiomaticity of the body that escapes reading, is not,” *Cistem Failure*, 32.

not all thrown on the same side. Nonetheless, we try extremely hard to cover up this reality; to fabricate normativity, a stability that does not actually exist. Cisgender, then, becomes inadequate if we equate cisgender and transgender to only reference identity markers and not structuring mechanisms.

Two, and where Bey's analysis takes off, we can cast off our thrownness. We have already looked at confessional mechanisms, but Bey takes us through other mechanisms: bodily comportment.²⁰ Bey quotes a documentary of Judith Butler, where they are recalling a story of a young man who lived in Maine. This young man walked with a swish in his step and as he grew up that swish became more pronounced, and for some, decidedly too feminine. Bullying from others eventually led to harassment, and then, finally, throwing him over a bridge and killing him. As Butler asks: "Why would someone be killed for the way they walk?"²¹

We are not privy to much knowledge concerning the man, who may not have identified as a man. Nor do we even know if the man might have been gay. What we do know is that he walked with a swish, which had been deemed to be feminine. There is no verbal confession, at least, to the best of our knowledge, so what are we to make of this identity? His very body, and not his articulation in language, is where the action of throwing off his thrownness occurred. As Bey will note:

This side was not enough; or, he was too much for this side. This boy was thrown into the world, onto this side, and chose to throw off that thrownness, like the stone-cold gender G that he was, that he is, in my book. But others wished to throw him

²⁰ In relation to Bey and bodily comportment that escapes the articulated language, see Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 99–129; see also Evans, *The Body in French Queer Thought from Wittig to Preciado*, 19–74.

²¹ Bey, *Cistem Failure*, 34. Bey is quoting from Paule Zadjermann, dir., *Judith Butler: Philosophical Encounters of the Third Kind* (Brooklyn, NY: First Run/Icarus Films, 2006), 23:52–25:35.

back into his thrownness, which culminated in a literal throwing. And he died. That cannot be overstated, written off, or overlooked.

The boy died.²²

Complexifying the analysis, Bey names both instances of thrownness as deaths. The first thrownness forecloses an ability to be of his body, it facilitates an ontological foreclosure that rejects anything other than cisgender: a first death. The second, the throwing off his thrownness, precipitates the ontological negation in his refusal to live on the right side, which led to him being thrown from a bridge: a second death.

Again, philosophically we are pushed against the endless conversations of linguistic binds, a leading reason why Butler followed up *Gender Trouble* with *Bodies That Matter*, and this example perhaps shows the extensive power of language when articulation does not occur. There is no performative utterance per *Gender Trouble*; nonetheless, the body still becomes the site where norms and normativity are enacted and policed. As it relates to cisgender as a violence, it is death either way.

It is near life and slow death, to recall the language of Eric A. Stanley. A slow death, with perhaps the promise of near life, marked this boy's life. Yet, crucially, as Bey constructs their argument, these mechanisms impress upon us all. We are thrown into the prevarication of cisgender, which already serves to foreclose any deviance from these realities.

We can see powerful evidence of cisgender and violence within *MF*. The thrownness being demanded in *MF* is that of cisgender comportment. I have already catalogued in the previous chapter how intersex people are to be subjected to surgical intervention to "correct" the

²² Bey, *Cistem Failure*, 35

body.²³ Transgender people are said to be making “provocative” displays that “ignores the suffering of those who have to live situations of sexual indeterminacy.”²⁴ I contend there are two cases of throwing off one’s thrownness occurring, with differing levels of response from the church.

Considering transgender people first, as the response plays into the philosophical games of linguistic reduction. The argument is hedged within a choice reading of Greek and Roman philosophy (but we are not provided any citational reference) to articulate an irreducible essence innate to each human. Transgender people, per the view of *MF*, reject this essence of sexual difference, choosing for themselves their sex/gender (remember, the two are irrevocably linked in *MF*).²⁵ As noted from the previous chapter, this philosophical omission equates to an ontological negation that renders the transgender body as outside the function of Christ.

To not become too repetitive, this ontological negation returns us to the relationship of cisgender and blackness. In this case, transgender people undergo a similar ontological negation as the Black body. Blackness then, serves as a coalitional building between the Black body and transgender body that have thrown of their thrownness and are constantly threatened by the violence that seeks to hurl their bodies back to the right side, or worse, the eradicate their lives.

²³ *MF*, sec., 24.

²⁴ *MF*, sec., 25.

²⁵ To be clear, this intervention regarding essentialism was one of the primary arguments circulating within *Gender Trouble*. Butler, there, articulating positionings of anti-essentialism. Butler’s concepts though, are often misunderstood, sometimes problematically, by thinkers in theology and religious studies. See performativity’s relationship to essence in Wilcox, *Queer Religiosities*: “Performative speech *does* things. Gender, Butler thought, is like that. So saying that gender is performative isn’t the same thing as saying that gender is a performance. That’s a common misunderstanding of Butler’s ideas, especially because [they] certainly do say that one enacts gender. But that enactment of gender, importantly, also *does* something: It creates the appearance, the illusion, of a stable, internal, gendered essence. Enacting gender, for Butler, constructs the self,” 20.

Now we can turn to intersex people. Medical interventions concerning intersex people is also treated within *Countersexual Manifesto*, and unfortunately, *MF* continues the problematic and negligent lineage of reducing a body—in this case, specifically the intersex body—to its visual appearance. In contrast to a Butlerian position where gender precedes sex, the church’s reduction to the physical body must seek out a vagina or penis; any morphology that complicates this vision of sex/gender morphology is not intelligibly a human. Due to the omission of medical citations in *MF*, it cannot be known for sure what methods the church has in mind concerning “objective parameters with a view to establishing the person’s constitutive identity.”²⁶ What is clear, though, is that the intersex body cannot be a constitutive identity.

Surgical intervention harkens to historical treatment of nonnormative bodies. In this case, I am turning to the history of racialized medical experimentation.²⁷ Vanessa Northington Gamble’s publication in the *American Journal of Public* sought to shed light on the distrust the US medical system by Black people. While the Tuskegee Syphilis Study is still a recent example where the personhood of Black people (in this case men) is diminished. The medical negligence of the study centers around the participants not being informed about the parameters of the experiment; these Black men were not informed that the study was seeking to understand the effects of untreated syphilis, nor were the men notified of their infection status. A vast majority

²⁶ *MF*, sec., 24. Cf. Paul Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*: “Behind the question ‘Is it a boy or a girl?’ lies a differentiating epistemology established by the empirical order that makes the body intelligible by fragmenting and dissecting its organs—an array of precise visual, discursive, and surgical techniques that hide behind the name ‘sex assignment,’ 104; Preciado, *Manifesto contrasexual*, 151.

²⁷ This is not exhaustive, and there is ample history involving medical procedures in relation to people deemed “undesirables,” including, but not limited to, Black people, people with both physical and mental disability, people suffering from substance dependency, and people with perverse sexual inclinations.

of the men died as a result of this study, in addition to some spouses being infected as well as children being born with congenital syphilis.²⁸

Gamble, however, reveals how the Tuskegee Syphilis Study can be situated into a longer history of Black bodies and medicine. The most pressing case study Gamble unearths involves the medical practices of James Marion Sims, wherein he developed a technique to repair vesicovaginal fistulas (an opening between the bladder and the wall of the vagina, leading to urinary incontinence). While the procedure was revolutionary, how Sims was able to perfect the technique was through the use of Black women's bodies.

Taking three enslaved Black women, Gamble will note, "Between 1845 and 1849, the three slave women on whom Sims operated each underwent up to 30 painful operations."²⁹ Keep in mind, this was before anesthesia was employed, so these operations were truly painful. There are many ethical concerns in relation to this case study, but I want to bring forward a couple.

One, due to these women being enslaved, they were not in a state to ethically consent to the procedures. This does not demean the painful realities these women already inhabited, both as an enslaved human, but also a human suffering from a vesicovaginal fistula who would probably rather not suffer this condition. Nonetheless, the women were not in a position of power, due to their enslavement, to really refuse Sims. Two, and this is key to Gamble's analysis, Sims conducted these experimental procedures to perfect his technique. It was only after that Sims would utilize the technique on White women volunteers with anesthesia.³⁰

²⁸ Cf. Lois Magner, *A History of Medicine*, 2nd ed. (Boca Raton, FL: CRC, 2005).

²⁹ Vanessa Northington Gamble, "Under the Shadow of Tuskegee: African Americans and Health Care," *American Journal of Public Health* 87, no.11 (Nov 1997), 1774.

³⁰ Gamble, "Under the Shadow of Tuskegee," 1774.

As we have already explored, while Gamble may be referring to these historical patients as women, Bey—and the scholars they lean upon—demand we interrogate this gendered term. First, for the case of these surgical experiments, the most necessary component is the sex of the patient. But bluntly, gender is irrelevant for Sims' work. Second, it was only after the technique was perfected that it was utilized as a voluntary procedure for white women. This voluntary aspect was denied the enslaved women, but afforded to white women, so what is happening here? It is a reprisal of Black bodies—in this case enslaved bodies—as outside the boundaries of gender: they have been classified, by the look of their bodies, as outside the logics of gender.

This visual function—recall the visionary function in relation to intersex people—serves to codify a body into sex/gender (for never the twain shall diverge) or to justify a person's inhumanity—their blackness—that is thrown outside of cisgender. Falling outside the boundary of cisgender—whether voluntarily or involuntary, conscious or unconscious—leads to violence. Therefore, cisgender, as a structure, serves to police the legitimacy of bodies, which we turn to next.

Cisgender as Structure

So, what, now we need to get rid of cisgender? Is this the future the left wants? Why do *they* hate cisgender people so much? Questions such as these, by and large, locate a misunderstanding with how words are being utilized.

While there are many factors that contribute to this misunderstanding, I home in on a misunderstanding in relation to structuring logics. Again, the idea of the symbolic structure and structuring logics can also take us down a more a psychoanalytic route, but we are not doing that. Rather, the present task involves discerning what we are asking these words to do (when written)

and what they conceptually do (when abstracted to an *a priori* symbolic order)—i.e., cisgender heteropatriarchy is not just the words, but how the words came to be and what they represent.

Therefore, even as I have previously noted that cisgender can refer to people, for there are cisgender people, the concern as it relates to structure is *why* cisgender is the demanded sex-gender alignment and or *why* we are told to that we should desire cisgender as an end (this would be the thinking that one transitions because they are seeking a “right” alignment of sex-gender, but this need not be the case) As noted by Bey, “Cisgender, gender alignment, will not save us, is not innocent, is not safe. It impedes the gloriously slanted magnificence available outside of cis’s constraints.”³¹ This will later be followed by noting, “Blackness, and those proximal to its work, bear a trans relationship to gender, leans as (trans)gender, is not necessarily transgender but, perhaps, trans to gender—all in service of kinds of gender that renounce, vociferously, gender as such.”³² In this regard, cisgender can be framed and understood in different capacities in relation to whiteness, for cisgender (like all identity categories that are and are not used in theory) is not a homogenous group.

This calls attention to differing mechanisms that also impact cisgender people. While it escapes the boundaries of exploration here, we could look at socioeconomic status, ability, immigration status, or even proximity to environmental degradation. Not all cisgender people exist in the same conditions. Nonetheless, what Bey is pointing toward in this interrogation is how cisgender in relation to race foments a false reliance on the cisgender/transgender binary. If cisgender provides the functional organization of whiteness, which is inaccessible to Black

³¹ Bey, *Cistem Failure*, 23.

³² Bey, *Cistem Failure*, 24.

bodies vis-à-vis the historical record already noted, we need to ask how our conversations concerning race perpetuate this narrative and structure. Per the previous exploration, we should look toward ways in which we can refuse the confessional logics, even when we cannot refuse the color of our skin.

As noted, Black bodies already trans gender. Drawing from Hortense Spillers' foundational essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Bey contends that the blackness itself is the loss of gender,³³ or rather, the point at which being otherwise manifests. Operating still within dyadic functions, a return to cisgender heteronormativity is not—but more like cannot—be the answer, for there is no intelligibility of the Black woman under such a structure. It is the structure that must be questioned—undergoing a process of desedimentation³⁴—as well as the attendant terms that fulfill a supportive role in its maintenance. Cisgender, then, is not *only* a threat to trans and Black people but comes to represent a threat to everyone.

It is here I want to turn toward inflection points concerning *MF*. To this point, we have returned to *MF*'s particular ire toward—for good reason—intersex and transgender people. Here, though, I want to note how cisgender heterosexuals are impacted by the demand of cisgender as

³³ We can turn to the forceful final paragraph of Hortense Spillers' article that addresses gender, race, fugitivity, and gestures toward paraontology: "This different cultural text actually reconfigures, in historically ordained discourse, certain *representational* potentialities for African-Americans: 1) motherhood as female bloodrite is outraged, is denied, at the very *same time* that it becomes the founding term of a human and social enactment; 2) a dual fatherhood is set in motion, comprised of the African father's *banished* name and body and the captor father's mocking presence. In the play of paradox, only the female stands *in the flesh*, both mother and mother-dispossessed. This problematizing of gender places her, in my view, *out* of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject. In doing so, we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the *insurgent* ground as female social subject. Actually *claiming* the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to "name"), which her culture imposes in blindness, "Sapphire" might rewrite after all a radically different text for a female empowerment," "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 80.

³⁴ Bey will note the influence of Nahum Chandler in *The Problem of the Negro as the Problem for Gender*. Within the chapter "Paraontology," Bey will recount Chandler's interactions with Derrida, where Nahum expresses receiving a proverbial thumbs up in relation to desedimentation as a "more convincing notion than deconstruction as a metaphor system or network," 13.

structure within *MF*. For clarity, *MF* never articulates a demand for these specific terms (cisgender or heterosexual), therefore, we need to interrogate how these terms nonetheless function as the structure.

We will look at the term heterosexual first, as many may think this is the goal. In reality, the goal is reproduction, and while the famous “pastoral letter” still pervades the church’s position, people who fall into the category of homosexuality cannot fulfill this goal. Here, the concern is not nonnormative gender, for such a reality—as already established—cannot exist. Sexuality becomes the name of the game. How does reproduction occur within the framework of the church? Between male and female. Therefore, heterosexuality is implicitly active within the anthropological assertions, as the church has already deemed any other configurations of sexual activity to be illicit.

Turning to cisgender, this project has lengthily explored the philosophical and medical interventions that must be made to ensure a cisgender existence. *MF* remains silent as to whether surgery that “corrects” an intersex person to cisgender, but results in unintended sterility (here, I am giving the church the benefit of the doubt in that they would not advocate forced sterility), would allow this person to properly partake in the institution of the family if they know reproductive sex cannot occur. It’s beyond the scope of the project to give a detailed account of the history of intersex surgeries, but it is commonly noted by medical authorities and human rights organizations that non-consensual and non-medically necessary surgical intervention is *bad* medicine. Such surgeries can entail the removal and/or movement of external genitalia, but also the removal and/or movement of internal organs linked to the production of sex hormones,

which can result in sterilization.³⁵ Nonetheless, the greater importance is that surgery has been deemed necessary in *MF*, for it facilitates the complementarity of male and female. There are a couple responsa from the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF), but they concern hysterectomies and sterility. In this case, the rationale is similar to cases of abortion and The Principle of Double Effect.³⁶ Nonetheless, this still falls into the logic of hysterectomy=woman=female=feminine. The logic employed within the responsa disallows even the possibility of intersex existence.

Now things get interesting in *MF*. As noted in the previous chapter, *Humanae Vitae* is still in play, meaning—at a base level—there should no obstacle that disrupts the unitive act. Most often, people think of condoms, birth control, or even the pull-out method. Another example often brought up is assisted reproductive technologies. Here, we can recall *MF*:

The physiological *complementarity* of male-female sexual difference assures the necessary conditions for procreation. In contrast, only recourse to reproductive technology can allow one of the partners in a relationship of two persons of the same sex to generate offspring, using ‘in vitro’ fertilization and a surrogate mother. However, the use of such technology is not a replacement for natural conception, since it involves the manipulation of human embryos, the fragmentation of parenthood, the instrumentalization and/or commercialization of the human body

³⁵ See Cathren Cohen, “Surgeries on Intersex Infants are Bad Medicine,” *National Health Law Program*, July 1, 2021: <https://healthlaw.org/surgeries-on-intersex-infants-are-bad-medicine/#>. See also Human Rights Watch, “US: Harmful Surgery on Intersex Children: Medically Unnecessary Operations Risk Lifelong Suffering,” July 25, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/25/us-harmful-surgery-intersex-children>. See also The American Academy of Family Physicians, “Genital Surgeries in Intersex Children,” updated October 2023: <https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/genital-surgeries.html>. See also Judith Butler, “Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality,” *GLQ* 7, no. 4 (2001): 621–636.

³⁶ See CDF, “Responses to Questions Proposed Concerning ‘Uterine Isolation’ and Related Matters,” July 31, 1993: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_31071994_uterine-isolation_en.html; CDF, “Response to a Question on the Liceity of a Hysterectomy in Certain Cases,” Dec 10, 2018: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2019/01/03/0005/00014.html#en>; in disagreement to the 2018 response, see Joshua Schulz and William Hamant, “Non-Sterilizing Hysterectomies? A Catholic Critique of the CDF,” in *Linacre Q* 87, no. 2 (May 2020). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0024363920908367>.

as well as the reduction of a baby to an object in the hands of science and technology.³⁷

While in-vitro fertilization (IVF) can make sensational headlines when couples choose to retain all successfully implanted embryos, the church reiterates its stance that IVF is not licit due to manipulation of the embryos and, thus, from the church's position, the destruction of human life.³⁸

The ire toward intersex and transgender people may cause one to think this paragraph is only referencing people who are homosexual. While the paragraph *does* note same-sex couples in relation to IVF, it fails to acknowledge this technology is utilized by heterosexual couples too (which comprise the majority of people seeking IVF). This addition within *MF* reveals the distinction between cisgender as structure and cisgender as identity marker. While nonnormative peoples are most certainly included in this articulation, people who bear cisgender as an identity marker have also been swept up into this claim. In other words, cisgender people can also be the people who cannot live up to cisgender as structure.

Who are these cisgender people in the context of the present conversation? When cisgender and transgender are used so rigidly as a binary distinction in relation to identity markers, we miss how cisgender people can still trans gender, per Bey's articulation and via the rigid anthropology of *MF*. Also, per Bey, there has been a transition that moves these cisgender

³⁷ *MF*, sec., 28.

³⁸ When I have taught *Humanae Vitae* and *MF* in tandem, students are quick to point out how the ovum wasn't discovered until the early 19th century, and conception not until the latter half of the same century. While this is usually invoked to assert some form of illegitimacy of the church, I remind them *Humanae Vitae* is barely sixty years-old, thus, rather than write off Catholicism as irrelevant, perhaps we should be more critical of structures that present anthropologies of humanity that assert as position as if it has come from time immemorial. Rather, we should look toward our own agency to demand that Catholicism be different.

bodies more proximate to blackness—they have been positioned as an irreconcilable excess of the structure. But I want to tease out more.

I have been noting both a demand *and* a desire of cisgender. In this way, even though a cisgender person may transgress the demand of cisgender through a biological inability to reproduce, they can still uphold the *desire* of cisgender—the desire that cisgender is the only way. Under these circumstances, the cisgender person does *not* trans gender, and, in fact, has chosen to seek a form of existence that positions to get as proximate to cisgender—to whiteness—as possible.

When *MF* is considered through the lens of cisgender as structure, the stitching together of the previous points (blackness and violence) is reinforced. Additionally, when cisgender people find themselves on the wrong side of cisgender as structure, a proximity to blackness can be discerned. Just as noted by Bey, this is not a claim upon Black bodies, but rather a call there this is necessary work to be done concerning coalitional building. *MF* has made certain of this reality.

Christ the Dildo

But what does this have to do with Christ the dildo? Per the opening rationale of this chapter, Preciado's omission regarding race in *Countersexual Manifesto* needed to be addressed. Rather than position various thinkers in relation to gender, sexuality, and race, I have opted to draw upon Marquis Bey, an emerging voice in the theorization of this intersection.

While Bey employs differing rhetoric than Preciado, we are nonetheless attuned to the mechanisms of somatic techniques. Meaning, the structuring logics of a hegemonic economy of desire dictates legitimate and illegitimate bodies (i.e., bodies, from a sense of identity, that

cannot “fit” into the hegemonic structure—they are excess). This reprisal of somatic techniques intervenes on how we conceive of the dildo.

The dildo is not the penis. Instead of giving into the logics of colorism attendant with racism, we must assert the dildo does not inherently possess a color, which would come to represent a race; furthermore, it need not even be shaped like a penis. For many queer and trans people, the idea that sex would need even the facsimile of a penis is quite comical. Furthermore, should a dildo fashioned like a penis be utilized for sex, it is not because there is some constitutive lack that only maleness can fulfill.

I know, this again walks the line with psychoanalysis, and while I do not traverse down these routes, Preciado’s thoughts concerning psychoanalysis intersect with Foucauldian power analyses. As noted in *Can The Monster Speak?*, “I would like to begin by saying that the regime of sexual difference as promulgated by psychoanalysis is neither a nature nor a symbolic order but an epistemological politics of the body and that, as such, it is historical and changing.”³⁹ It is a bold statement and one that must be unpacked in relation to Christ the dildo.

As I have contended within part II, christotechtonics is not a project that seeks a totalizing vision of Christian theology. It is, rather, a hermeneutic derived and attendant to a critical history of the present. Per the retrieval of the psychoanalytic tradition (primarily through Freud and Lacan), queer and trans theory have worked extensively to make sense of the pathologization of nonnormative bodies.⁴⁰ The positions often take shape through the idea that

³⁹ Preciado, *Can The Monster Speak?*, 52; Preciado, *Je suis un monstre qui vous parle*, 64.

⁴⁰ Preciado even remarks in *Can The Monster Speak?* that he was invited in 2019 to speak about “women in psychoanalysis.”

psychoanalysis reveals something about nature or a symbolic order—here the symbolic order also has recourse to the construction of nature.

Preciado names these structures for what they are, an epistemological politics of the body that is subject to history and change. While some within queer and trans theory question the validity of psychoanalysis, I find Preciado's sentiments to chime with Mari Ruti's sentiments in relation to the field.⁴¹ Psychoanalysis is less about articulating a predetermined reality, and more about our understanding of the self in relation to the world, and the development of agency in relation to the mechanisms of the world. In this way, the mechanisms of the world can be incredibly difficult to break out of, for they are presented as nature. Nonetheless, psychoanalysis still gives us tools.

Within *MF* we see the privileging of a cisgender heterosexual and white epistemology, that has sought to justify itself through the language of anthropology that finds its foundation in the very creation of the world. Furthermore, despite our knowledge of socially constructed categories, per Preciado, we have a difficult time conceiving of the dildo due to a history that often finds dildos looking like facsimiles of penises. Thus, by already slipping back into the somatic techniques of sexual difference, it is not surprising we can also slip back into the somatic technique of race. Nonetheless, and this is the crux of queer and trans theory often taking shape through forms of literary criticism and philosophy, we often intervene these somatic techniques (needing to work with them conceptually), to—hopefully—break them.

⁴¹ This sentiment is pervasive through Ruti's work. She often describes it as the distinction of psychoanalysis as theory and psychoanalysis as a clinical praxis that seeks to help us live.

The dildo is anything that modifies the sexual—and raced—subject. Christotechtonics asks: what happens when Christ has been utilized to determine the sexual and raced subject? What happens when Christ is the dildo?

As we have seen within *MF*, the position of cisgender white heterosexuals who are able to sexually reproduce are liberated within the function of Christ. On the surface, this statement is fine. The problem comes through the interrogation of what it took to get to this statement. Because what we didn't see within *MF* was the liberation through Christ of nonnormative Black queer, trans, and intersex people. The big question is perhaps the simplest question from children: why? Why is there liberation for some and not others? And what is their relationship to one another?

Recall my concerns regarding the openness argument with theology from chapter two, the idea that queer theology's goal is to seek out openness within Theology (or theologians) to show how queer can be nestled within the existing tradition. In the case with *MF*—as noted from the outset as a document that holds far more impact concerning church polity and lived theology within communities of faith over any theologian that is near-inaccessible to the average lay person—I ask the following: where is the space for openness within *MF* that would allow for Black, intersex, trans, and queer people existence and life in Christ? Of course, my answer to that question is that there is none.

When intersex, trans, Black, and queer are framed as excess of the structure, there is no space in the existent structure that would be able to accommodate these lives. The liberation of the few comes at the expense of the many. To deepen this problem, the justification of this liberation is directly related to the function of Christ, arguably the conceptual heart of the

Christian tradition. The actions of humans (in the case of *MF*, the ecclesial bodies and creators of the text captured under church) are disappeared. This is not *their* position; this is *nature*, and this nature is vivified through Christ.

This is why Mark Jordan's posture of utilizing church (without the expressed specificity of who wrote what and from what body of the Vatican) is so important. Documents like *MF* are the documents that gain traction, for they are the documents that allow transmisic and racist leaders to justify the exclusion and violence toward these bodies marked as excess. For lack of better words, Jordan is not interested in playing nice with the church or Catholicism.

But certainly, Christ the dildo leads to something? To recall from the introduction and recourse to Teresa de Lauretis, both yes and no. "Christ the dildo" is a conceptual and speculative task of discourse production which simultaneously deconstructs the various discourses and silences it intervenes. To be frank, the goal of this work is not to offer a new totalizing paradigm, even though christotechtonics' reliance on Preciado may gesture toward a more critical utopian project. This project could end with a version of the principles of countersexuality, here being principles of countertheology instead. However, through shifting an epistemic locus of theology, the principles of countertheology would find affinity with the projects and lineage of queer, trans, Black, feminist theories. There is no theology that can coherently contain all the ways in which the epistemic knowledge of these marked bodies transition theology to new and unknown locations. But this is precisely the project of "queer."

Rather, as noted in chapter four, I am more interested in a hermeneutical lens that is attuned to the appearance, formation, and utilization of Christ. Therefore, the construction in this project occurs more in relation to a critical lens of interpreting Theology, rather than the

articulation of a new theology. To that end, the final—and short—chapter of this project offers an interpretation of a performance by drag artist Louisiana Purchase that can function as a heuristic intervention of christotechtonics. By no means exhaustive, I turn to this intervention to note how it is not up to me to determine the contours of any new theology—this only repeats the disciplinary mastery we are trying escape concerning Theology.

Instead, I will contend theology is already happening within this performance interpreted as heuristic intervention. My role in this work, then, is articulating this reality into different spheres of knowledge. I have not produced this example of theological weighing-in. I am, rather, highlighting a way in which marked bodies already are doing that work.

Conclusion

This chapter deepened our understanding of christotechtonics. While *MF*'s primary addressee was “gender theory,” it is important to understand race as also *always* an operative somatic technique. This also serves to name a gap in *Countersexual Manifesto*, as Preciado's engagement with race is notably lacking. Drawing upon recent scholarship from Marquis Bey, the continued analysis of *MF* was inflected by earnest interrogation of cisgender and blackness. While cisgender was implicated through Preciado's *Countersexual Manifesto*, its named function coming from other thinkers in trans theory incorporated a new edge to christotechtonics.

Cisgender, following Bey, comes with a history steeped in the exclusion of Black bodies and the creation of the structuring logic of blackness. As such, cisgender has an implicit connection to whiteness. We can discern how a demand and desire for cisgender within *MF* is the demand and desire for whiteness. A body that cannot adhere to this demand and desire transitions into blackness. The mechanisms were explored through three sections concerning cisgender. First,

there was cisgender and blackness, where the kernel of the framing resided. Second, we turned to cisgender and violence, where we explored the inability or refusal to adhere to cisgender, and by extension whiteness, often leads to violence. Finally, we examined cisgender as structure, where I mediated the distinction between cisgender as identity and cisgender as structure. To the end of Bey's urge to create more coalitional work between peoples who are excluded from structure, this showed how cisgender as structure can even exclude cisgender people. To that end, the concern of *MF* is a concern for everyone.

This inflection of the argument then renders the demand of cisgender to be the unspoken demand of whiteness from the church. *MF*, though, takes it one step further in its articulation of a theological anthropology. The church has rejected any other anthropological studies (especially around gender and sexuality), in favor of the theological foundation of Genesis 1:27, edified through the function of Christ (as explored in chapter five). However, this means that the church has effectively ordained cisgender whiteness as the only legitimate anthropological formation. To draw from the language of *MF*, a crisis indeed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“PERSONAL JESUS”: A HEURISTIC INTERVENTION

It was noted in chapter four that christotechtonics is both hermeneutical lens and heuristic intervention. Within *Countersexual Manifesto*, Preciado provided three countersexual reversal practices. The capacity of these reversal practices oscillates between private sexual revelations to public performances. Within these performances there is also the act of translating the dildo onto various parts of the body to show the capacity of the dildo. While the dildo can look like the penis, it need not be confined to this anatomy; it can be an arm, or the entire body. In the case of this interpretation, the dildo is translated onto a cross.

Rather than Preciado enclosing dildotechtonics within the parameters of these three countersexual reversal practices, they serve as a springboard. Per the critical utopian edge present in the manifesto, there is need to create *more* reversal practices to facilitate the transition to a countersexual society. As such, this exploration of the performance “Personal Jesus” by drag artist Louisiana Purchase is presented as additive and not summative. It is also important to remember that Preciado surmises these reversal practices and performances are not the call for revolution, but the realization that the revolution, here and there, is already taking place.¹ Therefore, I am not engaging the art of Louisiana Purchase to co-opt it for revolutionary ends, but to think *with* the piece as part of an ongoing revolution.

¹ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 4.

We must recall some methodological groundings from part I of the project; particularly, Mark Lewis Taylor's conceptualization of the theological. The theological is rooted within the non-expertise of guild Theology, the recognition there is no anti-theological antispace, and that etymologically, theology does not specify a uniquely Christian usage. While Taylor was concerned with political philosophy and continental philosophies of religion, I have stretched this into the terrain of queer and trans theory as it chafes against the socio-juridical of the hegemony of a disappeared US Protestant moralism. While the close reading in this project engaged a Catholic document, it was made clear that *MF* is not just of Catholic concern, but of concern for everyone.

Here, in this heuristic analysis, I am stretching this even further. Art, both as medium and discipline, shapes a transimmanental movement in its own way. Louisiana Purchase is not articulating a queer and/or trans theory, at least not as disclosed by the interview engaged, nor is she seeking to articulate a political philosophy. Yet, and this is where the poetic and artistic gestures of Taylor reprise themselves, "Personal Jesus" is a powerful theological intervention. Furthermore, it is an intervention that lends itself to an interpretation that maps the mechanisms of christotechtonics.

This exploration also serves a secondary purpose. I am aware of the potentially shocking discourse of this project. Who in their right academic mind writes about dildos and theology? While I have been seeking to articulate my position in a more formalized manner, I think it is important to highlight how Preciado also engages realities from queer and trans life. The dildo is an object from the sex lives of queer and trans people. As an object, it is not some esoteric

conjecture, albeit Preciado—and me—has taken this object and thought with it, pulling it in new directions and to new ends.

Thus, this analysis of “Personal Jesus” is my way of minutely representing the theological outside the parameters of guild Theology. As noted in chapter two, theology is already happening. I know I have not been forthcoming concerning a construction of a new theological paradigm; this is more so a sustained queer and trans criticism. What I am suggesting, perhaps, is that this performance *is* that theology. But here is the queer deconstructive bind. The second I start to analyze this performance for the work of christotechtonics it has already passed into guild work—this, my interpretation, becoming Theology (remember, I am not exempting my own work from these processes). I—the scholar—have bungled the theological weight of queer and trans people by conforming it to this guild work. I interpret this piece for a specific end, I read it as commentary of the lived realities of people, and—this being crucial—I have removed the immediacy and affective discursive mechanisms of the event by putting pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard. Nonetheless, whether or not those who possess disciplinary power recognize it as such, does not diminish the theological imagination that is already circulating. Art is already giving voice to those who have been robbed of a voice, and with this new articulation of theological exclusion comes different theological insight. For this reason, I turn to Louisiana Purchase.

Louisiana Purchase, a drag artist known for their work on *Dragula*, recently conducted an interview with *Sensitive Content*. Before we turn to the interview, and Louisiana Purchase’s art, it is necessary to overview *Sensitive Content*.

Sensitive Content was started in 2022 by artists to provide other artists a platform to showcase their art that has been removed from social media due to its “sensitive content.” This term, “sensitive content,” naturally pervades each of the three volumes that have been published thus far. Like this project, it calls attention to what subject matter is flagged as sensitive content. For example, sexual imagery between lesbian presenting people is far more likely to be flagged as sensitive content than sexual imagery between heterosexual presenting people.² Beyond sexual imagery, whether overt or suggestive, *Sensitive Content* also highlights the role of sex work within queer and trans communities, it should be noted that due to the social media emphasis, this usually entails cam-workers and it is, by far, not representative of an entire sex worker community.³

Additionally, these artists and sex workers call attention to real issues facing people of non-normative gender and sexuality and those who engage in stigmatized work. Social media apps like TikTok and Instagram are known for banning accounts with content that mentions gender and sexuality, race, sex work, and more. Additionally, content around mental health is censored, which certainly impacts far more people. So beyond simply posting one’s art (static or moving, as Instagram is in the process of converting its platform to mimic TikTok), one must be

² From the interview with Louisanna Purchase, concerning censorship and drag: “With drag becoming more popular and ever more present, censorship definitely has a negative impact. I experienced that with Instagram and what they consider safe for their platform or not. This brings to light the root of censorship in drag culture, misogyny. I’ve seen so many dick outlines on my social media, but I post the side of my ass cheek, and my account is being threatened. They don’t like seeing femme presenting queer people’s bodies, and that’s the truth.” Interview with Louisianna Purchase, *Sensitive Content*, vol 3 (2023), 20.

³ Here, the popular site OnlyFans is often referenced, but increasingly also Twitter. With Elon Musk purchasing Twitter (now renamed X), many sex workers who have been able to freely post “Twitter porn” are finding increased censorship and banning of accounts. Twitter had been seen as an ideal platform to direct people toward sex worker’s more premium content on OnlyFans.

mindful of the words one speaks.⁴ *Sensitive Content*, then, is also providing a platform for artists to not only present art, but also their opinions.

Volume 3 of *Sensitive Content* centers around drag, due to the rise in anti-drag legislation. Of course, *Sensitive Content* is more than aware of the reality of this legislation: while it may be presented as anti-drag legislation, it is targeting transgender people. Louisiana Purchase is one of the drag artists interviewed in the issue, and recounts one of her most shocking performances:

The most shocking, or as I like to say, crowd-pleasing, is my “Personal Jesus” performance. My first performance of it was in Bushwick, NY, for Bushwig. I insert a cross in my ass, take it out and then suck it and snap it in half. The crowd loved it, and I love performing it as an ex-Catholic. Queer people have been so oppressed by religion that it feels good to be a heathen now and again.⁵

It is obvious why this stands out as a heuristic for christotechtonics, but some analysis is still in order.

⁴ This has given rise to what is referred to as “algospeak,” where users of—most often—social media apps and websites write or say different words or deliberately partition words to bypass the algorithms. Examples can include writing “seggs” instead of “sex”; “unalived themselves” instead of “suicide”; saying “kay...ink” instead of saying “kink” or “eff...etish” instead of “fetish”; and of course, the ever-popular use of emojis like eggplants to represent penises and peaches to represent butts. This may seem banal to those who do not engage this work or find themselves in a community where they do not need to police the vocabulary they utilize, yet for many of the people these social media spaces have allowed some of these people to cobble together a minimal livelihood. Getting flagged by the algorithm risks demonetization, or worse, a complete ban where one must start all over with a new account and username.

Beyond this reality of algospeak in marginalized and exploited communities, such tactics have also been employed by those advocating for mental health and anti-racist activism. I note this unique example, because algospeak, while still young, is passing into vernacular, especially in younger generations, at ever-increasing rates. Furthermore, algospeak suggests something deeper than the creation of slang, but a way to tweak language to serve a usage for people in a certain position or crowd. Perhaps connections could be to Polari used by British speakers (see Paul Baker, *Fabulosa! The Story of Polari, Britain’s Secret Gay Language* (London, UK: Reaktion, 2019)) or Swardspeak by Filipinos (Manalansan, *Global Divas*). Language, and the ways in which language is being represented, is being policed and is evolving to escape those boundaries. Art, per *Sensitive Content*, also traverses these spaces of representational logics. This, then, is where *Sensitive Content* is situated; it celebrates art, expands on linguistic evolutions, and so much more. For a glimpse of algospeak in relation to TikTok, see Daniel Klug, Ella Steen, and Kathryn Yurechko, “How Algorithm Awareness Impacts Algospeak Use on TikTok,” in *WWW ’23 Companion: Companion Proceedings of the ACM Web Conference 2023* (April 2023): 234–237. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3543873.3587355>.

⁵ Louisiana Purchase, *Sensitive Content*, 18.

Louisianna Purchase makes known a couple factors in her interview. One, “Personal Jesus” is a crowd favorite. We are not privy as to why “Personal Jesus” is so beloved. Is it the sodomization with this cross? The subsequent sucking of the cross? The breaking of the cross? Being a voyeur for an act that is considered so intimate? Or do all these transgressions of taboos coalesce into one, great climax? We cannot know for sure. Nonetheless, the performance centers around an object of the church (already a reappropriation of the Roman imperial torture mechanism of the cross, famously utilized to execute Jesus) being transformed into an object of sex. The dildo has been translated onto a cross.

In this case, the cross comes to symbolize larger institutional structures that impress on non-normative bodies. As always, it is important to note the distinction between organized structures of religion and individual faith. I do not interpret Louisianna Purchase’s performance to indicate deliberate criticism toward people who may identify as Christian, even though the performance may illicit a response that touches latent pietism. Rather, the performance harkens to institutional mechanisms of power that creates a dense transfer point of meaning when it encounters sex. Revelations of Catholic clergy sexual abuse have catalogued more than mere instances of sexual abuse across the world, but a systemic institutional pattern of abuse and coverup.

In connection to Catholicism, two, Louisianna Purchase discloses her Catholic upbringing.⁶ Therefore, we can interpret personal and institutional meaning behind her choice. Later in the interview, when asked about the slanderous charges of drag queens grooming children, Louisianna will respond with, “Children are groomed in churches, not drag events.

⁶ A connection shared with both Foucault and Preciado.

Look at who is being convicted of grooming and child abuse. It's politicians, clergy, and youth group leaders. The hypocrisy makes me nauseous."⁷ The addition of the clergy implicates a larger institution, coupling her own Catholic upbringing and the woeful, and at times negligent, response of the Catholic church regarding the sexual abuse crisis, the pointed meaning of the art toward institution becomes more apparent.

Three, the performance is titled "Personal Jesus." We can consider this title in a twofold way. One, a video upload by the user Monàe on YouTube reveals this performance is set to the 1989 song "Personal Jesus" by Depeche Mode, from their album *Violator* (though the club does not appear to be indicative of the same Wigstock performance noted in *Sensitive Content*). In the style of many drag performances, Louisiana Purchase is lip-syncing to the song, which feature the repeating lyric "Reach out, touch faith." More on this soon. Two, while the term Christ is absent in the title, I interpret an elision occurring between Jesus and Christ. I align Jesus, as noted in chapter five, more along the lines of ethical comportment in relation to structures of authority and power. The title also plays upon a popular phrase of evangelical Christianity: "Have you accepted Jesus as your personal lord and savior?" While the highly individualizing sentiments in such a theological question remain uninterrogated, the title still points toward Jesus serving a function. Here, I extend this more functionary role of Jesus to connect to a functionary role of Christ. The performance, therefore, evokes a powerful theo-ethical judgment.

Anatomy of a Performance: "Personal Jesus"

The performance commences with the driving beat of the music. *Reach out, touch faith.*

Louisiana Purchase is on the stage, draped in a sheer black fabric cape and wearing negligee.

⁷ Louisiana Purchase, *Sensitive Content*, 20.

Louisiana sports a black sequenced headpiece with a crescent moon shape, evoking the image of horns and the demonic social contagion of queer and trans people. Even from the start of the performance, the cross haunts the audience, as it is visibly secured to Louisiana's person by her garter. What will become of this cross? *Your own personal Jesus / Someone to hear your prayers / Someone who cares.*

The first verse of the song passes, Louisiana collects tips from patrons. *Reach out, touch faith.* Here, there is a different dynamic of economic exchange occurring. While queer people are not exempt from the pressures of capitalism, the act of tipping drag performers is often considered non-negotiable. Tip your drag artists! Recalling the role of trans women of color and drag artists often being the most visible deviants of "proper" gender performativity, such entertainment and tipping secured both livelihood and the ability to continue the activist work such people are engaged in. The people were not merely participants of communities, but pillars of communities. To be clear, this economic exchange extends beyond the space of the club (a contemporary consolidation of these dynamics) but queer and trans people have always found ways to earn money that have been outside the boundaries of what is considered decent, like sex work. Despite patrons potentially not knowing this reality, there are microhistories threaded throughout drag and queer and trans cultures. *Take a second best / Put me to the test / Things on your chest / You need to confess / I will deliver / You know I'm a forgiver.*

Louisiana flourishes and the sheer cape drops to the floor. Still lip-syncing, the cross becomes all the more apparent tucked into the garter. *Reach out, touch faith.* The collection of more tips and performance for the crowd continues. *Reach out, touch faith.*

Then Louisiana gathers the cross from her garter, eliciting cries from the audience. What is she going to do? The cross, this relic of religiosity, introduces a new affective charge to the performance. The stakes have suddenly changed. Louisiana holds the cross upside down, grasping the top of the cross. She brandishes it, the cross appearing more like a sword; a weapon, a tool to facilitate the circulation of power. Louisiana gathers herself and then spits on the cross, mucus hitting the cross and flying beyond. Cheers from the crowd. *Reach out, touch faith.*

Louisiana extends her tongue and licks up the cross before inserting the bottom half of the cross into her mouth. *Reach out, touch faith.* Louisiana purchase begins sucking on the cross. This evokes a parody of utmost seriousness, grasping the back of her own head, hinting toward the gestures of those who receive head, or those who have coerced and abused people to *reach out, touch faith.* Secondly, this provides necessary lubrication for what is to come next. *Someone to hear your prayer / Someone who's there.*

Louisiana bends at the waist and simultaneously reaches to her buttocks. Hidden within the darkness of the black fabric is a zipper over her anus. In beat with the music, she unzips the enclosure. *Your own personal Jesus.* The cross returns to her mouth as she rips the headpiece from its position on her head. She squats to floor, unzipped bodice now able to allow the cross lubricated with saliva to enter her anus. The crowd cheers. *Reach out, touch faith.*

Louisiana, already lowered to the floor of the performance stage, contorts her body into plow pose. The cross stands, supported by the muscles of the anus, betwixt the buttocks: not calvāria, the place of the skull, but cūlus, the place of the asshole, the place of excrement, the void of social contagion: the dildo cross. Louisiana displays this queered transgressive theological site. There is no need to be outside the walls of Jerusalem when the very flesh of

queer and trans bodies and victims of sexual assault by the church are the locations of this reverberation of violence done in the name of faith. *Reach out, touch faith.*

Louisianna unfolds her body, returning to standing. She removes the cross from her anus and immediately fellates it once again, this time with the apathy of someone who is over it. More cheers from the audience. The performance culminates as Louisanna wrestles the cross in her hands before breaking it in half. The audience cheers. Louisianna tosses this broken cross to the audience. *Someone to hear your prayers / someone who's there.* But Christ is not there, for Christ does not exist. Christ has been shattered, broken in half.

The performance ends in cheers from the crowd, Louisianna Purchase smiling, and the final repetitive cadence of the song fading. *Reach out, touch faith.* Before the video recording cuts out, the emcee can be heard saying “Maybe I will. Maybe I will.”

Analysis

There is a lot occurring in this performance. I contend a powerful theo-ethical judgment has occurred. While I adopted the rhetorical language of the song to capture the performance in writing, I also contend the concern is less about faith (especially when the lyrics of the song can just as easily be interpreted to engender a toxic relationship) and more about performing a rejection of Theology, a rejection of Christ. Yet, this rejection is dependent upon the realness of Christ; the reverberation of its effects in bodies. Nonetheless, the alignment of the cross representing Christ and the institutional structures that base their legitimacy through its function with the dildo are broken, snapped in half. Christ does not exist. Christ is nothing. But let's begin with some power dynamics.

Louisiana Purchase plays upon the reality of victims of sexual assault and queer and trans people as the objects of Theology; these bodies haunt a Theology that objectifies bodies to secure its positions of power. Pursuant to chapters five and six, I am naming Christ the dildo as a *locus theologicus* of these mechanisms. Far from notions of salvific activity, Christ engenders the sanctioned oppression of other peoples. The concern is not the idealized metaphysical assertion of what Christ does; the concern, recalling Dean Spade, is to look at what Christ is actually doing (in this case, being wielded by people to enact a desired effect) versus what we are saying Christ is doing. In perhaps a slightly reductionist argument, Theology may concern itself with retrieving the correct understanding of Christ, pursuant to Isherwood's assessments of Liberation Theology to be a powerful counter to the social ills of the world. Here, though, I am interested in how we have evidence of powerful theological activity that counters Theology, pronouncing the impotence and void of Christ, the illusion that Christ exists outside of how we humans have decided to use Christ. It is important that I am locating this understanding of power repositioned to sites of queer and trans being.

How might this performance be summarized, based on the brief interview response from Louisiana and my narration of the performance? In blunt terms, the church fucks you. In the case of "Personal Jesus," and the context of queer performance art, there are differing dynamics of consent circulating that are often flouted concerning the church and sex. As a performance, Louisiana remains the arbiter of power, though she can play upon the circulating realities of sexual violence to offer an insightful portrayal of power dynamics. This fucking images the realities faced by many people of nonnormative gender and sexuality in relation to institutionalized religion. Meaning, far from the shocking idiom, the institution of the church

(from clergy, people religious, and lay leaders) has fucked—raped and assaulted—many people of nonnormative gender and sexuality, as well as people who would fall into the categorization of normative gender and sexuality.⁸

The cross's insertion into the anal cavity intimates historical homophobia of the church directed toward gay men. While sexual encounters between gay men certainly extend beyond anal intercourse, this allusion to penetrative sex (for it parodies penis-in-vagina intercourse) hints at the hidden ranks of clergy who would fall into the very category of “intrinsically disordered” that is fabricated by the church. As noted in the latter portion of this interview, the perpetrators of abuse make this a noticeable hypocrisy and an open secret regarding Catholic clergy. A management regarding access to the theological gifts of the tradition is held by the episcopal body that traces their legitimacy through Jesus *the* Christ.

There is, then, a deepening of how we can interpret “Personal Jesus.” Is Louisiana Purchase noting that this cross is her personal Jesus, or does the cross, in its representation of authoritative institution, become the Christ-sanctioned usage of Jesus? In other words, this is my personal Jesus—the institution's—that fucks you; *not* yours. The dual valence of this interpretation can also serve to highlight the deconstructive and constructive components of countersexuality.

While Louisiana Purchase is participating in the constructive event of the artistic performance, there is a simultaneous event occur where the very self of Louisiana Purchase is

⁸ We see hints of this religious usage in both art and scholarship. See Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (New York, NY: Theatre Communications Group, 1995), Part II, Act II, Scene II. This scene is the visitation from the angel, and Prior struggling with his prophetic commissioning as theological pawn: “I. WANT. You to go away. I’m tired to death of being done to, walked out on, *infected*, fucked over and *now* tortured by some mixed-up, reactionary angel, some...” Academically, we can turn to recent work in biblical scholarship and more technical usages of “fuck” in Jimmy Hoke, *Feminism, Queerness, Affect, and Romans: Under God?* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2021), xiii.

being deconstructed. As noted, the crowd loves the piece. Through the constructive and deconstructive elements, the audience also becomes participant. There is vicarious transference, where Louisiana Purchase's deconstructed self can allow the audience participant to emplace their own being into the performance and meaning.

Here, I turn to Preciado's *Testo Junkie*. *Testo Junkie* has not received extended consideration, but a quick snapshot of the text. *Testo Junkie* is an autotheoretical text that pushes performativity into the body, rather than simply performative speech acts (via Butler through J. L. Austin). This is not to be confused with a reductive performance of gender. Per the subtitle of the text, *Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, Preciado theorizes molecular performativity, ascertaining the invention of the Pill as contemporary moment that broke heterosexuality.⁹ For Preciado, he catalogs his personal treatment of Testogel, an HRT, and how this molecular and hormonal shifting is also performativity. There is a whole pharmacological network that is also a biopolitical management of sexuality, sex, and gender.

Most pertinent for us now is Preciado's exploration of pornography and its role in sexual desire.¹⁰ Without reducing Louisiana Purchase's performance as pornographic, for it certainly isn't, I can say this performance could completely shock some people and be mistaken as pornographic. Writes Preciado, "Pornography tells the *performative* truth about sexuality. It is not the degree zero of representation. Rather, it reveals that sexuality *is always performance*, the public practice of regulated repetition."¹¹ Furthermore, "the current hegemony of the

⁹ See more in Evans, *The Body in French Thought from Wittig to Preciado*. Tim Dean, in an early reception of Preciado, referenced Preciado in relation to the barebacking subculture and bug-chasing, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹⁰ This claim will also be explored by Chu in *Females*.

¹¹ Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 270–271. Emphasis in the original.

nonpornographic cultural industry stems from this moral axiom that labels organs considered sexual (in particular, the cock, pussy, and anus) as extra-cinematic objects (literally *ob-scene*, or ‘outside the scene’).¹²

Treating these quotations in reverse order, I am contending one could *mistake* this performance as pornographic simply due to the deployment of the cross. As noted by Louisiana Purchase, drag artists are under renewed slanderous accusations that their art is inherently pornographic. However, even considering Preciado’s description of cultural hegemony’s privileging of certain body sites as pornographic, we must admit that we do not ever see Louisiana Purchase’s anus, but we do see how it is used. Furthermore, Preciado theorizes these somatic sites (cock, pussy, and anus) are “*ob-scene*” so as to privatize and control the libido with the same efficiency that pornography releases it.

The cross *as* dildo inserted into the anus carries an affective tsunami. To some, it may strike some latent pietism. As noted by Louisiana Purchase, the crowd loved it; which is attested to by another person from the video recording. Thus, we move to the former quotation. Following Preciado, Louisiana Purchase’s performance carries a force to subvert sexual performativity. What *is* the sexuality of sticking a cross in your ass? The performance reveals the truth of the performativity of sexuality. I am contending the cross has implicated Theology. Reading into the title of the song, I am interpreting “Personal Jesus” as an effort to short-circuit both sexuality and Theology.

¹² Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 271.

Preciado will note how within pornography there is a certain desubjectification that occurs—a hollowing out—so that the spectator may be affected and possess what Preciado calls the *potentia gaudendi*, or orgasmic force of the performance. Recall the vicarious cheers. Are these cheers for Louisiana? Or are these cheers the grasping of the *potentia gaudendi*? On the other hand, Preciado will note how there is also the desubjectification of the spectator—another hollowing out—that allows them to be a spectator and a recipient of the *potentia gaudendi* but not actively making sexual decisions, for they are spectators.¹³

Let us return to the performance, where this referenced sexuality is occurring in relation to a cross that has become a dildo. This dildo cross places divinity at the scene of the potentially pornographic site. Divinity, too, becomes pornographic; but then divinity, too, can be vicariously transferred to the audience. As a gesture that this performance might be considered *as* theology, the audience *cheers*. Even when brandishing the cross early in the performance, the audience cheered. Such an action could have been met with boos and heckling to get off the stage and leave that religious crap outside of the club, but that is not the case. Crucially though, from the perspective of a lip-sync, there is no talking that is occurring; there is no formal academic conference. Concerning the uploaded video, we are left with the emcee saying “Maybe I will” as the recording cuts out. This is theology shot through with queerness, sensing something and then losing grasp or sight of it just when you think you have it.

But the insertion of the cross into the ass is only one gesture in this performance. “Personal Jesus” then transitions to sucking on the cross; a movement I assert represents coming into ethical agency in relation to institutional power. Again, we are left to interpretation, but this

¹³ Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 270.

movement can be the translation from passive to active role in the sex act. This, of course, plays upon the importance of these categorizations within the history of sodomy.¹⁴ Passive and active could also be extended, in the context of this performance, to dom/sub play within BDSM practices. This orifice reversal is a reminder that while this performance points to real things, it is still a performance, and we—the survivors of abuse—can write our own narrative into the performance.

This complicates our relation to the art—a continual deconstruction and construction—in new ways. Is it still representing abuse? Or are we now representing how sexual subcultures practices free use and consensual nonconsenting play? In this reversal, the dom/sub relation is mediated by ethics. Most people may think of safe words, but this extends to types of physical contact, locations of sexual encounter, negotiating and discussing levels of pain tolerance, and much more. This ethical communication is one that allows for expansive sexual play.¹⁵

This oscillation of sexual dynamics results in the oscillations of meaning. The interplay of being fucked (albeit by one's own hand in the case of the performance) and then transitioning into taking the cross into one's mouth may cause quite the affective stir. In the sense of vicarious participation, many may see their own history in this performance, thinking the story has been written concerning sex and the church. Louisiana Purchase, however, offers a way out. Sucking on the cross not only inverts these sexual dynamics, but also facilitates a transitory movement of

¹⁴ See Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in the Christian Tradition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998) and Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*.

¹⁵ Here, it may be helpful to think of this reversal through the lens of Marcella Althaus-Reid's Sadean hermeneutics—where she draws extensively from Marcel Hénaff's readings of Sade in *Sade, The Invention of the Libertine Body*—as presented in *The Queer God*, 26–30. As noted in the interlude, such resonance between Althaus-Reid and Preciado during the same period, concerning the usage of sexual tableaux to break the structures of heterosexuality, is most interesting.

bodily mucus, the comingling of sexual abuse to the articulation of said abuse. It is a moment that can gesture to reclaiming one's agency—one's relationship to another form of power—after agency has often been violently diminished.

Finally, Louisiana Purchase snaps the cross in half. Such a potent iconoclastic gesture might stir latent pietism in some—stoking a potential faithful disposition one does not know they possess. In addition to its subversive gesture, the snapping of the cross also acquires its own articulation. Admittedly, Louisiana Purchase does not reference any verbal components as part of the performance, yet the snapping of the cross serves as unique sonic pronouncement.

A theo-ethical judgment has occurred, and it does not appear to favor the church. This action is inflected with recollection that the crowd loved it and Louisiana Purchase loved performing it: mutual sexual pleasure. The snapping of the cross can signify many things. The focus here is concerning the cross's potential representation of institutional authority (note, while I am alluding to Christianity due to the force of the cross, we must also contend the cross being infused into sexual object also challenges forms of sexual institutional authority). Louisiana Purchase's views of the church (particularly clergy and youth group leaders) has already been noted; therefore, I do position this judgment to be in relation to the institution. Again, it need not be interpreted that Christian faith, *tout court*, must be snapped in half. Rather, it can allude to the dismantling of institutional structures.

“Personal Jesus” as a heuristic of christotectonics points to the mechanisms of Jesus *the* Christ. While this elision might muddy the waters, it also serves to capture a more colloquial understanding of these theological terms. Meaning, most people make no distinction between

Jesus and Christ.¹⁶ While I have stretched this elision for this heuristic analysis, Louisiana Purchase's performance, while clearly entertaining for many, can function in other ways.

Witness and participation in such seemingly transgressive art can help shatter taboos and relationships to power structures. We do not need to be imprisoned, nor defined, by our abuse or the hegemonic narratives of our abnormality. We can claim our own agency, even a theological agency, in relation to this circulation of power. Louisiana Purchase's performance reveals that power is not a zero-sum game, it circulates and the marginalized and exploited can also claim power.

This, resultingly, means that something new is being created in this process. Christotechtonics—studying the appearance, formation, and utilization of Christ—entails the oscillation of deconstruction and construction. While the snapping of the cross may resonate with a sense of finality, it might also represent the necessary interruption required for theology. This action clears the way for new insights and new epistemic locations, while it simultaneously interrogates the disappeared markers of hegemonic Theology.

Situating the Intervention

As additive to the project of christotechtonics, Louisiana Purchase's performance of "Personal Jesus" is but one entry in reversal practices of a countertheology. The situating of this performance art has been formalized through the conceptual framing of the theological.

However, I do want to provide insights from Preciado's introduction to the English translation of *Countersexual Manifesto* in 2018.

A manifesto is a hyperbolic, flamboyant, and political dildo. There is no freedom in politics without poetry. Whereas second-wave feminist and queer theory stressed the need to transform the epistemological regime to activate gender emancipation,

¹⁶ I always think back to my own introductory religious studies courses: "Christ is not Jesus' last name. It is a title."

it now seems clear that the desire regime must be transformed to decolonize the sexual body. Desire is not a given truth but a fabricated social field that can be modified under the condition of investing the tools of metaphor and imagination, of poetry and somatic experimentation.

It is precisely because the violence of the sexual and colonial regime is too serious that it is necessary to unfold the unconscious and deconstructing forces of poetry against it. Here we must draw upon everything that the artistic and minority movements have taught us. This manifesto is Dadaism applied to sexuality, conceptual feminism applied to the [understanding]¹⁷ of gender difference and genitalia, radical pedagogy applied to the learning of gender and sexual identity disciplines. Performance art and post-structural theory ought to be understood here as dildos, cultural apparatuses of affect and imagination production that the text uses to displace the centrality of anatomical realism.¹⁸

There is much to unpack here. As noted, drawing upon Taylor's framing of the theological is a more formalized process of this project. In other words, it is a way in which Preciado might begin to be understood and read in different circles. Without it, this project could have been hyperbolic, flamboyant, and political; okay, perhaps *more* hyperbolic, flamboyant, and political than it already is.

This disciplinary stitching also resulted in me fence-sitting regarding an epistemological regime and a desire regime. While this project certainly *leans* toward interventions of epistemological regimes, I have sought to interrogate desire through a posture of asking why is this the only way? While Preciado makes changes in each edition and translation of *Countersexual Manifesto*, these changes do appear to be slight nuances to claims rather than a reorganization of the conceptual ideas (like this distinction of the epistemological regime and desire regime). And as we saw in the previous chapter in Preciado's remarks to the *École de la Cause Freudienne* in *Can The Monster Speak?*, he does not consider these regimes to exist in a

¹⁷ Typographical error in the English translation. Cf. Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 40.

¹⁸ Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 16–17; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 39–40.

state of irreconcilable difference. But this is a minor concession in relation to Preciado's work and pales in comparison to the more important portion—in my opinion—of the above quotation.

The intervention of desire regimes—and epistemic regimes—arrives forcefully through poetry, through artistic intervention. In fact, Preciado claims this is necessary because the force and violence of coloniality is all too serious. We need art that strikes us in the unconscious parts of mind where a learned desire resides, in hopes that we can interrogate this desire and discern how it is used toward the end of somatic techniques.

It bears repeating, the dildo need not be a facsimile of the penis. As Preciado contends, these artistic interventions are also dildos. These artistic interventions seek to modify the sexual subject.

In the case of Louisiana Purchase, “Personal Jesus” modifies the sexual subject *and* the theological subject. Such a performance as “Personal Jesus” may leave us awash with affective pulsations concerning what theology *can* be. It awakens the imagination that interrogates the fabrication of sexual desire rooted within particular theological mores, and thus also questions the epistemic foundation of where theology can begin.

Crucial to this project, I have also been privileging those who have been excluded from theological structures. As noted by Louisiana Purchase, she is an ex-Catholic. We are not provided the details of this journey, but what is clear is that Louisiana Purchase has chosen an existence outside the structures of Theology, while simultaneously not quite wholly rejecting the identity Catholic can confer—it clearly has informed this performance. In that regard, the performance of “Personal Jesus” reflects the weighing-in of subjects who have been cast out; not necessarily the faithful yet attuned to the influence of Christianity and power.

As heuristic intervention of christotechtonics, it short-circuits our thinking by way of artistic performance. It is not necessarily an elegant, cogent, or even complete argument, but perhaps an effective—perhaps potentially affective to some—pathway to theological criticism. That is why christotechtonics, as a hermeneutic, must think *with* this type of art. This art is not for the people who would see it and consider this to be the nail in the coffin concerning a depravity of queer people. This art is for the people who need a short-circuit to theological thinking, a potentially messy stumbling entrance into understanding they, too, can making theological claims. That power is not inaccessible to them.

Furthermore, and indicative with many queer people in relation to Christianity, tapping into this power to make theological claims often erupts in relation to material conditions of bodies. How does the church have authority to be concerned about whom I sleep with when their clergy are sexually assaulting youth? How can I sit in church and hear sermon after sermon about the importance of pro-life (a reductionist position) when the local actions of churches (some) stop just short of queer bodies concerning healthcare, housing, and more? These questions can go on. Arguably, though, for many queer people, they have become attuned the fruit borne of Theology—it's rotten, bitter, or poisonous.

What "Personal Jesus" does, though, is open a door. Louisiana Purchase is not actively constructing a theology (though such apophatic gestures could certainly be part of a theology), but she is creating a pathway for others to do so. Christotechtonics is not a completed project, it is not seeking an enclosure of ideas that builds a bridge back to its oppressors so they can cross and colonize a new location. Christotechtonics is perhaps more so building a bridge into an open horizon. We cannot know the depths of this theological abyss, and that's okay. But we can know

one thing for certain, we must leave Theology behind to make that journey. Perhaps frustratingly, I don't think it can be written; it must be lived.

CONCLUSION

I want to return to the initial metaphor from the introduction of this project: a flood. While this project did not undertake an eco-theological criticism, it did point toward other floods, so to speak, that are occurring in relation to gender and sexuality and Theology. Additionally, this is not a new phenomenon, but the overflowing of boundaries that has been a long time coming.

I still maintain the realities of floods; they recede eventually. While rivers—in this case guild Theology—may return to its entrenched course of flow, the surrounding landscape is left changed. Here, I avoid the language of natural course because the natural course of flow changes over hundreds and thousands of years. This conception of natural is precisely what is lacking within the previous theological explorations of Catholic social teaching of this project.

Furthermore, the specificity of this project is contingent upon the intersection of various factors occurring at the right time. In retrospect, the reading of *Countersexual Manifesto*, the publication of “*Male and Female He Created Them*” (MF), and my work toward earning a PhD happened to coincide in a way that would facilitate the articulation of this particular flood. As with anything that is bound to the inexorable flow of time, there will come a day when this work is no longer needed, or, potentially worse, contributing to the factors that will precipitate a new flood.

But enough with floods now, the metaphor is exhausted. From the outset of this project, the methodology sought to decenter Theology in a way that sexuality, sex, and gender are decentered by queer and trans theory. In this regard, yes, it was necessary to abstract the

particularities of each instance of a Theology to examine how Theology also functions as a socially constructed category, which is why I directed this work more toward the direction of philosophies of religion. Leaning more upon my concentration with Women's Studies and Gender Studies, I take seriously the epistemic loci of intentionally exploited peoples—in this case racialized queer and trans people—to inform the starting point of theological reflection. As a formal research project that is more indebted to philosophy and socio-ethnographic research, queer and trans theory served as the primary interlocutors of this embodied reality. Here, following the tradition of queer and trans theory as utilizing a critical lens to analyze texts (most often cinema and literature) to interrogate the philosophical structures that organize gender, sexuality, sex, desire, and more, I chose *MF* as the text under scrutiny.

Part I of this project played upon the rhizome's multiple multiplicities to map a particular snapshot of the current moment (where our boat is in this flood). This part of the project, which served more so as a transdisciplinary overview of my own positionings as a scholar, ventured through Foucault's formulations of power, which is not a zero-sum game (which I think Louisiana Purchase's performance makes abundantly clear), Dean Spade's and Eric A. Stanley's criticisms of neoliberal gay politics inflected with the affect theory of Lauren Berlant, and finally, working with Mark Lewis Taylor concerning guild Theology and the theological (rendered as theology). Part I also served to establish how I read queer and trans theory to engender the force of Taylor's theological for these are voices that are coming from outside the discipline of Theology. The other two parts of Taylor's usage of the theological are my own readings and interpretations of queer and trans theory and why I use them. Taylor will also contend there is no anti-theological anti-space, thus the potentially normative secularism lurking

in queer and trans scholarship can be interpreted as a theological gesture. Finally, etymologically, “theology,” as a word, does not inherently mean Christianity. While Part II does tarry with a particularly odious document from Catholicism, the theological in reference to queer and trans scholarship need not even be related to Christianity. Again, this is why there is a strong current of philosophy of religion, as this will be a future scholarly trajectory.

As I noted in the introduction, my method could be described as queer and trans theory informing the ethical implications of theological assertions that delimit the politicality of intentionally exploited people. Within this framing is already the kernel of a hermeneutics of suspicion, but I considered that not all people may be on board with considering Theology as a social phenomenon akin to religion (via religious studies). That is why, as noted, I do consider part I also providing an account of how I have chiseled out a niche. Time will tell how much of this content will appear in a future publication of this work.

At the heart of this project in part II there was a desire to chart the potentiality of discerning theology with Paul B. Preciado’s *Countersexual Manifesto*. In this regard, as Preciado provides reference to theological thought (here, directed toward Christianity which shaped the trajectory of this work), this project, in my opinion, is not a disciplinary overstep (especially when queer and trans theory likes to tout that its doesn’t have a real discipline). The result of this project has been christotechtonics. While I have concerned myself very little with the construction of a new theological system, christotechtonics has set out to present a new critical hermeneutical lens that studies the appearance, formation, and usage of Christ within theological formulations. The case study for this hermeneutical lens was the Vatican document “*Male and Female He Created Them*”. This usage of Christ was explored in relation to gender and sexuality

in chapter five and in relation to race in chapter six. Additionally, christotechtonics can also be understood as a heuristic device, a short-circuiting of the theo/logics of institutional structures (whether this be guild Theology or sexual institutions like heterosexuality) through the process of weighing-in. This was explored through the reading of Louisiana Purchase's performance "Personal Jesus" in chapter seven.

The theological claim of this project may be asserted as follows: Christ is a dildo. Following the argument of the book, this phrase is a performative claim in relation to Christ. However, as the artistic intervention of Louisiana Purchase showed, this performative claim can conceptually elide into performance of Christ as a dildo. To try and be clear one last time, this performative claim articulates the *function* of Christ. Here, I am aware that this potentially renders Christ into an empty signifier, a void that holds no meaning other than the meaning that has been overlaid upon it by those possessing hegemonic power.

In many ways, this performative claim names the failed messianism of Christ for Theology, for Christ has been co-opted for theological biopolitical ends. Once we interrogate this failed messianism, we reveal that Christ has no use nor identity (despite the philosophical category's relationship to Jesus) other than the use and identity that has been *placed onto Christ*. Here, the appositional framing of the dildo and Christ (i.e., theorizing them together rather than as oppositional forces) seeks to articulate, then, the prostheticity of Christ.

This "is" in "Christ is a dildo," therefore, is an "is" which "is not"—an "is" as if it was. Similar to Butler's claims in relation to gender, Edelman's claims in relation to queer, or Preciado's claims in relation to the dildo and countersexuality, this "is" articulates the produced

effects of the function of these realities. Within these constraints we must contend that these realities do not exist, not really. But this does not mean the produced effects are not real.

This distinction also plays upon the limitations of the English language in relation to the verb “to be.” This verb can be expressed in a predicative sense (i.e., Christ is a dildo) that articulates the function of Christ as prosthetic. This verb can also be expressed in an existential sense (i.e., there is no Christ) that challenges our assumptions or cluster of promises that we have invested into a particular identity formation of Christ. This existential Christ, then, does not exist (it is, at the end of the day, a theological construction that describes a privileged title assigned to someone—meaning that it modifies the supposed identity of whosoever wields it), even though the predicative Christ functions and is very real. The realities concerning this function of Christ are on display in the previous chapters.

The theology present, then, takes shape through a form of critical theology that seeks to intervene in the theo/logics of Cis-tematic Theology that is embodied within *MF*. Additionally, there has been a throughline in this project concerning ethical reflection and perhaps moral judgment in relation to Theology, that is ascertained through recourse to the theological (or our socio-juridical attunement). This ethical edge of the project brings theology into spaces it often would rather avoid, if possible, yet this ethical edge is perhaps the most potent entry point concerning gender and sexuality studies.

This project, though, is a broad sketch. More time will need to be spent applying this hermeneutical framework to other texts and other time periods. Additional analyses of other art and performances can strengthen heuristic possibilities. Though this is only the start, I am certain of one thing: Christ is a dildo.

The Future of Christ the Dildo

From a practical and psychological perspective, Christ the dildo may go into hiding for a few months while I remember how to be a functioning human being again. From a more academic perspective, it has been noted throughout that christotechtonics is a critical hermeneutical lens that is utilized to study the appearance, formation, and utilization of Christ, especially as it concerns matters of sexuality, gender, sex, and race. Therefore, and as noted in the final chapter, the future of a constructive theology may not be forthcoming because I do not think it can really be written. Nonetheless, I do include a gesture toward a possibility below.

At the close of this project, I want to consider avenues that I did not take. These will be presented as small vignettes, some longer than others depending on how soon I abandoned some of these conversations. Far from fleshed out, these vignettes provide some “vibes,” as my students say. Some just as easily could have been routes I took *for* this project, but I chose not to, and others may be considered what I am considering exploring beyond this project.

Apophatic Theology

The apophatic tradition is both theological rich and often filled with drama when it brushes against ecclesial authority. Considering a large impetus of this project was reading both *Countersexual Manifesto* and “*Male and Female*”, I found my work situated more in what could be considered a critical history of the present. Owing to sexual research concerning the contemporary creation and category of the “homosexual,” I, admittedly, struggled to reach farther back than 1869. I followed assessments like Peter Coviello that contend that queer, a much newer category for sexual non-normativity, is a historically anachronistic—and potentially a temporal colonial—term when we reach beyond 1869 for purposes to justify queerness.

Others, like Foucault and Halperin, which utilize genealogy to try and ascertain a semblance of what we might *call* queer through a contemporary mentality, but that is not the same as saying it *is* queer. From a theological aspect, Linn Marie Tonstad notes this as the pernicious quest for queer in history as a way to legitimate queer's presence in the contemporary. Pursuant to this project, and its rootedness in queer's foundational theorizations and inflammatory theorists, there are no queers in the present because queerness is not an identity. Recourse to a past sense of queer cannot justify an identity that does not exist. Again, this is from the academic level concerning how queer has/is theorized. But I do make concessions, like Edelman, and note that I am aware that queer is used as an identity marker as well, one I claim for myself. I have also been rather ambivalent in my own usage of "queer" in relation to a positive identity (i.e., "queer and trans people), for such language renders a smoother reading experience.

Why do I note this? While there are certainly contemporary scholars working on apophatic theology, and even apophatic theology in relation to sexuality, gender, sex, and race, I was still left with my foundational documents of *Countersexual Manifesto* and "*Male and Female*". Additionally, some historians (medievalists) have taken up the temporal turn within queer and trans scholarship. Though I am indebted to Edelman's *No Future*, which presents a rather strong intervention concerning temporality through its very impediment, temporality studies is not particularly present within this work. The pursuit of such apophatic work, arguably, is made more fun due to this avenue one can take. The closest this project came to temporality was my work with affect theory. In my opinion, temporality is a cross-historical deployment and consideration of affect and norms.

The Polemic

In all fairness, some people may read this as a polemic. Perhaps it sounds too dismissive of Theology, but I would also argue it is just as dismissive of sexuality, gender, sex, and race that is linked to Theology. Polemics have also enjoyed a lot of light in gender and sexuality studies, particular in those texts referred to as theory. While the medium of a manifesto is certainly inflammatory in some directions, Preciado's *Countersexual Manifesto* gives us something, no matter how naïve (this will be the next vignette). Sometimes, this can also take the shape of calling out people, naming names, and not caring who you offend. It's not personal, it's just queer theory.

While this project has been an academic exercise, I have tried earnestly to shape the argument more so through scholars I think with and not against. I think most academics can be read as elitist when we name drop people and concepts, but we are often just being nerds and letting other people know that our insights are highly dependent on other people we think with. Of course, we all think against, or differently than, some people. In this regard, I would often offer slight adjustments to how I would think with such-and-such scholar. I have tried hard to not bother with disciplinary squabbles, other than through conceptual framings.

In this vein, I am shaped by a dissertation fellowship I held sponsored by Melissa Wilcox at the University of California Riverside for scholars pursuing queer and trans studies in religion. Melissa recounts how when they were a doctoral student the funding for fellowships hosted by Mark D. Jordan had run out, and the network of scholars conducting this work was severely impacted. Melissa, now fortunate to have a chaired position, uses the chair funds to sponsor students. As long as they have the chair, the fellowship will live.

Our mentorships (for I was a cohort with five others) contemplated conducting our research in these present moments (personally, academically, politically, and more). Central to our conversations was the demand of academia (especially queer and trans theory) to present itself through polemic; it is radically standing against something, so it is making that position clear. We then discussed the above framing of who I am thinking with. Yes, by leaving scholars out of your conversation or consigned to footnotes (what my colleague refers to as my “works slighted”) we are still making our positions somewhat known, but it is not us seeking to advance or improve our future job prospects at the expense of other scholars. As we often reminded each other, we must remember the structuring logics that pit us all against each other. Squabbling against one another about how their understanding of queer and trans death is doing nothing to assess, critique, and counter the structuring logics that produce this death. There are such few people doing this type of work that we should, perhaps must, reconsider how one proves and positions their research in academia concerning matters queer and trans.

A Theology

Is it finally happening? Is there a theology? Not quite. I noted in passing how Preciado has laid out articles for a countersexual society, and even included a contract that one can replicate and sign to become a member of the countersexual society. Remember, it *is* a manifesto, so there is a bit of flair for dramatics. Nonetheless, I redirect you to chapter seven, where I am contending that such a theology (would it *be* a *queer* theology, or just theology) cannot be written. The action of writing passes theology *back* into the guild discipline of Theology. As noted throughout, I don’t exempt my project from this. The penning of this document is decidedly not theological, no matter how much I push rhetoric to its limits, refuse to treat Theology as a

discipline and treat it as a social construction through queer and trans theory, or even my reading of the performance of Louisiana Purchase. All of this was for the ends of a guild endeavor. It is Theology.

So then what might a *queer* theology look like? This word pairing is one I have also resisted and used sparingly throughout this project. For one, it only compounds the crisis of contextual theologies by contributing another adjectival marker. Further, I don't think such a task can be done. Or, perhaps, if such a task can be done it would be written in a way where it is unintelligible to many. Here, I think about Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (and how this influenced Lacan, who also influenced Edelman), and question what such an articulation of "queer theology" will look like. While portions of this text may have been arduous, I certainly hope it was not as frustrating as *Finnegans Wake*.

As I ended chapter seven, I gestured that perhaps it cannot be written, it must be lived. I also turn to Butler's 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, "The point was not to prescribe a new gendered way of life that might then serve as a model for readers of the text. Rather, the aim of the text was to open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized."¹ Per Butler's summation of this point, which some may find inadequate for a project, they note that it is often the people who have been rendered legitimate, intelligible, or real who pose the question of "use value" of simply "opening up possibilities." This is, admittedly, a rather modest proposal; even if it is couched in the dissolution of racialized gender, sex, and sexuality. Why might this be? Per Butler, for those who have been rendered unintelligible, illegitimate, or unreal, the opening up of possibilities is the opening up of life

¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, viii.

itself. As the quotation notes, Butler—nor this project—wants to dictate what that “ought” must be; for this action, once again, forecloses possibilities.

To that end, within *Countersexual Manifesto* Preciado has a vision of how to live. What are we to make of this? First, one must sign the contract. Contrary to the pop culture sentiments of being born this way, queer theory and countersexual members assent to their refusal of the hegemonic systems of sexuality, gender, and sex, and direct this refusal toward short-circuiting this hegemonic system. In this countersexual society is the abolition of the family. Here, we can take a more Marxist approach, where the privatization of the family unit is broken and the sexual labor, especially of people capable of pregnancy, is no longer disappeared. Rearing of children, thus, becomes a communal responsibility. In relation to this abolition is the affirmation of children’s autonomy, through the understanding that they have the right to a countersexual education, but this also means that they can choose otherwise. This type of work, though not from the angle of sexual manifesto, can be seen in Sophie Lewis’ *Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation*.

In a more posthumanist vein, which is not that surprising considering the dildo as prosthesis, there should be work dedicated to furthering countersexual practices. Following how I noted that “Personal Jesus” should be additive to this project and not summative, Preciado contends a countersexual society must be dedicated to this perpetual permutation of bodies and technology. This could venture down routes of posthumanist studies and ecology through scholars like Timothy Morton.

But what is this? Is this theology? I am not fully sure, but from the perspective of this project, what Preciado names as the articles of countersexuality is far more theology than what I

would write if I were to translate it into Theology. Yes, Preciado wrote these down, so we could interrogate from that level in relation to gender and sexuality studies. But here, in relation to theology, is how Preciado is saying we should live. Nonetheless, pursuant to the dildo's function within countersexuality, even this stylized formation of a new society must be open to a continual deconstruction. In other words, countersexuality is a project, not an identity; transit, not essence. It is trying to ascertain how we might live without the somatic categorizations of heterosexuality, and simultaneously ensure how this new society does not impose an "ought" that forecloses possibilities.

Even I wonder if it is enough. However, as I read more and more manifestos, I quickly saw two primary types emerge. On one hand you have the authors that seem to contend that something is over and we need to move on (Haven't you heard? Gender is out. It's time for something new.). On the other hand you have authors that are wrestling with the reality that there are people trying to make something a reality in the midst of the present situation (We are the revolution currently happening). I consider Preciado's work to be the latter, especially as he names it as such. Preciado does not write as if we already live in that utopia where all these somatic categories have become destitute (for me, this should be the acknowledged academic humility all scholars should try to engender—just because we may write it and publish it, does not make it so). So how do we get there? While the articles of the countersexual manifesto may seem bizarre, Preciado has given us instructions, even if we will never actually make it happen. It is a manifesto, but I also consider it to be a rather critical utopian project.

For me, I am thinking: perhaps theology isn't there. Maybe this utopia is no longer concerned with those conversations and has returned to a contemplative life where people treat

others with dignity, and where there is no need for a *theo*-ethical system to rationalize why this is so. It's lived. Yet, perhaps this strays too close to Freud. While there is still immense queer and trans suffering, there is also immense queer and trans life that is occurring without need of Theology's justification. Preciado is not advocating for society to justify countersexuality; rather, Preciado is advocating for a coalition of countersexuals willing to justify a society.

I—with my privileged academic training and *longue durée* view of history and social processes in relation to Theology—can justify queerness within Theology until the day I die; that's not the issue. Again, this is what I will frame as openness arguments and what Linn Marie Tonstad will refer to as queer apologetics. From an academic perspective, I think it is important to leave space; leave open the possibilities. Thus, the task is for queer and trans life to determine if they want to justify theology. Per the emcee from Louisiana Purchase's performance, "maybe I will." But that's not for me to decide.

Messianicity

No doubt, in my references to Christ from a philosophy of religion angle, there could have been conversations of messianicity. Most notably, at least in my mind, would be Water Benjamin. The rhetoric of "weak messianic force" in the context of revolution might converse well with Preciado and this work concerning "Christ the dildo." As with apophatic thought, these explorations kept bumping into temporality, and this was a route I ultimately did not go down.

Additionally, this conversation of messianicity also converses with Derrida, who possesses his own haunting force within queer and trans scholarship (much like Lévi-Strauss). We could also proceed down the route of Agamben, or Žižek, or Badiou, and many others. As I was already progressing down the pathways of queer politics through the works of Spade,

Stanley, and Berlant and discerning how to converse this with a socially constructed formulation of Theology (Taylor), I abandoned this thread of conversation early on. This project was already conceptually overburdened. While I am completely in favor of conceptual and speculative discourse production *à la* de Lauretis, I had to draw a line for both my sanity and the sanity of my committee (who is having to read this (overly) lengthy work).

There is potential I may explore this route in the future, but I foresee the next vignette as possessing the most logical extension of christotechtonics.

Integral Anthropology

Within in the closing paragraphs of “*Male and Female*” the authors will introduce a new concept in light of the prior argument (which, again, was framed as a movement toward dialogue). This concept is “integral anthropology.” This set an alarm off in my head in reference to *Laudato Si*’. Of note, *LS* does not even create this specific word pairing “integral anthropology.” This does not mean anthropology is not present in the document.

LS will reference “anthropocentrism” more times in the document than “anthropology.” Especially as *LS* is praised for being a powerful ecological text coming the church, this reference to the rapacious greed of anthropocentrism is not only welcome, but I would say necessary. Within *LS*, anthropology is noted as something crucial to our understandings of ecology; therefore, *MF* now stands out as presenting a new concern. This allusion at the end of *MF* to an integral anthropology cross references its implication to the arguments of *LS*. We need to have an account of anthropology? Coming right up! The authors of *MF* are contending their fabrication is the only possible interpretation of integral anthropology. Recall, the authors are not coming for

only “gender theory,” but take aim at *any* anthropology that challenges the church’s anthropology of sexual dimorphism—“gender theory” simply receives the church’s particular ire.

This has implications when contemplated alongside *LS*. If anthropology and ecology are to be united, where then is the space for all the bodies *MF* have rationalized out of existence? Playing off the root of ecology, they have been excluded from the *oikos*, from the home, from an economy (grace, salvation history, as we have seen, desire, etc.). Again, I ask similar questions. What is at stake when human bodies are framed as excess to an *oikos*? What violence does such a framing make possible? As I contend within *MF*, the very real violence toward bodies not only becomes licit, but, in some cases, becomes encouraged—becomes a theo-ethical imperative.

I do not yet know how this will take shape. Will it become another chapter in this revised project? Will it become a journal article? Will it become another project altogether, one where I take an even stronger turn to posthumanist studies? Perhaps I take the decentering even further and move into the fungal turn in posthumanism? Only time will tell. Nonetheless, this reference at the end of *MF* was striking, and I will return to interrogate it at some point.

Dysphoria, mon amour

Following in a similar trajectory with “integral anthropology,” there is also potential to explore Preciado’s most recent text, *Dysphoria mundi: le son du monde qui s’écroule*. While I referenced this text at moments in this project, the scope of *Dysphoria mundi* escapes the boundaries of this work. Nonetheless, *Dysphoria mundi* offers new grounds to queer and trans theology. Within the text, Preciado redeploys dysphoria—the clinicalizing category—in a technical philosophical sense to articulate dysphoria as a way to interpret contemporary political (sexual, racial, ecological, and more) life.

Preciado continues the trajectory of thinking with scholars, artists, and activists who are thinking and living differently. Importantly, for scholars, Preciado asks what would it mean to imagine a different world that takes seriously all these insights. Suddenly, by way of example, we are not reading Gloria Anzaldúa in comparison to Hegel or Heidegger, or some other paradigm of thought that holds sway in the canons of Western academia. Rather, we take seriously Anzaldúa as a starting point not in need of retroactive comparison, but open to emerging new conversations with other subjugated knowledges.

Additionally, and from a theological perspective, Preciado inflects his work with a counter form of intercessory prayers. Reflecting both on COVID-19, as well as the burning of Notre-Dame de Paris, Preciado wonders why we need to rebuild. What is the compulsion humans have to rebuilding structures (physical or ideological) that we know have caused unspeakable traumas in the material conditions of marginalized bodies. We might, as suggested by Preciado, consider Notre-Dame de Ruines. This counter form of prayer also shifts a familiar prayer (the “Our Father”). Rather than a potential usual utterance of “Notre Père,” the repetition of “Notre-Dame”—an infusion of feminine language, for a femininized church, administered by men.

In retrieval of a flood metaphor, I could also introduce conversations concerning how the earth itself is expressing its own political force. However, the earth does not communicate like humans communicate. Furthermore, as this project has shown, some humans have yet to foster meaningful communication with other humans, who knows how this communication will be possible with the earth. This also does not mean gender, sex, sexuality, and race have left the tableau. History has shown how these categories of human (still a wobbly entity for some veins

of Catholicism) bodies often become aligned with nature. They must be contained. They must be subdued. But this is not a viable option of human community, nor is it a viable option for the foundation of capitalist enterprises. The foundation will not hold, and dysphoria mundi (the dysphoria of the world) is already expressing itself.

Conclusion

Sometimes it is said that a dissertation is a summation of everything you have learned thus far in your life. I think the above vignettes can attest to how that is not true. Others consider the dissertation to be the most important piece of writing you will ever accomplish. One only needs to have a couple conversations with people on “the other side” to know this is also not true. In fact, some people permanently embargo their dissertation because no one should read such cringe-worthy, rudimentary thoughts. I had an undergraduate professor describe the dissertation process as reading more and more about less and less until you know everything there is to know about absolutely nothing.

I find it funny that over a decade later I have completed a PhD (hopefully) where my project is contending this very nothingness. Albeit my undergraduate advisor was contending the necessary humility of presenting such a limited argument for the sake of the academic exercise of the “pass” (which can also be read with so much queer and trans theory with the politics of passing). I don’t think he had in mind this nothingness would be a sexual theological claim. Both in relation to racialized somatic politics of sexuality, gender, and sex, and to the socially constructedness of Theology.

As Preciado states: “All is dildo;”² as I state: even Christ. In this case, it is how Christ is socially constructed in relation to the racialized somatic politics of sexuality, gender, and sex. Christ is used to determine the appearance, formation, and utilization of heterosexuality. Christ, then, is evacuated of all other content, save for this construction of racialized sexuality, gender, and sex. If we draw from queer and trans theory to interrogate the socially constructed functions of these somatic politics of identity, we reveal the fabrication of their supposed foundations: gender, race, sexuality, sex, Christ do not exist, but produce a series of effects. Christ is nothing. Nonetheless, this nothingness can also facilitate open possibilities through the dildo. Christ, then, can adhere to the logics of the dildo. Christ is a dildo.

² Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, 66; Preciado, *Manifiesto contrasexual*, 103; Preciado, *Manifieste contra-sexuel*, 66.

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VITA

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