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FROM TRAUMA TO QUOTIDIAN CRISES:
TRAUMA, THEOLOGY, AND THE HUMAN

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Preface.....	vi
PART I: Feminist Trauma Theologies in the Historical Present.....	1
Chapter 1. Lineages of Trauma Theology: Feminists Speak Out.....	17
Chapter 2. Witnessing Irreducible Phenomena: Trauma and Lack.....	58
BRIDGE: From Trauma to Quotidian Crises.....	101
Chapter 3. An Alternative Framework: Quotidian Crises, Object Relations, and the Reparative.....	102
PART II: Toward a Theology of Quotidian Crises and Resurgent Grace.....	145
Chapter 4. Quotidian Crises: Sin, Evil, Incarnation.....	155
Chapter 5. Resurgent Grace: Criticism, Collaboration, Resistance.....	207
Bibliography.....	259

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Preface

I was first assigned Judith Herman's seminal text, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, in a clinical course while I was pursuing my Master of Social Work.¹ At the time, I recall furiously underlining sentences and marking up the margins. Herman, in describing trauma and its effects, was helping me make sense of my own experiences. *Maybe I had experienced PTSD*, I thought. I would go on not only to facilitate trauma-informed trainings and programming in my work in non-profit administration, but to undergo extensive trauma therapy myself. At the same time that I was encountering clinical work on trauma in my social work curriculum, I was taking classes on social movements and community organizing. From the poor people's campaign to the farm worker's movement to the black freedom struggle, I was learning of the power of collective action, through the everyday and usually unremarked-upon work of ordinary people, to demand and effect social change. These courses exploded the narrative of the Civil Rights Movement I had been taught in school, and gifted me the names of Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ruby Sales, and Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons. I also learned about the theory behind Saul Alinsky's style of organizing, characteristics of which I would come to see in the various demonstrations I would attend over the years in Chicago. Living and working in a politically vibrant city like Chicago allowed me to not just imbibe the lessons and abstract theories I was reading about in the classroom, but to put them into action. This was particularly the case in my work in Chicago housing and education initiatives, which required protests to change the structures that blocked access to housing and education as much as programming to offer resources that provided access in the short-term.

¹ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Updated Edition (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2003).

I share these glimpses into my formation because they represent one of the tensions that has come to structure this project, which engages in trauma studies but does so with an eye to shifting theological discourse *away* from trauma frameworks when addressing social and structural injury. This is to say, as someone who has not only been a part of rolling out trauma-informed programming in community services but who has herself benefitted from trauma therapy, my intention is by no means to disparage the importance of clinical practices around trauma, nor, as I will discuss shortly, the theological work that has arisen in conversation with this clinical work. While I will discuss this point more fully in chapter one, recognizing the importance of clinical work on trauma does not preclude attending to how exactly trauma came to be a fixture in clinical work, and what that might mean for political and ethical life. After all, clinical work on trauma, especially around trauma's codification in medicalized and psychological practice and discourse, has been very much itself imbricated in social movements. Herman's book, still assigned in clinical coursework over thirty years later, not only states its indebtedness to the women's movement but also addresses the way that trauma constitutes not just individual injury but structural injuries as well.

While this project interacts closely with trauma studies, this is also a theological project. My formal training in social work was sandwiched between formal training in theology, and, at the same time, animated by it. In discovering James Cone, Gustavo Gutiérrez, and Delores Williams in my undergraduate studies, for the first time I felt that Christianity could matter – not only because these theologians were addressing the way that theologies shape possibilities for life in the world, but also because these theologians were giving me tools and frameworks to make sense of certain experiences occurring in my own life. The work of these theologians has, in some ways, propelled some of the trajectories I have pursued in life, from where I have worked, to what I have studied, to where I have lived.

Suffice it to say, what follows is a new but old project, for it has been developing for many years as I have traversed the classroom, the clinic, the political demonstration, and elsewhere. The theologians mentioned above have gone with me and some of them continue to travel with me in this dissertation. Yet, others have joined along the way, as I encountered them in continuing my formal theological training. For example, after studying trauma in social work coursework, I was interested in what theologians had to say about trauma. At the same time, I began delving deeper into trauma studies through a variety of lenses – psychoanalytic theory, philosophy of religion, and feminist and queer theory. The current theological literature addressed trauma in conversation with a number of these disciplines, but especially clinical and feminist theory. In reading what these theologians had to say, I was at times delighted and other times perplexed, reactions which continued to sow the seeds of what this project would become.

Overview

This project details the evolution of trauma discourse in the West, tracing its origins in psychoanalysis and medicalized discourse during the early twentieth century, to its intersections with American feminist activism around sexual abuse and rape in the mid-twentieth century, and culminating in contemporary feminist theory and theology. I am especially interested in conceptions of the human among these various discourses, specifically how trauma gets deployed to theorize subjectivity along various gendered configurations. The constructive aim of the project is to propose a theological and ethical framework for responding to structural harm, one centered in an alternative understanding of the human (i.e. theological anthropology) than those approaches that have tended to center around discourses of trauma. To develop this framework, I offer the concepts of ‘quotidian crises’ and ‘resurgent grace.’ The former concept signals the ways that contemporary structural harm is oftentimes a daily drawn-out, persistent wearing-away rather than an extraordinary

event that shatters and fragments a person, as is usually suggested by a trauma-centric approach. Resurgent grace is what arrives in the everyday struggle to live and enhance conditions of livability amid experienced quotidian crises. I will say more about these concepts in what follows.

Throughout this dissertation, I use structural harm interchangeably with terms like structural injury, oppression, domination, social harm, and dispossession to denote the ways that social, political, and cultural structures put people in the way of harm, by blocking access to basic needs, perpetuating literal violence and murder, stealing resources, forming spaces where certain bodies are deemed deviant or inhuman, and the like. Some of these terms have a very particular meaning in specific disciplines (for example, dispossession, for decolonial scholars, usually only means the literal theft of indigenous land and resources), yet, at the risk of oversimplifying, I have chosen to use these terms more generally, while recognizing that none of these terms perfectly capture particular instances of social injury. Whereas trauma-centric approaches have tended to advocate for testifying and witnessing to structural harm, a response taken from psychological and philosophical definitions of trauma, in this project, I argue for moving away from, or at least expanding, the universe of trauma-centric frameworks and responses when addressing certain instances of social injustice.

While I will say more about the trauma concept in the chapters that follow, in making this argument, my intent is not to redefine or do away with the concepts of trauma to be discussed in this dissertation, whether clinical or philosophical. When trauma was first included in the third version of the American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III), a traumatic event was considered to be outside the range of ordinary human experience.² (Understandings of trauma in philosophical and literary works also tend to frame trauma in terms of its being outside the range of normal human experience, due to its incomprehensibility and resistance to redress.) In response, Laura Brown coined the term ‘insidious trauma,’ arguing that the ‘range of human experience’

² American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd ed., 1980.

described by the DSM-III definition of trauma was based upon the experience of “men of the dominant class; white, young, able-bodied, educated, middle-class, Christian men.”³ Insidious trauma was meant to give clinicians a way to talk about more hidden, normalized, and everyday forms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that were occurring particularly for minoritized clients.

Thus, those familiar with the clinical literature on trauma might notice that my notion of ‘quotidian crises’ is somewhat akin to the notion of ‘insidious trauma’. At the same time, my concern with the concept of trauma is not primarily with changing its clinical or philosophical definition per se, for those definitions have their practical and theoretical uses, but rather with how that concept has traveled into feminist and theological literatures to make sense of historical and structural injury, human subjectivity, and especially, then, how this making-sense-of shapes theological-ethical responses to such injuries. In the case of insidious trauma, early proponents of the concept, while recognizing that not all trauma could be captured in terms of extraordinary events, argued that its effects included “violence to the soul and spirit.”⁴ This violence to soul and spirit manifested, for example, in women being hypervigilant about the imminent threat of rape – for, according to Brown, women were more aware than ever that they could be “raped at any time, and by anyone.”⁵ The insight that insidious trauma was an assault on soul and spirit, and the claims about women’s experience, reveal the way that trauma, even when clinically defined, carries with it gendered presuppositions about human personhood. How do these presuppositions shape the field of

³ Laura S. Brown, “Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma,” *American Imago* 48, no. 1 (1991), 121; See also Mary Root, “Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality,” in *Personality and Psychopathology: Feminist Reappraisals*, ed. Laura S. Brown and Mary B. Ballou (New York: Guilford Press, 1992).

⁴ Brown, “Not Outside the Range,” 128.

⁵ Brown, “Not Outside the Range,” 128.

possibilities available for responding to the conditions under which such insidious traumas are perpetuated? And what significance do they hold when carried over into the theological literature?

As I will show, trauma has taken on different significances as it travels to and from the hospital, the clinic, the feminist speak out, the public sphere, and back again. Its use and significance shift within the contexts and historical moments in which it is drawn upon, and my aim is not to delimit trauma's proper terrain. Instead, I want to show how the fields within which it has usually been delimited stifle the theological possibilities for ethical response when applied to contemporary structural harm. Quotidian crises differs from trauma-centric approaches coming from philosophical and clinical notions that have tended to travel into theology. I will develop the distinct theological anthropology and ethics of the quotidian crises framework in this dissertation.

Therefore, my argument to shift from trauma frameworks when considering structural injury does not entail a further claim that one could not *really* be suffering symptoms of insidious trauma due sexism, and should not seek psychological resources to address it.⁶ Nor do I see the concept of quotidian crises, in turning away from the 'extraordinariness' usually associated with the trauma concept, as then coming to encompass all of the everyday negative experiences one encounters in life. As I will explain in chapter three, quotidian crises describes the ways structural injury, as I explained above, often shows up in contemporary social and political life today. Therefore, it would not include cases of simply having a bad day because it's raining and one must ride one's bike to work, or being upset because one accidentally eats meat served to one at a restaurant after asking for the vegan version of the dish, or feeling ashamed because one's pants rip down the middle during a public presentation. Not only would these cases not fall under the clinical and philosophical definitions of trauma to be discussed in the chapters to follow, but it would also be difficult to argue

⁶ Moreover, while beyond the scope of this dissertation, practical theologies have provided insight into how religious leaders and ministers might address such clinically-understood experiences of trauma.

that any of them would be a result of political, social, and cultural structures that put a disproportionate number of people in the way of harm, violence, and death.

Part one of the project, comprised of the first two chapters, provides a conceptual history of trauma in order to see how and why trauma has traveled into theology, and feminist theology in particular, at the turn of the century. Part one details the ways that trauma has come to not only anchor theorizations of the human along lines of gender, sexuality, and race, but also how the trauma concept has reverberated from its origins in clinical and medicalized research into the social, cultural, and theological imagination. In a register similar to Ann Cvetkovich's 2003 intervention into trauma studies, I am interested in how trauma has become "a social and cultural discourse that emerges in response to the demands of grappling with the psychic consequences of historical events,"⁷ although I would add theological discourse as well. In other words, while I will address the way trauma has come to be clinically defined for the individual, I will also analyze how trauma has seeped into public culture and theological accounts of trauma in formative ways for defining historical group injury.

Chapters one and two trace two distinct yet overlapping concepts of trauma. The first, elaborated in chapter one, stems from Freud's early work on trauma, later developed by American ego psychologists. In this framework, trauma can be traced to an exogenous precipitating factor, one that is shut off from the victim's system at the time of its occurrence. Yet, through testifying to the repressed memories in the presence of the compassionate therapist-witness, one's life can be returned to normalcy. Inflated to the level of the social, feminists have drawn upon this framework by testifying to experiences of abuse and sexual violence in order to demand recognition from the state and achieve the possibility of the good life. However, it is a good life at times sustained by the

⁷ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 18.

exclusion of deviant subjects (e.g., sexual and racial ‘others’). I show how this version of trauma is both taken up and shaped by certain liberal and radical feminists throughout the feminist sex wars and beyond, eventually making its way into feminist trauma theologies in their reformulations of the Christian doctrine of redemption.

Chapter two traces a second notion of trauma to Lacan’s interpretation of Freud, where trauma is an unavoidable and irreparable lack around which subjectivity is construed. It is this concept of trauma, combined with post-WWII continental philosophy’s ethics of alterity, that produces the trauma theory of literary studies emerging in the 1990s. While this understanding presses against redemptive and liberative politics, an ethical demand to witness to what cannot be fully represented or known nevertheless remains. I juxtapose this concept of trauma with debates among continental feminisms around women’s association with lack and, later, with post-structuralist interpretations of subjectivity emerging in black and queer studies. While this second, trauma-as-lack framework also makes its way into theology, it does so in ways that potentially over-universalize the trauma concept such that there remains an inattentiveness to the way that power is constituted. Put another way, this framework risks flattening all instances of structural harm into one universal trauma that marks subjectivity writ large. Thus, in the first two chapters, I show how existing theologies of trauma, most of which are written with feminist sensibilities, remain constrained by issues that have followed both trauma studies and feminism since the mid- to late-twentieth century.

Therefore, part one of this project illuminates some of these issues that have arisen due to trauma’s vast uptake in a variety of disciplinary fields. In their edited volume on trauma and the philosophy of religion, Eric Boynton and Peter Capretto have pointed to “the traps of reductionism

and obscurantism in thinking trauma”⁸ that come with divergent disciplinary methodologies in approaching trauma. Mary Jane Rubenstein has elaborated on this point, noting that the former, the trap of reductionism, befalls the “sayable” of “medicalized, militarized, and empirical studies of trauma” and the latter, the trap of obscurantism, befalls the “unsayable” of “cultural, philosophical, and psychoanalytic approaches” to trauma, where trauma is understood “as absolute rupture, as the presence of an absence, as the possibility of the impossible.”⁹ As Rubenstein goes on, “The medical approach risks explaining trauma away, whereas the philosophical approach risks not explaining anything at all.”¹⁰ Similar critiques have been made by a variety of people working in and across trauma studies, some of which I will discuss in the chapters that follow. However, my interest lies more specifically in the effects that falling into these traps potentially have on feminist theorizing and feminist theological accounts of social harm, including the anthropology assumed therein and the possibilities afforded for resistance to such harms.

In that vein, part of my engagement in part one of this dissertation with trauma theory, and especially its uptake in feminist activism and theorizing, is to track how trauma, particularly as a site of sexual injury, becomes a central yet contested site for feminist, black feminist, and queer theorizations of gender and political-ethical action. As the first two chapters of the dissertation will show, sexual violence remains a powerful unifying imaginary for feminism’s self-constitution. Furthermore, when I describe sexual violence as a powerful unifying imaginary, I do not simply mean literal experiences of sexual violence, although it is certainly not less than that. I also mean the

⁸ Eric Boynton and Peter Capretto, “Introduction: Trauma and Transcendence,” in *Trauma and Transcendence: Suffering and the Limits of Theory*, ed. Eric Boynton and Peter Capretto (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2018), 4.

⁹ Mary Jane Rubenstein, “Afterward,” in *Trauma and Transcendence: Suffering and the Limits of Theory*, ed. Eric Boynton and Peter Capretto, First edition (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2018), 284.

¹⁰ Rubenstein, “Afterward,” 284.

way that injury has come to serve as a figure for theoretical definitions of gender, where sexual trauma becomes key to the constitution of the ‘feminine’ or ‘woman’ in relation to ‘man.’

Therefore, while unveiling parallels between trauma discourse and feminist politics in part one, I also aim to shed light on the limitations of relying on trauma as the primary explanatory framework for instances of structural violence. Instead of limiting our understanding of trauma to extraordinary events, in the third chapter, I propose a paradigm shift towards perceiving trauma in the context of everyday or ‘quotidian crises.’ I do so by exploring the turn to everyday struggle and ordinariness enacted by queer and black feminisms, through concepts such as Lauren Berlant’s “crisis ordinariness” and Christina Sharpe’s “quotidian disaster.”¹¹ In this framework, quotidian crises are experiences of structural subordination, viewed as persistent, diffuse crises. By focusing on familiar and tireless harm, I propose shifting efforts of redress away from the testimony-witness structure often proposed by trauma-centric approaches, and toward changing the conditions that perpetuate such harms through collaborative and grassroots coalitional work.

The third chapter serves as a bridge between Part I (chapters one and two) and Part II (chapters four and five). In chapter three, I draw upon the psychological anthropology of object-relations theorist, Melanie Klein, to fund the quotidian crises framework. By turning to Klein, I also shift away from the Freudian psychology that anchored the trauma frameworks of chapters one and two. I argue that Klein provides a more flexible view of human nature than does Freud, and one that allows for a level of movement and change within what can feel like overdetermined social and structural conditions. Klein’s work has been more broadly taken up in what has become known as the ‘post-critical’ or ‘reparative’ turn in the humanities, a turn from methods of critique and exposure of power toward attention to what texts do affectively and what kinds of possibilities texts

¹¹ Lauren Gail Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

can open up. However, critics of the postcritical turn have argued that such an interpretative method lacks the negativity of critique, a negativity also associated with the Freudian understanding of human nature that accompanies trauma frameworks. As a result, one is left with an apolitical hermeneutics that merely reproduces the status quo.

With these criticisms regarding negativity in mind, chapters four and five aim to provide a theology for the quotidian crises framework. These chapters simultaneously show how being anchored in the object-relations anthropology of the reparative turn does not abrogate resistance and critique to the very forces of domination that perpetuate actual quotidian crises. Thus, the second part of the dissertation aims to present a more explicitly theological perspective on the quotidian crises framework.

The fourth chapter argues that the quotidian crises framework effectively aligns with a liberal-theological tradition, particularly the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher. This chapter develops a theological anthropology with a specific emphasis on notions of sin and evil. I emphasize sin and evil because of their associations with negativity, since negativity is the central site of worry for critics of the reparative turn. Just as critics argue that the absence of negativity in reparative frameworks leads to the inability to effect political resistance, so critics of Schleiermacher have argued that he offers a merely perspectival understanding of evil that does not recognize the depth of human suffering and cannot effectively motivate moral action against evil. By turning to debates in theology around sin and evil, this chapter demonstrates the kind of account that is necessary to do justice to contemporary forms of structural harm and the kinds of responses demanded by such harms. While I contend that Schleiermacher is not fully liable to the critiques raised against him, as his deeply social views of sin and evil can provide tools for resistance against evil, I nevertheless illuminate certain limits to Schleiermacher's theology, prompting me to turn to the resources of queer and womanist theology in chapter five. Womanist and queer projects provide a needed shape

and direction (a shape and direction Schleiermacher's theology does not provide) to God's presence for those experiencing quotidian crises. That is, these projects specify that Jesus dwells with those who are on the edges of systems of domination – those for whom the effects of such systems are most acutely felt. This will lead me, in chapter five, to argue that grace is what arrives in response to quotidian crises, and this is a grace that makes place in environments of resistance and survival to systems of domination.

Thus, chapter five develops a notion of 'resurgent grace' through the lens of abolition feminism, queer theology, and womanist theology, where resurgent grace, through the work of criticism and care, offers life amid experienced quotidian crises. This chapter moves beyond the reconciling tendencies of liberal theologies, recognizing the impasses and interruptions asserted by abolitionist feminism as essential tensions for the reparative work of resurgent grace. This chapter redefines grace as an ongoing gift that disrupts attachments, making the imagination of alternative options possible. Such an imagination arrives from encounters that can take place outside traditional sites of redemption and within places of dispossession, aligning with the insights of womanist, black feminist, trans,¹² and queer theological work. To show how resurgent grace arrives, I provide two examples: the collaborative work of The Mud Flower Collective¹³ and a march and vigil that took place in the summer of 2020 in Chicago.

The two examples of resurgent grace offered in the fifth and final chapter enact forms of spiritual friendship and grassroots political community with an eye to social transformation. The communities formed in these examples certainly allowed space for the kind of care that constitutes

¹² Some use an asterisk when using the term, 'trans' and others see it as unnecessary. I have chosen to forego an asterisk, but when using trans I am referring to anyone who is not a cisgender man or woman, including, but not limited to, those who are transgender, genderqueer, agender, two-spirit, non-binary, gender non-conforming, gender fluid, third gender, and androgynous.

¹³ Mud Flower Collective, eds., *God's Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological Education* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985).

repair, but in ways that resisted the forces of domination that make such care-work necessary, which included an openness to critique, failure, and refusal. Thus, these sites can be understood as akin to how Amy Hollywood has described religion – both “excessive and destabilizing to the dominant orders,” but at the same time “a space in which to live and to breath.”¹⁴ Through the examples of collaborative theology and protest, I seek to provide an account of what it might take to enact theological resistance in ways that attend to the complexities of everyday lived experiences of structural harm. Ultimately, therefore, I contend that the quotidian crises framework can open up alternative avenues than those centered upon trauma frameworks for responding to contemporary social injury. Before getting deeper into this work, however, a few words on the relationship of this project to feminism and theology are worth mentioning.

Feminist Attachments

I’ve realized, in the course of working on this project, that while it is a project about trauma and crises in relation to theological conceptions of the human, it is perhaps also an attempt to work out an answer to the question of whether doing feminist theology is an aspiration worth sustaining. ‘Aspiration’ is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “The action of aspiring; steadfast desire or longing for something above one.” One might think of aspiration as a synonym to hope, for both are future-oriented attachments and have optimistic valences. Yet, hope has a more passive connotation and aspiration more active. Hope is combined with a sense of expectation, a belief that something desired will be the case. The sense of expectation drops out in the case of aspiration, which instead has a valence of working to enact something one desires, without necessarily believing it will be the case. “The aspirant is trying to change herself in some particular dimension; she is not

¹⁴ Amy M. Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion, Gender, Theory, and Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 11.

merely open to changes that might come. She grasps, however dimly, a target with reference to which she guides herself.”¹⁵ In other words, aspiring (for example, “I aspire to be a feminist theologian”) is enacted through changing what one values and what one does (for example, “I am enrolling in a course on feminist theology, and I will interact with these materials in my own work.”)

I think of an aspiration like an attachment. Attachment or *anacclasis* is the English translation of *Anlehnung* in Freud’s early psychoanalytic theory.¹⁶ The German *Anlehnung* means resting upon, leaning upon, depending upon, and even imitating an object. For Freud, *Anlehnung* referred to the way sexual instincts, in their early stages, depended upon self-preservative instincts for their organic source, orientation, and object, before evolving into the autonomous choice of objects. In sexual instincts, then, one receives benefits exceeding those of the self-preservative ones, such that one’s attachment to objects is neither necessary nor strictly functional. In other words, attachments are oriented toward objects thought to satisfy a desire or pleasure, and while they provide one with a sense of support and continuity, they are secondary to the needs sought by the self-preservative instincts.

Because attachments swing free from needs, but nevertheless refer to the sense of dependence one has on an object, attachments can be quite cruel. Lauren Berlant has famously described all attachments as optimistic, but sometimes cruelly so. “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 to become different in just the right way.”¹⁷ Such an attachment might uphold a sense of one’s self or one’s world, such that when attachments are cruel, “the subjects who

¹⁵ Agnes Callard, *Aspiration: The Agency of Becoming* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019): 8.

¹⁶ See Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, “The Language of Psycho-Analysis,” in *Anaclitic or Anacclasis (Attachment)* (New York: Norton, 1974).

¹⁷ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 2.

have x in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object/scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being, because whatever the *content* of the attachment is, the continuity of its form provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world."¹⁸ Again, attachments orient one to objects, in part, because one desires, even feels dependent upon, the benefits such an object is supposed to confer upon one.

Cruel attachments, however, need not be cruel all the way down, for one could be attached to something that is cruel in one sense but not in another. For example, one could be attached to whiteness such that one dogmatically votes for candidates that enforce policies to keep racial and ethnic 'others' from immigrating to one's country, even if such candidates also shrink the healthcare system in ways that constrict one's access to resources needed to address a terminal illness one has. In this case, the attachment is ambivalent, for while whiteness as a political and economic system may have negative health effects for a white person, it nevertheless affords benefits too, something Jennifer Malat, Sarah Mayorga-Gallo, and David Williams have called the paradox of privilege.¹⁹

It is not just that the cruelty of an attachment is not always cruel all the way down, but cruel attachments can be applied to things less obviously cruel than, for example, whiteness. Andrea Long Chu has described feminism itself as a fantasy along the lines of a cruelly optimistic attachment. Feminist theorizing has not and continues not to deliver on many of its promises for change; yet feminism is a fantasy people remain attached to despite its impossibility. Chu clarifies:

By 'fantasy,' I mean not something that is untrue, but something you believe in not because it's true, but because you want to. That's not, in and of itself, a shortcoming. The question is never how to get rid of fantasy....The question is how to make adjustments in fantasies without totally breaking them, or how to survive a shift from

¹⁸ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 24.

¹⁹ Jennifer Malat, Sarah Mayorga-Gallo, and David R. Williams, "The Effects of Whiteness on the Health of Whites in the USA," *Social Science & Medicine* 199 (July 2017): 148-156.

one fantasy to another, or sometimes, just how to survive the fantasy you're already in.²⁰

The urgency of Chu's question is easier to grasp if one considers the more obvious example of the cruelly optimistic attachment to whiteness mentioned above. The attachment can be cruel, in part, because it directly inhibits one's health outcomes. Determining how to modify or shift such an attachment could not only enhance one's potential for improved health outcomes but could also benefit others whose lives are impacted by limited access to health resources.

Furthermore, the images of adjustment and shifting that Chu offers are helpful because in either case, one retains a relationship to the object. It is not as if one has the power to escape one's fantasies altogether, nor to destroy one's object. One could adjust one's relationship to whiteness, which might result in one changing one's political positions, but one will not fully escape the ways whiteness structures the world. At least on the face of it, the cruelty of an attachment to whiteness, then, may appear clearer than the cruelty of an attachment to feminism. Feminism is a *good* attachment, right? After all, feminism aims towards greater flourishing for all. If anything, feminism is a fantasy worth remaining attached to, not adjusting or shifting, because it orients us to a better world...right?

I understand what Chu calls the fantasy of feminism to be a cruel attachment, but one that can be ambivalently cruel. In other words, like the attachment to whiteness, which provides tangible material advantages while simultaneously contributing to one's and others' slow death, feminism can exhibit a form of ambivalent cruelty. This cruelty may not necessarily affect the individual attached to the feminist fantasy, but rather, it might manifest as a form of harm directed at those whose exclusion the fantasy requires.

²⁰ Andrea Long Chu, "The Impossibility of Feminism," *Differences* 30, no. 1 (2019): 78.

In this project, I am interested in the attachments and imaginaries that have animated constellations of texts variously associated with feminist theorizing and feminist theology and, more specifically, how these texts have come to understand the human theoretically or theologically. This project not only describes these attachments, but also asks after the conditions of possibility for shifting them. One powerful influence I suspect shapes some of the attachments of theologians working in gender and sexuality, including myself, is what one could call a certain suspicion-matrix. Many scholars of religion are suspicious of theology, many theologians are suspicious of feminism, and many feminists are suspicious of religion *and* theology. As Elizabeth Castelli has pointed out, while theory and literary studies has (re-)turned to religion, theology remains “the thing everyone seems to worry about being mistaken for doing.”²¹ This sense of worry is probably strongest *within* the field of religious studies. Therefore, theology sits perhaps most uneasily within the very disciplinary matrix in which it is usually housed.²²

²¹Elizabeth A. Castelli, “What’s the Difference? Religion and the Question of Theory,” *Differences* 21, no. 1 (May 1, 2010): 125. For the turn to religion, see, for example, Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, “The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies,” *Criticism* 46, no. 1 (2004): 167–90; and Bruce Holsinger, “Literary History and the Religious Turn: Announcing the New ELN,” *English Language Notes* 44, no. 1 (March 1, 2006): 1–3.

²² For the sake of expediency, consider a few caricatures of the kinds of suspicion a feminist theologian might face. In the study of religion, theology is an embarrassing grandfather that no one really wants there. For some in the study of religion, theology’s abstractions merely facilitate the projection of human characteristics onto one great human being called God (Feuerbach), the mystification of human-made social structures (Marx), and the pacification of human fears and anxieties (Hume, Freud), among other things. Not only that, but (Christian) theology is itself considered to be a major motor of the secular enlightenment project. ‘Religion’ was a category created in the space of colonial encounter, a term invented by Christian missionaries and colonizers to name the practices of ‘other’ non-Western subjects. For example, see Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*, Series in Philosophical and Cultural Studies in Religion (Aurora, Colo: Davies Group, 1999) and Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). While Enlightenment truths of faith were separated from the truths of reason, Christianity remained the vehicle through which those truths of reason would be discovered, such that even secularity itself is a product of Christian theological inheritances. See especially, Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); and Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler,

Not only do theologians have various antagonistic relationships to ‘other’ disciplines like feminism,²³ but within theology, any number of emancipatory or constructive theologies are regularly dismissed as too ideological or political to count as proper Theology.²⁴ One theologian has even gone so far as to claim that only theology can solve the contemporary challenges offered by feminism, for only theology offers the kind of ascetic resources necessary to orient subjects towards positions of unmastery.²⁵ Insofar as feminist theology, then, finds itself among a number of intra-

and Sabha Mahmood, *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (New York, NY: Fordham Univ. Press, 2013).

Some ‘secular’ theorists, then, ignorant to these theological inheritances, avoid religion as an annoying cousin who is still stuck in their ways, or worse, who is constantly frustrating attempts at democratic plurality and equality. But theology is much, much worse: it is the problematic great uncle that no one invites, or maybe no one even knows exists. Like the scholar of religion, the secular theorist sees the theologian as dabbling in abstractions or assuming the theologian is adhering to religious beliefs, religious beliefs that could only taint any objective, distanced critical inquiry. For the secular feminist, religion might even be fundamentally antagonistic to women’s flourishing, such that to do feminist theology, especially, would be an oxymoron. For the most famous challenge to this view, see Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012). Other texts of interest include R. Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*, (Berkeley, Calif. London: University of California Press, 2000); Nancy Frankenberry, “Introduction: Prolegomenon to Future Feminist Philosophies of Religions,” *Hypatia* 9, no. 4 (1994): 1–14; and Gisela Carrasco Miró, “Encountering the Colonial: Religion in Feminism and the Coloniality of Secularism,” *Feminist Theory* 21, no. 1 (January 2020): 91–109.

²³ See especially, Linn Marie Tonstad, “(Un)Wise Theologians: Systematic Theology in the University,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 22, no. 4 (October 2020): 494–511.

²⁴ Such emancipatory theologies, or ‘Constructive Theologies,’ as Hanna Reichel has heuristically defined them, also have their own ways of dismissing ‘Systematic Theologies.’ See Hanna Reichel, “Conceptual Design, Sin and the Affordances of Doctrine,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 22, no. 4 (October 2020): 538–61 and the expansion of that article in Hanna Reichel, *After Method: Queer Grace, Conceptual Design, and the Possibility of Theology*, First edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2023).

²⁵ According to Sarah Coakley, through unknowing submission to God’s mystery one can solve the problems posed by contemporary issues of gender, race, and class. In fact, Coakley claims that “*only* systematic theology (of a particular sort)” – and here she means theology inflected with an ascetic, contemplative practice of submission and prayer before the trinitarian God – “can adequately and effectively respond to the rightful critiques that gender studies and political and liberation theology have laid at its door. And *only* gender studies, inversely, and its accompanying political insights, can thus properly re-animate ‘systematic theology’ for the future.” Sarah Coakley, “Is There a Future for Gender and Theology?: On the Nature of Prayer, Contemplation, and the Systemic Task,” *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 85, no. 2 (2009): 52. See also Coakley’s elaborations in Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay “on the Trinity”* (Cambridge New York: Cambridge University Press,

and inter-field antagonisms, why maintain an aspiration that is not only a cruel attachment, but one that encounters suspicion at almost every turn?

On the one hand, I have sensed that, due to the suspicion-matrix described above, theologians with feminist sensibilities at times seek a sense of belonging among other feminists, but especially other women, and that one of the ways this is done is to reject critique by associating it wholly with patriarchal methods. (I experienced this recently, when I was told that by offering a critique of another white woman's book, I was beholden to a 'patriarchal whiteness' because feminists ostensibly do not critique other women, but only uplift one another's work.) This view of feminism reflects a broader trend in the humanities known as 'post-critique' or 'the reparative turn', something that will occupy a good deal of the work to come in this dissertation.²⁶ The 'all critique is patriarchy' view, however, reveals a (mis)understanding of the reparative not only as an uplifting, inclusive methodology but also as *the* feminist methodology regnant. Additionally, I wonder if it reveals something about one of the attachments animating feminist theology more broadly. One of feminism's fantasies is that feminists will provide each other with a place of support and belonging, a fantasy that has been challenged most famously during the 'third wave.' But one of the marks of an attachment, after all, is that we attach to an object as if our lives depended on it. A threat to that object feels like threat to one's very self or world. When academic theology faces ever-increasing

2013). For a helpful critique of Coakley's position, see Brandy Daniels, "Excess and the Enactment of Queer Time: Futurity, Failure, and Formation in Feminist Theologies," in Kent L. Brintnall, Joseph A. Marchal, and Stephen D. Moore, eds. *Sexual Disorientations: Queer Temporalities, Affects, Theologies*, Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia (New York (N.Y.): Fordham University Press, 2018).

²⁶ In a 2013 article, Wiegman associates a number of "queer feminist" critics with the reparative turn initiated by Eve Sedgwick: Ann Cvetkovich, Heather Love, Elizabeth Freeman, and, to a more ambivalent extent, Lauren Berlant. See Robyn Wiegman, "The Times We're in: Queer Feminist Criticism and the Reparative 'Turn,'" *Feminist Theory* 15, no. 1 (April 2014): 4–25. One can also trace the reparative turn to a broader 'post-critical' turn. See Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (January 2004): 225–48; and Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

precarity in the university, and when the feminist theologian themselves face the kind of suspicion-matrix described in the beginning of this section, one might come to expect that *at least* other feminist theologians will offer support, praise, and community to one another. Critique, then, comes to feel like a threat to one's livelihood/life.

In other words, in the face of the suspicion-matrix, it is not all that surprising that one can become particularly defensive against any kind of critique, even if that critique comes from within feminist theology itself. However, the stakes of removing critique from a properly feminist methodology are highly political, not least because it has constituted and continues to constitute an important form of activism for a wide variety of discourses aiming toward political emancipation. But the failure of critique to count as feminist if it does not take a properly reparative form also rests, I think, on a hidden assumption that feminism is primarily, or even only, a discourse about gender. Because we face suspicion at every turn, we women supporting other women trumps all other politics, even if that means ignoring a more fine-tuned investigation into the more insidious logics that might sustain such a vision of feminism. That is, the continued alignment of (sexual) injury with gender can in turn get wielded as a defense against having to attend to certain (especially sexualized and racialized) attachments that also sustain our imaginations. The lure of the feminist claim to the reparative is that one can feel a certain safety and belonging in returning to attachments that sustain (white) feminist theorizing: women-supporting-women communities, where one feels uplifted and cared for with people who *know* what it's like to face the harms of patriarchy. The lure of such a fantasy may become especially acute among feminist theologians, for, as I have mentioned, it is easy to feel as if one does not belong anywhere, academically, if one takes on the disciplinary designation of feminist theologian.

However, as I will show in this dissertation, the reparative and the critical are both important aspects of the work of feminism and feminist theology. Which is in part to say that in this project, I

am less interested in what feminism or theology is, in defining a proper method or discipline, and more interested in what they *enact* when coupled with cultural discourses of trauma and group injury. And in any case, for those who have tracked the uses and engagements of the reparative since Eve Sedgwick's first development of it in the mid-1990s, one might know that Sedgwick herself did not intend the reparative to supersede the critical (or what she calls the paranoid),²⁷ something I will discuss more fully in chapter three. I also do not interpret her hopes for expanding the methodological repertoire as aiming to dismiss the fact that our relations are always entangled in aggressive tendencies and effects.²⁸ Rather, I take her to offer a recontextualization of interpretive methods with an eye to expanding political potential, such that the critical method is one possibility among others. The reparative is not devoid of criticism, even if negativity in the reparative framework is situated differently than it is in Freudian (and trauma-centric) approaches.

Atmospheric Pressure and the Ground that Pushes Back

If reparative methods are to afford alternative possibilities for world-building within given social conditions, I am convinced that critical work remains necessary to unveil the limits of any project within such a reparative framework. For this particular project, womanist and queer theologies and black and trans feminisms especially mark the limits of the constellation of texts

²⁷ See, for example, Elizabeth Weed, "Gender and the Lure of the Postcritical," *Differences* 27, no. 2 (September 1, 2016): 153–77.

²⁸ For example, Sedgwick finds a practice of placing objects beside each other to offer a spatial imaginary that is not as dualistic as the logics of origin and telos. At the same time, "Its interest does not, however, depend on a fantasy of metonymically egalitarian *or even pacific relations*, as any child knows who's shared a bed with siblings." [emphasis mine]. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003): 8. Melanie Klein's own elucidations of the depressive position, upon which Sedgwick's reparative is based, never abrogates the negativity that sustains our relations with our objects. I will discuss this point more fully in chapter three. On a related note, promulgating a method supposedly opposed to the critical can serve to hide its own aggressive tendencies. See Tim Dean and Robyn Wiegman, "What Does Critique Want? A Critical Exchange," *English Language Notes* 51, no. 2 (September 1, 2013): 107–22.

engaged in this dissertation and especially those feminist theologies that have generally come to engage in trauma discourse. Blackness and queerness in particular serve as subtexts to the work of this dissertation, a kind of ground that has sustained and put pressure on my thinking. White supremacy is the air we breathe, the air *I* breathe, for (as I will argue especially in chapter five) it structures not only national and global institutional forms with deep implications for individuals' life outcomes, but it also shapes our very political, ethical, and theological imaginations.²⁹ If white supremacy is a kind of atmospheric pressure, then black, queer, and trans thought is the ground that pushes back.

Because this is a project that circles around questions of the human in view of offering a theological anthropology attentive to contemporary social harm, it must engage the atmosphere in which 'the human' has taken form, which is to say, has been thought theologically and otherwise. Black, queer, and trans thinkers and activists (among various other projects, such as postcolonial, decolonial, and ecofeminist) are doing the work to reveal the way the human has been thought and sustained by the atmosphere of white supremacy, which is why this work *must* be the ground of any project engaged in a theological anthropology. I will say a bit more about this when I discuss intersectionality below. Furthermore, the citational work of this dissertation, which engages in a variety of disciplines I would not claim as my own (e.g. womanist theology, trans theory), in a sense, performs the coalitional work that both sustains and is sustained by resurgent grace, a concept to be developed in the final chapter. Such non-identitarian coalitional work that nevertheless recognizes precarity's differential embodiment is enlivened by a view of the interdependency of life, or what

²⁹ See, for example, essays in Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, eds., *White out: The Continuing Significance of Racism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003). See also Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2010).

Judith Butler has called *alliances*: “the social network of hands that seeks to minimize the unlivability of lives.”³⁰

Relatedly, I take certain claims from womanist and queer theologies as central to this project, for example, that black queer and trans lives matter, that feminism needs abolition, and that God dwells with those who are oppressed. In another version of this project, I might have defended these claims, which in some cases might also require me to defend how this project is even properly theological from the start. I might have attempted to explain how one might begin to take a first step toward living into a world wherein whiteness recedes such that black, queer, and trans lives could matter (as if I could know). However, I have more and more come to view such defenses as too easily giving into the protocols of anti-black and transantagonistic grammar. The strategy of persuading others to care about a world wherein black, queer, and trans lives matter can too quickly become a form of saving oneself and saving others, a feel-good and at times hubristic apologetics of inclusion.³¹ Instead, I look for life and livability that is latent in the precarious edges of devastating and drawn-out crises, following the trajectory set forth in God’s becoming human and dwelling with those deemed deviant and unworthy.

In suggesting that I see blackness and queerness as key subtexts to the kind of theology proposed in this dissertation, and especially in taking on certain presuppositions such as God’s dwelling with ‘the oppressed,’ it is worth saying more about what I take these terms to mean. When Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the language of intersectionality in discussing the interlocking effects of oppression and their legal implications, especially for black women, she was providing a term for

³⁰ Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 67.

³¹ See especially Linn Tonstad’s work on theological discourses of inclusion in Linn Marie Tonstad, *Queer Theology: Beyond Apologetics* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018).

phenomena black and woman of color feminists had long recognized and been theorizing.³² For example, in 1974, Theresa Hoover wrote of the “triple jeopardy” of being black, a woman, and a church member.³³ It is now almost standard, at least in self-identified feminist work, to give tribute to one’s recognition of the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, religion, and any number of markers of identity. What can sometimes happen, then, is that by mere fact of stating one’s awareness of the importance of intersectionality, one assumes one is then free from the work of considering how oppressions take form in specific instances or how oppressions *work* and what they are *doing* in one’s work. And/or, one might think that by addressing these terms one by one, as themes, one can cover the importance of each. (For example, one might have a chapter on gender, another on race, and another on class).

In contrast, I see race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and so on to be constituents of mobile configurations rather than static, nominalized, or value-added categories of social identity. For example, Judith Butler, following Michel Foucault, has argued that bodies are regulated through the reiteration of norms, such that there is not an essential body prior to discourse. Butler describes sexuality itself as a regulatory ideal, meaning it is a norm and a force that produces bodies through differentiation, circulation, and discipline and control.³⁴ If compulsory heterosexuality is the regulatory ideal that manages bodies, then the ritualized repetition of gender retroactively comes to stand for the subjects produced by compulsory heterosexuality. One might wear pink dresses, think of oneself as caring and emotional, grow one’s hair long, and date and desire men because such are

³² Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99.

³³ Theresa Hoover, “Black Women and the Churches: Triple Jeopardy,” *Sexist Religion and Women in the Church; No More Silence!*, Alice L. Hageman, ed. (New York: Association Press, 1974).

³⁴ See especially Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, First issued in hardback (New York London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015); and Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2011).

the normative forms of gender that compel one's own ritualized repetition of what has come to be seen as 'woman.'³⁵ Thus, the regulation and reiteration of gender norms, 'man' and 'woman,' is produced, in part, by compulsory heterosexual desires and vice versa.

At the same time, such configurations are not always coherent or determinative, for categorical leakages and slips occur.³⁶ One might be a straight cis woman but hate wearing 'women's' clothes and instead wear 'men's' clothes, opening one up to being excluded from certain social and economic privileges in particular spaces (perhaps one's dream workplace holds very traditional views about how women should dress) but not others (perhaps one's group of friends sees no difference between 'women's' and 'men's' clothes). As Emilie Townes has pointed out, "oppressions are rude cultural productions that are ever-changing and historically situated / oppressions are also political constructs that will vex us every time when we offer unitary or intersecting analyses and critique."³⁷ Moreover, to see oppressions as ever-changing and contextual, effecting mobile racial, gendered, sexual configurations is not to say that one's being a white woman, for example, does not have real, lived consequences for the field of possibilities afforded to one. Rather, it is to say that such field of possibilities varies based upon a number of contextual factors. For example, the life trajectory for a

³⁵ See also Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification," in *Deconstruction: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, Jonathan D. Culler, ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003), 213-223. In this particular piece, however, Butler is keen to think about how the workings of gender do not always "show" in gender performances and how what is exteriorized as performance is only made intelligible with reference to what is excluded. I can only perform "woman" because "woman" stands for what is not "masculine." To desire another woman is "masculine," and thus, homosexual desire would bar me from being "feminine." Gender, then, is a kind of acting out of an unresolved grief, according to Butler.

³⁶ See, for example, Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore, "Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3/4 (2008): 11-22. For the relationship between transness and blackness, see C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017). For a helpful explanation of queerness in theology, see Linn Marie Tonstad, *Queer Theology: Beyond Apologetics* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018).

³⁷ Emilie Townes, "Panel Response to Marcella Althaus-Reid's Indecent Theology," *Feminist Theology* 11, no. 2 (2003), 172.

white woman with generational wealth will likely vary greatly from a white woman lacking generational wealth; at the same time, one's being white does not necessarily determine the ethical shape one's life takes, although it may form the field of possibilities available for the shape it takes. In other words, while I do not think whiteness is constituted by literal phenotypically white people, for example, (the same goes for masculinity and so on), whiteness *is* much more likely to attach and stick to phenotypically white people. Sarah Ahmed, for example, has shown how whiteness provides specific orientation for bodies and impacts the way bodies inhabit space. "[W]hiteness is an effect of racialization, which in turn shapes what it is that bodies 'can do'."³⁸ To have a white body surely matters for the way one moves in the world, and so to point to the mobility and sometimes incoherence of racialization, for example, is not meant to overlook its material effects.

However, I am interested, in this project, in shifting the analytic weight from what intersecting identities *are* to what conditions contribute to the coagulation of identity in ways that allow domination to go unchecked. Therefore, while I see having a white body to have material effects for one's access to space and privilege, I also see whiteness as something that sustains theoretical and theological considerations of the human being, leading me to inquire into the anthropologies that sustain notions of subjectivity in trauma discourse and trauma theologies. Rather than asking, what difference does race or gender or sexuality make, I aim to ask, what is whiteness, patriarchy, or heterosexuality doing? How does it take form?

Doing so moves away from certain troubling tendencies in intersectionality discourse. One of these is, as Jennifer Nash has argued, to rely on black women to stand in as the "prototypical intersectional subjects whose experiences of marginality are imagined to provide a *theoretical-value added*."³⁹ As Nash points out, not only does this assume a uniformity to black women's experience,

³⁸ Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (August 2007): 150.

³⁹ Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality," *Feminist Review*, no. 89 (2008): 1–15.

but it also immunizes black women from possible critique.⁴⁰ Furthermore, making black women the prototype, according to Jasbir Puar, tends to produce the Woman of Color as the Other to the white woman. The Woman of Color becomes “an enabling prosthetic to white feminism,” insofar as white feminism draws upon intersectionality to avoid questioning the very construction of the Subject itself.⁴¹ As Puar states elsewhere, “No matter how intersectional our models of subjectivity, no matter how attuned to locational politics of space, place, and scale, these formulations—these fine tunings of intersectionality, as it were, that continue to be demanded—may still limit us if they presume the automatic primacy and singularity of the disciplinary subject and its identitarian interpellation.”⁴² For similar reasons, Rey Chow has questioned whether the marginalized subject remains a sustainable site from which to do politics, as intersectionality seems bound to remain sutured to the self-referentiality of center and margin.⁴³

At the same time, I remain convinced that the experiences of those disproportionately managing the effects of domination are critical for contesting what Puar above calls the primacy and singularity of the disciplinary subject. As Nash also points out, black feminism has always drawn upon black women and their experiences in order to display “an inherent disloyalty to race-or-gender thinking” and “as a way of continuously and strategically jamming the workings of binary thinking.”⁴⁴ Especially at the end of this dissertation, I turn to queer and womanist theology, and

⁴⁰ Marquis Bey has suggested that in conflating black women with “the wholly oppressed” it thereby “evacuates them of the possibility of privilege and the ability to do harm...and it uncritically invests in identities that become consistently reified and presumed natural, in need of no critique, dissolution, or, indeed, abolishing.” Marquis Bey, *Black Trans Feminism*, Black Outdoors: Innovations in the Poetics of Study (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 58.

⁴¹ Jasbir K. Puar, “I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess’: Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory,” *philoSOPHIA* 2, no. 1 (2012): 49–66.

⁴² Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 206.

⁴³ Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2006).

⁴⁴ Nash, “Rethinking Intersectionality,” 9.

black feminist, abolitionist, and trans theory, where the experiences of black, trans, and queer people often are important and central sites of theorizing, because I think these discourses offer the most promising resources for the kind of continuous and strategic jamming Nash describes.⁴⁵ As described above, these sites are the ground that can push back on the atmosphere of white supremacy, and as such, jamming binary thinking is done with an eye to creating a more livable world for planetary life. I see feminism, or, as I will explain in the final chapter, transfeminism, as holding the potential to be a practice that aims for radical democratic and communal flourishing, the kind of flourishing that resurgent grace also reaches toward.

Theology

At this juncture, one might ask, what does all of this have to do with theology? As I mentioned above, there are those within the discipline who tend to reject or dismiss theologies that engage in the kind of discourses to be discussed in this dissertation. For some, theology is not only talk about God, but it is done as a part of one's very devotion to God. For others, theology entails deep engagement with scripture and doctrine, such that engagement with so-called 'political' topics (ostensibly, for example, gender and race) only imports human ideologies into the discipline. Oftentimes, these sorts of views are associated with what is known as systematic theology.

At the same time, some theologians have viewed systematic theology's pursuit of systematic unity to risk occluding what spills out into matters of everyday life, power, politics, and human

⁴⁵ I see a similar trajectory arising from J. Kameron Carter's work on race in theology. "Therefore, as a twenty-first-century discourse, Christian theology must take its bearings from the Christian theological languages and practices that arise from the lived Christian worlds of dark peoples in modernity and how such peoples reclaimed (and in their own ways salvaged) the language of Christianity, and thus Christian theology, from being a discourse of death--their death. This is the language and practices by which dark people, insofar as many of them comported themselves as Christian subjects in the world, have imagined and performed a way of being in the world beyond the pseudotheological containment of whiteness." J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 378.

fallibility. According to Joerg Rieger, such theologians tend to prefer the term ‘constructive’ theology, discarding the systematizing connotations of systematic theology.⁴⁶ The constructive theologian might think their work more attentive to pressing matters of human life, more aware of human frailty and noetic sin, more promising for addressing matters of contemporary planetary life. The systematic theologian might think their work more committed to tradition, more adequate to its objects through its commitment to its Subject-God, more rigorous in its pursuit of correspondence and unity.

Based upon this dichotomy, this dissertation would be a constructive theology. At the same time, I see systematic and constructive theology as, at best, useful only as a heuristic framework, for it is more accurate, both historically and practically, to view doctrinal, systematic, and constructive approaches as overlapping and colliding in theological works for centuries.⁴⁷ Therefore, while this

⁴⁶ See, for example, Joerg Rieger, “Constructive Theology,” in *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religion* eds. Anne L. C. Runehov and Lluís Oviedo (Dordrecht: Springer 2013), 483–486.

⁴⁷ Consider Karl Barth and Friedrich Schleiermacher, two theologians steeped in Christian doctrine, who wrote what could be considered recognizably systematic works, but are often figured as taking different methodological approaches. And yet, Schleiermacher’s contextually-conscious theology marks the Chicago School liberal theology to which constructive theology traces its roots. Jason A. Wyman, *Constructing Constructive Theology: An Introductory Sketch* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017). For Schleiermacher’s definitions of theology see Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016). See especially §16 and §19. “Propositions regarding Christian faith are conceptions of Christian religious states of mind and heart presented in the form of discourse” (CF §15, 116). He defines dogmatic theology as “the science concerned with the interconnection of whatever doctrine has currency in a given social organization called a Christian church at a given time” and the task of dogmatic theology is the “purification and improvement of doctrine” (CF, §19, pp. 131; 138). See also his definitions of theology in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology*, trans. William Farrer (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2007). But constructive theology might also be indebted to Karl Barth’s warnings regarding the impact of human fallibility in the work of theologizing. The constructive theologian’s resistance to closed systems is reminiscent of Karl Barth’s *theologia viatorum*, “[Theology] is broken thought and utterance to the extent that it can progress only in isolated thoughts and statements directed from different angles to the one object. It can never form a system, comprehending and as it were, ‘seizing’ the object.” Karl Barth, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Creation. p. 3: Vol. 3. The Doctrine of Creation*, vol. 3 (London: Clark, 2004), 293. Taken together, Barth and Schleiermacher, in their most mature, highly doctrinal and recognizably systematic works, express the contextually conscious and systematically suspicious impulses of the constructive theologian described by Rieger above.

project will do a good deal of work engaging in, for example, contemporary gender and sexuality studies, psychoanalysis, continental philosophy, and trauma theory, it does so with an eye to proposing a way to think, theologically, about the kinds of crises facing us, particularly in the American context today. While much of the explicitly theological work will come in the final two chapters of the project, insofar as the project engages with the attachments and devotions that orient one's thinking and one's life, I see the project as theological all the way through. There is a sense in which I agree with something Schleiermacher noted long ago, which is simply to say that theologies are lived, and one could say then, that theologies matter for how one orients one's life. It is to these possibilities of living that this project turns.

Part I

Feminist Trauma Theologies in the Historical Present

“This itself is a continuing question for feminist historiography and cultural memory: what are the memory politics at work when certain framings of the past or theoretical initiatives achieve canonical status while nonbenign amnesia is inflicted on equally coherent possibilities?”¹

“Feminist theorists need to pay attention to the amenability of our own stories, narrative constructs, and grammatical forms to discursive uses of gender and feminism we might otherwise wish to disentangle ourselves from if history is not simply to repeat itself.”²

"The lineage of 'trauma theology' is deeply feminist."³ So states trauma theologian, Shelly Rambo, in a recent volume on feminist trauma theologies. According to Rambo, just as feminist theology testifies to hidden oppression, trauma theory brings to light hidden suffering. Both feminist theology and trauma theory offer ways to uncover experiences of suffering against the powerful forces of repression, be they hegemonic Christian traditions or psychological mechanisms. In the following two chapters of the dissertation, I make trauma and feminist theology privileged sites of analysis, elucidating their intersection and examining divergent notions of trauma within these discourses.⁴ These chapters primarily serve a descriptive purpose, highlighting how two different

¹ Griselda Pollack, "Is Feminism a Trauma, a Bad Memory, or a Virtual Future?," *Differences* 27, no. 2 (2016), 28.

² Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, Next Wave (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

³ Shelly Rambo, "Preface," *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture and Church in Critical Perspective*, ed. Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross, (London: SCM Press, 2020), p. ii.

⁴ While there are many avenues one could pursue to ask after the networks that converged to produce the theological interest in trauma, I have chosen gender due to the above-mentioned feminist sensibility generally shared among trauma theologians. War and genocide would also be possible avenues. I will be drawing upon several different projects which have discussed in detail the history of trauma. This includes: Lucy Bond and Stef Craps, *Trauma*, The New Critical Idiom (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020); Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009); Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008); Mark S. Micale and Paul Frederick Lerner, eds., *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870 - 1930*, Cambridge Studies in the History of Medicine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton, N.J:

frameworks of trauma surface in contemporary feminist and theological work, while noting certain risks that accompany these frameworks.⁵

As trauma makes its way into theology, two heuristic frameworks emerge, each with profound implications for gender, subjectivity, and notions of recovery. The first of these frameworks is attentive to particular, historical losses while the second foregrounds a split or lack at the foundation of human subjectivity. These frameworks, though sometimes employed to understand structural harms, fail to fully address the disproportionate impacts of contemporary injustices. Because of this, chapter three will propose a concept of ‘quotidian crises,’ highlighting ordinary yet enduring injustices as opposed to extraordinary events and advocating for responses that challenge conditions of domination while fostering care within these oppressive systems. Such a move will also lead me to provide an alternative account of evil and redemption, in tandem with queer and womanist theology, in the final two chapters. While previous trauma theologies have focused on redefining redemption within the confines of traumatic experiences, my approach involves a shift away from trauma-centric frameworks to address certain instances of structural harm.

In tracing these two conceptual streams, I am concerned with taking a step back from the point at which most of the work in trauma theology begins. Generally speaking, trauma theologies have sought to solve the following problem: (1) Trauma is by definition a suffering that remains. (2) A suffering that remains, in virtue of its remaining, cannot be redeemed. (3) Redemption is

Princeton University Press, 1995); Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁵ I use the language of risk throughout these chapters because I do not mean to suggest that the problems that arise with these various concepts of trauma inevitably befall every case wherein one draws upon the respective concept of trauma. The trauma frameworks to be discussed in these chapters can be appropriate to particular contexts and with particular aims, and the framework I offer in chapter three is accompanied by its own perils as well. I do not aim to supersede previous trauma concepts, but to open the field of possibilities for deciding which framework’s risks are most worth venturing when attempting to make sense of the particular harm one is facing.

fundamental to Christian theology. (4) Therefore, Christian theology cannot account for trauma.⁶ Trauma theologies attempt to solve the problem by focusing on step two. These theologies might qualify step two of the problem as follows: A suffering that remains, in virtue of its remaining, cannot be redeemed, *if redemption is understood in its traditional Christian theological sense*.⁷ In other words, trauma cannot be redeemed when redemption means that through Christ's death and resurrection, life and grace once and for all overcomes sin, death, and suffering. Through this qualification, such theologies open up the possibility of redemption's reformulation such that Christian theology can account for trauma. That is, these theologies shift a conception of redemption from its traditional doctrinal formulations.⁸ While previous trauma theologies have generally focused on step two, I intervene at step one.

⁶ One might raise the following objection to this problem construction: Redemption being fundamental to Christian theology does not in itself lead to an apparent contradiction with the idea that trauma cannot be redeemed. In other words, it is not immediately clear that Christianity cannot account for that which cannot be redeemed (e.g. the Devil is on some accounts thought to be irredeemable, but the Devil can still be accounted for). The first thing to be said is that I am presenting this as the problem construction that previous trauma theologies have entered into. Whether or not one finds the problem construction convincing would be a matter to be taken up with those trauma theologies from which I am generalizing the problem.

Point one aside, the second thing to be said is that the example of the Devil differs, in ways that matter for the force of the objection, from the example of trauma once one gets into the weeds of God's goodness, human sin, guilt, and evil. I imagine people would be willing to accept that the Devil is irredeemable yet accountable within theology since it would be easy to argue that the Devil is responsible for this irredeemability. It would be less likely that people would accept that trauma is irredeemable, leaving survivors to live with the consequences of either moral or natural evil for which they are not directly responsible. In any case, more would need to be said about the nature of sin, guilt, and evil, which later chapters of this dissertation seek to do.

⁷ In trauma theologies, theologians representing the traditional Christian theological sense of redemption include, for example, John Calvin, Karl Rahner, and John Howard Yoder.

⁸ For example, in her most recent theology of trauma, Shelly Rambo reformulates redemption at the point of the resurrection. Traditionally, redemption might be said to follow the ensuing timeline: (1) God creates the finite world, including humanity; (2) death and suffering enter creation through human sin; (3) God sends God's incarnate self, Jesus Christ, in the incarnation; (4) Jesus Christ gives himself up to death and sin in the crucifixion, offering new life to humanity in spite of suffering and sin; (5) Jesus overcomes death and suffering through his resurrection life. Rambo argues that, in light of trauma, the resurrection is better understood as life in the midst of death, rather than life overcoming death. In other words, she argues that death remains even in the newness of resurrecting life. Rambo resists the completeness indicated by the noun resurrection, opting instead

I trace two different frameworks of trauma that have distinct relations to Freud's founding work.⁹ Freud's early work saw the etiology of trauma to reside in a real sexual experience in early childhood, the memory of which is activated by a later experience occurring after childhood. This is known as Freud's seduction theory (which I will call Freud's theory of sexual abuse), which he famously disavowed in 1897. Freud's rejection of the theory became a matter of great contention during the American women's liberation movement, fueling activism around the sexual abuse of children and in part leading to the psychological codification of PTSD in the 1980 DSM-III. Hence, the first framework comes to be associated with medical and psychological explanations of ontic or contingent traumas. On this view, trauma is an experience so overwhelming that its victim represses the memory of the event as a mechanism of survival. Even so, the victim will experience uninvited, uncontrollable symptoms that suggest the presence of an unworked through traumatic experience. If the victim can bring to light, in the presence of a safe witness, the traumatic memories, the victim may regain control over their life. American feminists not only play a role in shaping this understanding of trauma, but also draw parallels to women's experience of oppression that are later translated into trauma theologies.

The second framework, which will be the focus of chapter two, comes from Freud's later work, which concentrates on a developmental view of the sexes and the fantasies of psychic life arising from, for example, what he calls the Oedipus complex. Here, a primal scene of traumatic loss

for the present tense verb resurrecting. Drawing on the motif of death remaining in life, Rambo situates redemption in persistent witness to survival in the in-between, which she calls the work of the Spirit. She then situates resurrecting in affective and communal practices that facilitate healing. Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017).

⁹ It should be noted that I do not necessarily see these streams as *directly originating* in the tensions in Freud's work. A much longer story could be told about the ways trauma is understood variously in the work of Oppenheim in Germany as the German welfare state develops, Janet's work with hypnosis in France, and England and the Americas with litigations around railway shock. The complexities of these developments are not fully included in this dissertation for the sake of space.

constitutes a foundational element of all human subjectivity – a theme to be amplified and further developed by Lacan and later psychoanalytic feminisms.¹⁰ In other words, the second framework concerns ontological or symbolic trauma and is associated with philosophical and literary explanations. Trauma is unassimilable, irreducible, and transcendent such that it cannot be represented and it is not even fully known by the one who has experienced it. On this view, attempts to operationalize trauma into an intelligible pathology to be treated do violence to the very experience of trauma itself. Trauma is something that cannot be mastered but is the very excess or lack around which subjects are constituted. Lacan, extending the work of Freud, describes this view of subjectivity in terms of masculine and feminine positions which will later animate critiques of Lacan coming from continental feminists. Thus, whereas the first view sees trauma as contingent and therefore allows for full redress, the second sees trauma as constitutive of the human subject in ways that prohibit full redress.

While I present the two genealogies of trauma as distinct, in both cases, trauma generally comes to be understood in terms of its extraordinariness, either phenomenologically or epistemologically. That is, trauma is understood as extraordinary due to its ability to profoundly overwhelm and shatter one's established ways of understanding and living in the world, or trauma is understood as extraordinary because it represents incomprehensible and irrecoverable catastrophes. The former view (described in chapter one), when taken up in certain strands of feminist thought and activism, tends to offer what theologians and others have described as a redemptive account,

¹⁰ One could mark a third shift in Freud's thinking, when he returns to the concept of trauma as soldiers begin returning from WWI with symptoms of "shell shock." In working with these soldiers, Freud develops his theories of the drives and repetition compulsion, which also get taken up in Lacanian psychoanalysis. There is a vast amount of literature around interpretations of Freud, especially in relation to his views on gender and sexuality. Here, I focus on what seems most relevant to the development of trauma theories. For one overview of the post-Freudian psychoanalytic debates, see Juliet Mitchell's introduction in Juliet Mitchell, ed., *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne* (New York, N.Y.: Norton, 1985).

where witnessing to harm - more particularly, sexual injury at the hands of patriarchal men - is meant to redeem memories of trauma by releasing their foothold on victims of patriarchy and holding perpetrators to account.

However, theologians and others have worried that such a redemptive view covers over the way that trauma remains and returns, and, in certain cases, cannot fit easily into a framework of redemption. As such, some theologians have drawn upon the view wherein trauma is extraordinary in its epistemological incomprehensibility (described in chapter two). That is, traumas are horrible catastrophes that also reveal human finitude, for nothing humans do or say could possibly capture or address the horrors of trauma. In this case, trauma comes to represent not only catastrophic loss, but simultaneously stands in for human lack and finitude. On this account, one is to testify and witness to trauma in ways that reveal the lack that all humans share – a lack that also becomes historically associated with women. When the conception of trauma as incomprehensible catastrophe gets applied to cases of structural harm (e.g. sexism), not only does it risk flattening the particularities of various instances of such harm, but it also becomes unclear whether it is possible to change the material conditions under which such harms are perpetuated. If one cannot know or possibly address trauma, then it is difficult to see how one could motivate concrete action to prevent further similar harms.

Thus, these two conceptions of trauma, both in theological literature and elsewhere, have been applied to cases of social injustice. If the former redemptive conception borders on an overconfident political optimism and forward-looking temporality, where what happens in the past can be recovered and overcome toward a better future, the latter unknowable conception borders on a political quietism and a pessimism about whether the future could at all be different. The quotidian crises framework I will present in chapter three, in many ways, falls between the more extreme versions of these frameworks. Moreover, to be clear, there is good reason to maintain the various

notions of trauma I will discuss. For example, while potentially overconfident, a view wherein one's trauma *can* be overcome might be a necessary attachment for an individual dealing with the overwhelming symptoms of PTSD. And while potentially politically quietist, a view wherein certain events are incomprehensible might be the only way one could even begin to describe certain indescribable evils that have occurred, like any number of genocides. By shifting from trauma frameworks in chapter three toward a different one, I am offering an alternative way to attend to contemporary structural harm in ways these other frameworks do not.

The first two chapters thus set the groundwork for understanding the problems that arise when applying the conceptual lens of trauma to instances of structural injury. Roger Luckhurst, drawing upon Bruno Latour, has described trauma as a “conceptual knot” that arose as a powerful signifier in contemporary consciousness after having traveled in and through a range of discourses and networks of knowledge.¹¹ Part of my goal is to do some untangling of this knot, while recognizing the complexity of trauma as it is lived and experienced. In providing a brief conceptual history of trauma, I disentangle trauma's use for the very practical, material experience of traumatic loss (i.e. ontic trauma) and trauma's use for a theory of subjectivity (i.e. ontological trauma). I associate the former with the framework to be discussed in chapter one and the latter with the framework to be discussed in chapter two.

Again, my aim is not to reject the concepts of trauma that will be described in the first two chapters, as if the concept of ‘quotidian crises’ I offer in chapter three will solve all the problems that arise in trauma theories and theologies. Rather, by attending to the ways in which trauma is mobilized in tandem with certain notions of subjectivity and redress, I aim to expand the theological repertoire for responding to structural injuries. The deeper questions that have animated the following chapters revolve around how one can recognize the universality of loss without eliding the

¹¹ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 14.

historical conditions and mechanisms under which loss is disproportionately perpetuated and experienced. Theoretically and theologically, trauma has become a placeholder for what might otherwise be called lack, loss, or catastrophe, and in contemporary discourse trauma is drawn upon to discuss a wide range of affairs that might be thought of as especially intractable forms of suffering or harm. The question becomes: how can one historicize intractable losses in ways that still open up possibilities for changing the conditions under which such losses take place? And can one do so without investing particular people (e.g. women, poor, queer, trans, people of color) in woundedness and without forcing them to bear the weight of responding to the violences that wound them?¹²

Wounds, Trauma, Loss, and/or Lack?

Wounds seem to be undeniably central to the Christian story. After all, Christian theology tells the story of finite humans muddling along in a broken world and of a God who died a human death and yet, resurrected, defeating death and suffering. Wounds are central to the study of gender and sexuality as well. Basic questions underlying theories of gender and sexuality revolve around how subjects may or may not take up the socially conferred norms, prohibitions, rules, and regulations that sometimes limit, oppress, or do violence to them. As such, loss and wounds (coming from the aforementioned limits, oppressions, and violences) have come to play a primary role in theorizations of gender and sexuality. At the same time, feminists both in philosophy and theology have pointed out that women have historically been associated with wounds, lack, loss, and the mortal body in ways that render them impotent receptacles for free, rational Man's desires.

¹² My question is tangential to a problem posed by Amy Hollywood: "We are left, then, with the problem of how to acknowledge trauma and loss and allow for mourning and recognition of its bodily effects without forcing women and other oppressed people to bear the weight of this work through their symbolic association with the mortal body, and without succumbing to a valorization of trauma as the sole site of the real." Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 277.

Conversely, Man has been associated with the Logos, the divine, the transcendent, and even come to stand in for the Human Himself.¹³ Hence, feminists have sought to free women from such constraining theoretical schemata. At the same time, to put things in terms of Man and Woman overlooks that one's proximity to power is not determined solely by one's gender, as 'third wave' feminists have famously pointed out. Hence, tensions between the universality and particularity of loss(es) have long haunted feminism and feminist theology.

I have noticed a parallel tension appear in trauma theologies when they overlook the two different frameworks of trauma characterized above – one historical, where traumas are empirical, recognizable losses, and one structural, where trauma is a lack constitutive of human subjectivity.¹⁴ At times in the theological literature, trauma is used in the abstract sense of being a lack constitutive of all subjectivity while rendering historical losses comparable across a range of circumstances (the suffering war veterans experience, the suffering ethnic-racialized subjects experience living under conditions of state-sanctioned violence and white supremacy, the suffering experienced by sexual abuse survivors, the transgenerational suffering experienced by a child of a survivor of the Holocaust, the suffering experienced by women living in patriarchal societies, and so on). However, much work has been done already to show the incommensurability of certain wounds and relatedly, the ways in which loss, when figured as constitutive of certain subjects and not others, confines

¹³ According to Sylvia Wynter, white, heterosexual, cis, Western, global middle class Man grounds the criterion for the flourishing of the entire human species. "This issue is that of the genre of the human, the issue whose target of abolition is the ongoing collective production of our present ethnoclass mode of being human, Man: above all, its overrepresentation of its well-being as that of the human species as a whole, rather than as it is veridically: that of the Western and westernized (or conversely) global middle classes." Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument," *The Centennial Review*, Coloniality's Persistence, 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003), 313.

¹⁴ I have chosen these terms because they are standard in trauma theory.

certain subjects to the space of marginalization.¹⁵ When this is the case, the recovery of those in power and the wholeness of the good subject can end up depending upon those so marginalized.

For example, recognizing one's own lack as a person in a position of domination might require witnessing the trauma to which people living under domination testify. In this case, the one experiencing domination is rendered a vehicle upon which the recovery of the one in power rests.¹⁶ In other words, historical traumas get understood as structural traumas which then require the same response – a response of witness to an irreducible phenomena that simultaneously reveals the wound in us all. But this response is not necessarily germane to historical traumas resulting from structural harm. All humans share certainly in finitude or lack, but not necessarily in the same losses. Not only that, but one's closeness to structural mechanisms of harm, such as white supremacy and patriarchy, disproportionately vary based upon complex and contextually specific circumstances.

What is ultimately at stake in these chapters is the ethics of redress. For example, if trauma is loss disproportionately affecting a group of subjects such as women but not men, then redress might mean a claim to recognition and rights equal to those of men. On the other hand, if trauma is counted as a loss *constitutive* of women as subjects, then there may not be a possibility of redress; rather, women insofar as they are women would potentially be permanently lacking, traumatized subjects. If trauma is a lack constitutive of all subjects, regardless of gender, then full redress may again be impossible, or least reframed as the coming to terms with one's constitutive lack. If trauma

¹⁵ To name just a couple, see Antonio Viegas, *Dead Subjects toward a Politics of Loss in Latino Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) and essays in Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith, *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020). In the case of trauma studies specifically, see George Yancy, "Black Embodied Wounds and the Traumatic Impact of the White Imaginary," in *Trauma and Transcendence: Suffering and the Limits of Theory* eds. Eric Boynton and Peter Capretto (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

¹⁶ This problem is similar to ones raised in debates about the Christian doctrine of atonement, particularly in feminist, womanist, and liberationist accounts.

is the psychological shock of a life-threatening experience, then redress might mean individual therapy to recalibrate one's psychological system.

The point of reaching back into the conceptual and theoretical archive, the work of the following two chapters, is to see not only the ways in which these issues have arisen, but also to see what kinds of resources, if any, might already exist to reconsider how contemporary losses might be better addressed. In other words, my wager is that returning to debates within these fields will provide some of the conceptual resources needed to better understand and address human suffering. I will then be set up to reconsider contemporary forms of loss not yet fully thought through in the theological literature – what I call ‘quotidian crises’ in chapter three. What this project will ultimately argue, in framing structural harm away from trauma frameworks toward a notion of ‘quotidian crises,’ is that responses to quotidian crises are best approached through the work of showing up to demand and enact spaces that protest conditions of domination under which structural harms are enacted, but also provide the care necessary to make a life in the wake of domination.

Some Things to Note

The choices one makes in telling a historical narrative matter, and while I have sought to resist what Clare Hemmings has called Western feminist stories of progress, loss, and return,¹⁷ it is nearly impossible as a person with a vested interest in feminisms’ futures not to fashion the narrative at times within these common narrative arcs. For example, it was difficult for me not to read the material around sexual abuse and rape in the 1970s and 1980s without some affective cringing, as if, echoing the feminist progress narrative Hemmings describes, we now know better than we did back

¹⁷ To that end, I have at times chosen not to tell the story below in a strictly linear fashion. It would be easy to follow publication dates and tell the story that way, but much of what shaped the discourse around trauma, especially from the feminist side, was happening in unrecorded speak outs, women's groups, and clinical interactions with patients.

then. However, as Hemmings has shown, the assumptions implicit in the progress narrative erase the way that feminism has always maintained attention to the ways gender interacts with varying racial, sexual, and classed arrangements.¹⁸

Discourses around trauma also come with their own problems. As Antonio Viego has argued, “the history of psychology and psychoanalysis in the United States has always included as a crucial part of its history a witting and unwitting reflection on the meaning of ethnic-racialized difference in U.S. culture.”¹⁹ Pathologization and diagnoses throughout history have been layered by a host of problematic assumptions.²⁰ Examples abound: hysteria was once thought only to affect

¹⁸ One example of this erasure centers around the citation of Judith Butler in feminist story telling. As the narrative goes, Judith Butler was the first to *really* trouble the category of woman, and she did so through abstract, post-structuralist theories of language and discourse from Derrida and Foucault. Butler thereby ignored materiality and the body. Hemmings shows how in this story, Monique Wittig, the Marxist lesbian feminist influential to Butler’s early writings, is entirely disregarded. See especially the chapter entitled “Citation Tactics,” in Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

One can see these stakes likewise echoed in accounts of the development of feminist and womanist theology. Rosemary Radford Ruether has told the story of her own development as a feminist theologian beginning with her activism in the black freedom struggle and Vietnam war protests of the 1960s. Hence, her early publications were on black and Latin American liberation theologies, and it was only later that her work now considered foundational to feminist theology was focused on gender and sexuality. Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Sheila Briggs, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology*, Oxford Handbooks in Religion and Theology (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

In addition, part of the issue with any historically-minded feminist theological project is that one must contend with academic biases toward the textual archive. However, womanist theologians in particular have, from the start, pointed to how their work narrates oral traditions of their mothers, grandmothers, and ancestors. Womanism could not be institutionalized without written texts, yet the mothers and grandmothers of early generations of womanist theologians were never authorized to write and read theology. See especially Katie G. Cannon’s introductory remarks in Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1988). In addition, Marcella Althaus-Reid’s *Indecent Theology* brings to the fore the ways that institutionalized theologies alienate the theologizing of “indecent” subjects on the ground. Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*, (London: Routledge, 2010).

¹⁹ Antonio Viego, *Dead Subjects*, 32.

²⁰ See especially Fassin and Rechtman’s critical work on the ways trauma discourses are mobilized in Palestine, immigration and refugee work, and humanitarian efforts globally in parts three and four of their *The Empire of Trauma*. See also Paul B. Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?: Report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts*, trans. Frank Wynne (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2021).

jaded, wealthy women; soldiers displaying hysterical symptoms were initially thought to be weak, effeminate men trying to escape their national duty; madness was once attributed to ‘backwards’ and ‘primitive’ peoples and cultures only to later be attributed to evolutionary complexity that could only affect the ‘civilized,’ white race; trans people have been pathologized by terms such as ‘gender identity disorder’.²¹ As one can see, the complexities of any project dealing with the histories of trauma and feminism are vast. While an adequately nuanced historiography of the issues at hand would be an entire project unto itself, I have chosen to focus on what I see as some of the most significant moments for the convergence of trauma and theology around issues of gender, particularly as feminist theologians begin to discuss patriarchy in tandem with rape, sexual abuse, and domestic violence in their work. Thus, the paradigmatic cases of trauma for my genealogy are those usually categorized as sexual violence.

A note regarding the language and concepts used in the following chapters is warranted. As I detail the history of the literature, I will usually be employing the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ with the intended meanings of the authors I discuss. Therefore, it should be noted that gender did not become a term commonly used distinctively from sex until the late twentieth century. Thus, some of the authors discussed use the term ‘sex’ to connote what one would today call ‘gender.’ When I use the term gender, I usually refer to socially conferred and performed norms, rules, and cultural assumptions around what constitutes a ‘man’ and a ‘woman.’²² Generally speaking, I use ‘sex’ as a

²¹ See Amina Mama, *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender, and Subjectivity*, (New York: Routledge, 1995); Juliet Flower MacCannell, *The Hysteric's Guide to the Future Female Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Robert V. Guthrie, *Even the Rat Was White: A Historical View of Psychology*, 2nd ed (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2004); Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?*

²² Following Eve Sedgwick's, *Epistemology of the Closet*, the gender of an object choice (for which or for whom I desire) follows no inevitable or naturalized pattern, but the instability of sex and gender categories does not render them “inefficacious or innocuous.” Eve Kosofsky. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1990), 10. Furthermore, to say that one could fully differentiate sex and gender would be to overlook the complexity in the ways in which the two are socially and politically co-constituted; nevertheless, I follow Sedgwick's contention that it can be helpful to see the two as analytically distinct. See Sedgwick's second Axiom in *Epistemology of*

term aligned with desire, sometimes meaning the act of sex, and I use sexuality to refer to one's preferred objects of desire, which I also see, like gender, as constituted yet relatively mobile within given social conditions.²³ When referring to the sense of sex associated with biology and chromosomes, I will usually qualify the term as 'biological sex,' 'female sex,' or 'male sex.'

Furthermore, like many other scholars who have worked historically and theoretically on the concept of 'trauma,' and revealed the various social, political, and cultural influences on the development of the term, the aim of such inquiry is not to reject the view that people really are traumatized or that women really experience oppression. Rather, I view the development of 'trauma,' as it was increasingly medicalized and diagnostically defined, as providing a universe within which people who have been affected by overwhelming experiences come to understand themselves. But it is also a discourse shaped by the experiences of the people themselves. Here I am drawing upon what Ian Hacking has termed "the looping effects of human kinds."²⁴

Categorizations and frameworks change the way we interact with people, and these categories in turn can change how people come to view themselves.²⁵ According to Hacking, human

the Closet. For the claim regarding the co-constitution of sex and gender, see Gayle Rubin's description of the "sex-gender system" in, "The Traffic in Women," in *Toward an anthropology of women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2011).

²³ Lee Edelman and Lauren Berlant call sex a site in which our relationality invests different affects, a site subject to various social, legal, and personal pressures and drives, but a site that nevertheless holds the possibility of "confronting our limit in ourselves or in another." Sex can powerfully foment encounters which disturb a subject's fantasy of sovereignty (although sex is not only site at which this can happen). Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), vii.

²⁴ For Hacking, human kinds can be understood in their distinction from natural kinds. A natural kind, such as a rock, cares not if it is called a rock, nor does a rock care if one picks it up and throws it. In contrast, if a particular person is called a human kind then we might treat that person differently, based upon their being a human kind, and that person, based upon our thinking of them as a human kind, might change how they think of themselves. Further, they might *care* whether or not we call them a human kind. Ian Hacking, "The Looping Effects of Human Kinds," *Causal Cognition: A Multidisciplinary Debate*, eds. Dan Sperber, David Premack, Ann James Premack, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 351-383.

²⁵ "If H is a human kind and A is a person, then calling A H may make us treat A differently, just as calling Z N may make us do something to Z. We may reward or jail, instruct or abduct. But it also

kinds are able to choose, within a field of description, possibilities for future action and redescrptions of their pasts. If one comes to see themselves as having survived trauma, this may change the way they view themselves and influence their interactions in the world.²⁶ This, in turn, might force experts to reconceptualize the very terms under which human kinds are categorized. “To create new ways of classifying people is also to change how we can think of ourselves, to change our sense of self-worth, even how we remember our own past. This in turn generates a looping effect, because people of the kind behave differently and so are different.”²⁷

Trauma has become a powerful way to make social and political claims to redress in the contemporary moment. Commenting on the famous female ‘hysterics’ under Charcot’s care at the Salpêtrière Hospital at the end of the nineteenth century, Asti Hustvedt writes, “Blanche, Augustine, and Geneviève were undeniably victimized, both inside and outside the hospital. That said, they also participated in a hospital culture that was in many ways less oppressive than the world beyond it. The Salpêtrière provided a language—a language of hysteria—that allowed them to articulate their distress. Blanche, Augustine, and Geneviève mastered its vocabulary and were rewarded.”²⁸ The claim here is *not* that Blanche, Augustine, or Geneviève were not in fact experiencing what Charcot

makes a difference to A to know that A is an H, precisely because there is so often a moral connotation to a human kind. Perhaps A does not want to be H! Thinking of me as an H changes how I think of me.” Hacking, “The Looping Effects of Human Kinds,” 368.

²⁶ “To take an extreme example, some people come to see themselves as incest survivors, which in turn changes their lives and their relationships to their families. There is no mere matter of recovering forgotten trauma; it is a matter of being new descriptions available, connected in law-like ways to other new descriptions, explanations, and expectations....We did not know that we had [traumas] until recently—or, more paradoxical but more true, they were not a possible kind of experience to have had. But surely trauma, in its present sense of psychic wound, has been a permanent fixture in human life? Only in the past century has it been a human kind, i.e., a kind of experience about which scientific knowledge is claimed.” Hacking, “The Looping Effects of Human Kinds,” 369.

²⁷ Hacking, “The Looping Effects of Human Kinds,” 369.

²⁸ Asti Hustvedt, *Medical Muses: Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 5.

and others were calling hysteria at the time, but rather that the ones so diagnosed could draw on that very discourse both to self-define and to mobilize a desired politics.

The question I am ultimately interested in here, then, is not about the status of reality in trauma, but rather about what one's concept of trauma *does* in terms of possibilities afforded for a feminist political-theological practice, especially if and when trauma becomes tied to one's gender. My ultimate aim, as later chapters will develop, is to expand this range of possibilities. The proceeding two chapters might be thought of, then, as the first installment in a story to be told about the perils and possibilities of feminist trauma theologies with an eye to later chapters in which I will seek to shift and reconfigure some of the frameworks we have come to inherit and inhabit. Feminist theology's legacy in and as liberative theology, on the one hand, has sometimes conflicted with the ways attention to gendered subjectivity pulls feminist theology toward more ambivalent notions of emancipatory possibilities. The trick becomes figuring out how to hold together political expediency and action with feminisms' equally important loyalties to the proliferations and problematizations of genders and sexualities. I hope that reaching back into the historical archive and opening up space to rethink the relations between gender and trauma will allow feminist theology's available attachments to shift in ways that are not only survivable, but also make room for precarious lives to be more livable in our historical present.

Chapter 1

Lineages of Trauma Theology: Feminists Speak Out

*Freud was never far from the controversies over the nature of traumatic memory.*¹

*Christianity is an abusive theology that glorifies suffering.*²

‘Trauma’ has long trafficked in the territories of sexuality and gender. As I will show, the increasing psychologization of the trauma concept in the early twentieth century came to surpass what was previously diagnosed as ‘hysteria.’ Hysteria was originally understood to be a malady of the uterus and therefore strictly a woman’s disorder. It was not until the late nineteenth century that Jean-Martin Charcot pulled hysteria from gynecologists and obstetricians to the realm of neurology. Charcot’s work would be influential to both Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet, two progenitors of the modern concept of trauma.

While this chapter will trace important historical episodes in the history of the trauma, including the moment at which Charcot fought to understand both male and female patients as exhibiting symptoms of hysteria, my ultimate concern is with how trauma made its way into theology. There is a now recognizable, albeit young, field called ‘trauma theologies’ that Shelly Rambo, as mentioned in the introduction to Part I, has described as having a feminist lineage. In this chapter, I will trace one framework that has come to shape this field of trauma theologies, one that I correlate to what is known as Freud’s seduction theory, which I will also be calling Freud’s theory of sexual abuse.³

¹ Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008), 74.

² Rebecca Ann Parker and Joanne C. Brown, “For God So Loved the World?,” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York, N.Y: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 26.

³ “Seduction theory” is the standard name in the literature; however, since this phrase would likely strike the modern reader as a misnomer, I will frequently use “theory of sexual abuse” instead.

In this framework, trauma is understood to be a recoverable, yet overwhelming experience repressed by the victim at the time of its occurrence. A compassionate witness or therapist facilitates recovery by helping the victim bring the experience to speech. Such a framework aligns well with a strand of feminism that seek to bring to light the hidden workings of patriarchy so that justice may be addressed. The claim to trauma theology's deeply feminist lineage should be unsurprising to one familiar with the genealogical history of trauma. The inclusion of PTSD in the third edition of the DSM-III in 1980 is often attributed to the political activism of Vietnam war veterans and feminists. Just as feminists were engaged in consciousness-raising around rape and sexual abuse of children, so feminist theologians began publishing edited volumes engaging the same issues historically, theologically, and pastorally. Trauma studies began to congeal in the 1990s as the study of gender and sexuality took its own shifts and turns, and it was not until the early 2000s that trauma theologies began to appear in publication. Trauma had become a new discourse to discuss women's issues of rape, abuse, and oppression and was thereby germane to feminist theological appropriation.

The burden of this chapter is to show that one of the major influences that came to shape feminist trauma theologies was a push among feminist psychologists and activists to understand trauma in terms of sexual violence. Trauma's framing around sexual violence in part came from Freud's early work on trauma with female patients who had been sexually abused (Freud's so-called seduction theory), something feminist activists engage with as they fight raise consciousness around sexual violence. However, even as feminist theologians take up the work on sexual violence in their own theorizations of patriarchy, the ways sexuality, gender, and trauma are configured remains contested terrain. More to the point, at least three problems arise as trauma makes its way into theological accounts. First, accounts which associate women too closely with trauma risk foreclosing women's agency and pleasure. As I will show in the literature, if 'women' become attached to (sexual) victimhood, then it is unclear how women could retain freedom or enjoy sex in a patriarchal

society. Second, accounts which are optimistic about the possibility of bringing to light oppression and/or of such bring-to-light's effectiveness in facilitating justice or healing may fail to see the very interminability of trauma. This kind of account has usually been understood to be based upon a redemptive temporality (traumas are recoverable losses that can be healed and moved on from) that borders on a kind of Christian triumphalism. This is why some feminists, feminist trauma theologians included, have either done away with the Christian concept of redemption or at least tried to reformulate redemption in ways that can attend to traumas that remain. Third, what *kind* of women get attached to violence and woundedness gets tied up in questions of race, class, and sexuality in ways that remain undertheorized in feminist trauma theologies. In other words, one of the questions for those influenced by stream of trauma discussed in this chapter is whether or not 'women' (all women? straight women? white women? cis women?) can be detached from conditions under which sex is anything other than violent, and if so, what kinds of erasures might be enacted therein.

The frameworks to be elucidated in this chapter and the next primarily serve to acquaint the reader with the crucial concepts, problems, and debates that I will draw upon in the constructive argument of the latter half of the project. The issues around theorizations of gender, sexuality, and sex as well as feminist theological debates around the doctrine of atonement and redemption will play important roles in motivating the quotidian crises framework I offer in chapter three, and thus will be discussed in further detail in part II of the project. For those already versed in the histories of trauma, gender and sexuality, and feminist theology, much of the work of the first two chapters should already be familiar. For those who are not versed in these histories, the first two chapters should provide some important groundwork. To begin, I turn to an important moment in which Freud's work on trauma is challenged by feminist activists.

The Psychologization of Trauma

On April 17, 1971, Florence Rush delivered a paper at a conference held by the Radical Feminists a few months after one of their speak outs. The conference topic was rape, and Rush's paper presented a thesis on the sexual abuse of children, linking abuse to the oppression of women. Rush's paper was published into a book in 1980, *The Best Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children*.⁴ In the book, Rush argued that Freud had altered case studies to support his own theories. Most significantly, he had removed or replaced the fathers who had abused their children when he abandoned the theory of sexual abuse in favor of the developmental, Oedipal paradigm (a paradigm I will discuss more thoroughly in the next chapter).

Not only did Rush harshly critique Freud's abandonment of the theory of sexual abuse, but Rush's paper challenged the prevailing views of the day that children were to blame for their own abuse. Rush writes with a tongue-in-cheek tone:

The little girl, then, with her innate passion for a penis, is—as in Christian doctrine—the temptress Eve, and if she is violated, the nature of her sexuality renders her culpable. Any attempt on the part of the child or her family to expose the violator also exposes her own alleged innate sexual motives and shames her rather than the offender; concealment is her only recourse. The dilemma of the sexual abuse of children has provided as system of foolproof emotional blackmail: If the victim incriminates the abuser, she also incriminates herself. The sexual abuse of the child is therefore the best kept secret in the world.⁵

Rush points to the previously prevailing view that children were, at least in part, to blame for early incestuous experiences. This marks the shifting tide of the moral valences around understandings of trauma. Trauma had once been seen as a malady of the weak, feminine, or delinquent, but political activism around Vietnam veterans and sexually abused children was increasingly shifting such

⁴ Florence Rush, *The Best Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981).

⁵ Rush, *The Best Kept Secret*, 104.

valuations.⁶ Radical feminist texts like Rush's make their way into volumes published by feminist theologians on violence against women in that same period.

In order to get a better understanding of these shifts, however, a closer look at the development of the notion of trauma is in order. What is Freud's theory of sexual abuse and why does it resurface in the 1970s as an area of contention for psychoanalysts and feminists alike? Part of the answer lies in the psychologization of trauma at the turn of the twentieth century and in shifting views of trauma's moral implications into the mid-twentieth century. Trauma increasingly comes to be seen as related to events outside one's control whose symptoms can intrude upon any unsuspecting victim – women and men, strong and weak, wealthy and poor, young and old. At the same time, the one increasingly important issue for feminists during the women's liberation movement is sexual violence, leading trauma to take on its own gendered valences.⁷ To see how trauma surfaces in the women's liberation movement around controversies over Freud, I would first like to return to the late nineteenth century to the premier Parisian hospital for the study of hysteria.

As already mentioned, the modern psychological notion of trauma developed out of and in conjunction with the study of hysteria – a term originally describing a malady of the uterus and therefore strictly ascribed to women. Hysteria's exclusive association with women shifted in large part due to the influence of Jean-Martin Charcot.⁸ The Parisian neurologist's lectures at the Salpêtrière Hospital were famous, gathering crowds to listen and watch his demonstrations on noted

⁶ One could add here additional social and economic factors that shifted valuations around trauma, including the development of the welfare state in Germany, litigation around railroad shock in Britain and America, and national interests around war in the Western context. See fn 6 of the section introduction for resources on these issues.

⁷ The focus of this chapter is therefore the paradigmatic cases of sexual abuse and rape. There are many other paradigmatic cases of trauma, but my interest in the overlaps between the women's liberation movement and feminist theology in the mid-twentieth century leads me to focus on these two animating cases. One could consider, for example, the development of concepts of masculinity and femininity in relation to "railway spine" and "war neurosis."

⁸ See especially Ian Hacking's chapter on trauma in Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998).

patients such as Marie “Blanche” Wittman, Queen of Hysterics. It seems apt, then, that Charcot described the infirmary in which he worked as “a sort of *living pathological museum*.”⁹ While Charcot’s most famous patients were “hysterical” women such as Blanche, Charcot insisted that hysteria could be found in both men and women.

It was neurological research in England and the United States that allowed Charcot to affirm hysteria’s gender-neutral etiology. Charcot drew upon the work of James Jackson Putnam and George Walton in America and Herbert W. Page in England on “Railway-spine” and “Railway-brain” to argue that men manifested hysteria due to the psychological shock of a railway accident.¹⁰ In these cases, it had previously been believed that an organic lesion upon the spine caused an alteration in the nervous system which led to hysteria. But Charcot’s contribution to the etiology of hysteria included his contention that it was not the organic lesion alone that caused hysteria, but the traumatic shock these male victims of railway accidents experienced.¹¹ For example, the fear that one might become paralyzed in an accident introduced the idea that one *was* paralyzed. One might then experience the hysterical symptom of paralysis of a limb without anything having physically touched one’s limb to cause paralysis. In short, Charcot is considered the first to have introduced a psychical explanation, what he called trauma, for hysterical disorders, and this could be experienced by both men and women.

⁹ Charcot, Jean-Martin, *Clinical Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System*, trans. Savill, Thomas, vol. 3 (London: The New Sydenham Society, 1889), 3.

¹⁰ See lecture XVIII of Charcot, *Clinical Lectures on the Diseases of the Nervous System*, vol. 3. For a fuller history of the role of research on railway spine in the development of psychotherapy, see Eric Caplan, *Mind Games: American Culture and the Birth of Psychotherapy*, (Berkeley, Calif. London: University of California Press, 2001). See also the volume of essays Micale and Lerner, *Traumatic Pasts*. This volume provides insights into trauma’s development in British and American psychology with some attention to the construction of masculinity.

¹¹ For a brief overview, see Librecht, Katrien and Quackelbeen, Julien, “Early History of Male Hysteria and Psychic Trauma,” *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences* 31 (October 1995): 370–84.

Beginning in 1885, Sigmund Freud spent five months studying with Charcot in Paris at the Salpêtrière Hospital and quickly shifted his career interests from central nervous system anatomy to the psychological condition of hysteria. However, Freud moved from Charcot's work to place an even greater emphasis on the psychical reorganization of the hysteric. Particularly in his earliest work on trauma, Freud seizes upon and expands Charcot's psychical explanation of hysteria. Freud shifts the concept of trauma to center more upon the way an experience affects the victim's psychical economy rather than on the event of trauma itself.

In one of his first works with Joseph Breuer, traumatic symptoms are said to occur because the memories and affects built up around the event did not disappear. "Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences."¹² Trauma's etiology is the psychical reorganization rather than an originating event. However, at this early stage in trauma theory, the etiology remained premised upon events in the past that led to present trauma. Thus, Freud and Breuer liken trauma to a virus:

But the causal relation between the determining psychical trauma and the hysterical phenomenon is not of a kind implying that the trauma merely acts like an *agent provocateur* in releasing the symptom, which thereafter leads an independent existence. We must presume rather that the psychical trauma—or more precisely the memory of the trauma—acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work.¹³

The cause-effect structure of trauma is not like a bat hitting a ball, but like a virus which enters the psyche and continues to effect it. This traumatic temporality will be further developed throughout Freud's career in the notion of *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action or afterwardness) – trauma's repetitive intrusion upon the patient.

Around the same time, Freud was working on a manuscript that attempted to "furnish a psychology that shall be a natural science," a work that was not published until after Freud's death in

¹² Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies in Hysteria* (Beacon Hill: Beacon Press, 1961), 42.

¹³ Breuer and Freud, *Studies in Hysteria*, 40.

1950.¹⁴ Here, one can see a helpful example of the traumatic temporality as Freud works through the notion of hysteria. Freud draws upon a case study with Emma Epstein, who has a phobia of entering shops alone. Emma attributes this phobia to a memory of being laughed at in a shop by the shop assistants when she was twelve. She recalls being attracted to one of the shop assistants, that the shop assistants were laughing at her clothes, and that she ran away in fear. According to Freud, the phobic symptoms Emma now displayed – of always having to be accompanied by someone else if she is going into a shop – do not make sense considering the memories Emma has presented. But Emma reveals a second memory, this one having occurred when she was eight. She says that this memory, which Freud calls Scene II, was not conscious to her at the moment of Scene I (where the shop assistants laugh at her). In Scene I, Emma had been sexually assaulted by a shopkeeper when she had gone in to buy some candy.

According to Freud, the repressed memory of Scene II had been activated in Scene I by the associative link of laughter. The laughter of the shop assistants (unconsciously) reminded Emma of the grin on the shopkeeper's face when he sexually assaulted her, and her assumption that the shop assistants were laughing at her clothes becomes a symbol for the earlier sexual assault at the hands of the shopkeeper. "The memory aroused what it was certainly not able to at the time, a *sexual release*, which was transformed into anxiety. With this anxiety, she was afraid that the shop-assistants might repeat the assault, and she ran away."¹⁵ Freud explains this temporality, then, as a repressed memory which becomes a trauma "by *deferred action*."¹⁶ Therefore, memory-traces carry within them a latent potential for hysterical symptoms.

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. I, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1999), 295. Hereafter, *S.E.*

¹⁵ *S.E.* I, 354.

¹⁶ *S.E.* I, 356.

The treatment for such symptoms was to bring the repressed material into the realm of consciousness through speech. Returning to Freud's work with Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria* suggests that when a patient was able to describe the event in detail along with its accompanying affects, the symptoms disappeared. The energy which was suppressed during the event, keeping the affect attached to the memory and leading the memory to intrude repeatedly upon the patient, must be abreacted by bringing to words the event and its accompanying affects. The affect is to find its "way out" through speech, so that now the patient can integrate the trauma into normal consciousness.¹⁷ Breuer's patient, Anna O., famously described this as 'the talking cure,' a phrase which continues to be associated with psychotherapy to this day.

At this early stage, Freud viewed trauma's etiology to result from the memory of a sexual experience prior to puberty, much like the case of Emma Epstein above. Known as Freud's seduction theory, since the child was supposedly seduced into a sexual relationship with a caregiver or adult, trauma resulted from repressed memories of sexual assault in infancy. This view of trauma should be familiar to the contemporary reader: traumatic symptoms arise due to repressed memories of a real childhood sexual experience activated after a period of latency by an event later in life. This later event triggers bodily symptoms indicating the repressed memory has not yet been released. It is now, however, what would be considered not a seduction but an instance of childhood sexual abuse.

It is now well-known that Freud publicly rejected the theory of sexual abuse in 1906 and privately in an 1897 letter to Wilhelm Fliess.¹⁸ He moves to a universal, developmental model of infantile sexuality beginning in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*.¹⁹ While I will discuss this

¹⁷ See also Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II," *S.E.*, vol. XII (1911-1913), 145-156; and "Mourning and Melancholia," *S.E.*, Vol. XIV (1914-1916), 237-258.

¹⁸ *S.E.* I.

¹⁹ For more detailed accounts of Freud's shifting views of trauma, see John Fletcher, *Freud and the Scene of Trauma* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) and Jean Laplanche and John Fletcher, *Freud and the Sexual: Essays 2000-2006* (International Psychoanalytic Books, 2011).

model in detail in the next chapter, for now, one can note that sexuality on this later account is understood to be an endogenous rather than exogenous force of infantile life. Hysterical symptoms, in this later model, do not arise due to a pre-pubescent sexual experience, but rather due to unconscious fantasies.

Hence, Freud abandons the theory of trauma as a theory of symptoms and a causal paradigm (the theory of sexual abuse) in favor of a theory of universal subjectivity in a developmental paradigm (Oedipal wishes and fantasies directed towards the child's parents). Whereas trauma was once grounded in the real event of sexual abuse, Freud now grounded it in the biological, sexual development of the child. Freud would later return to trauma and associated concepts in his work on the compulsion to repeat and the death drive beginning in his 1919 *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, extending these understandings in his highly speculative texts on history, culture, and anthropology such as *Moses and Monotheism*.²⁰

I will discuss this return in the next chapter, but for now, I would like to press ahead to the time leading up to the moment when trauma becomes an official diagnosis for the field of psychology. After PTSD's codification in the 1980 DSM-III, debates continued to erupt among feminists around Freud's views of trauma as it related to sexual abuse and rape. It is this strand of feminism, which fought to revive the scene of seduction as trauma's cause, that first tends to make its way into feminist theology.

Freud's Theory of Sexual Abuse Rediscovered

I have already discussed Florence Rush's criticisms of Freud in the 1970s, and the controversies over Freud's work continued after the publication of the DSM-III. Psychoanalyst

²⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey, Standard ed (New York: Norton, 1989). Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism: An Outline of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works (1937-1939)*, trans. James Strachey, Standard ed Vol. 23 (London: Vintage, 2001).

Jeffrey Masson was granted permission by Anna Freud to read and later publish the full collection of Freud's letters to Wilhelm Fliess, many of which were previously unpublished and which, according to Masson, shed greater light on Freud's famous rejection of the theory of sexual abuse. In his book-length analysis of the letters, Masson argued that while Freud realized the fathers of all his women patients had sexually abused them, Freud discarded this theory, and the real experience of abuse, in favor of the Oedipal view which attributed trauma to mere sexual fantasies rather than real events.²¹ Masson suspected that Freud was under great pressure not to implicate the well-respected fathers of his patients as abusers.

Masson's preface to the 2012 edition of the book sheds some light on his motivations for publishing his particular reading of Freud. Masson was trained as a psychoanalyst, but he was uncomfortable with how he was encouraged to analyze the patient in ways that did not always accord with the patient's own account. "Case in point, as part of our training, we were taught that if a female patient described a memory of incest, we were to regard this as anything but a true memory....It could, in fact, be just about anything. The one thing it could *not* be, however, was a genuine memory."²² The book generated significant controversy, as some in the psychoanalytic community vehemently critiqued Masson's work and defended Freud, while many feminists defended and drew upon Masson's findings.²³

However, even prior to Masson's book and after Rush's conference paper, feminist psychologists Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman had begun talking in 1975 about a trend they were observing in their practice. In the course of their clinical practices, they had noticed that a vast number of their women patients had a history of incest. Yet, there was very little literature on the

²¹ Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth* (San Francisco, Calif.: Untreed Reads, 2012).

²² Masson, *The Assault on Truth*, i.

²³ Some of the controversy at this time was around "false memory syndrome" – the view that psychoanalysts encouraged patients to remember experiences of abuse in childhood that they never really had.

subject that was not “so contaminated by sexist bias as to be essentially useless.”²⁴ The two began research together, research published in the 1981 book *Father-Daughter Incest*. By the time of the book’s publication, as Herman notes in the preface, incest had become recognized as a major social problem due to the activism of the women’s liberation movement.²⁵ Herman goes on later to state that the book is avowedly feminist, for the subject of incest is laden with ideology:

Without an understanding of male supremacy and female oppression, it is impossible to explain why the vast majority of incest perpetrators (uncles, older brothers, stepfathers, and fathers) are male, and why the majority of victims (nieces, younger sisters, and daughters) are female. Without a feminist analysis, one is at a loss to explain why the reality of incest was for so long suppressed by supposedly responsible professional investigators, why public discussion of the subject awaited the women’s liberation movement, or why the recent apologists for incest have been popular men’s magazines and the closely allied, all-male Institute for Sex Research.²⁶

For Herman, the subject of sexual abuse is inextricable from the workings of patriarchy.

Freud makes an appearance at the very beginning of chapter one of the book in a block quote from his 1933 Introductory Lectures of Psychoanalysis. Here, Freud admits that most of his women patients related an early experience of being “seduced by their father,” but that Freud in the end decided these stories were not true.²⁷ Hysterical symptoms did not come from real occurrences but from fantasies expressing the Oedipus complex in women. Herman begins the chapter in direct contrast to Freud, stating that incest is ubiquitous among female children, a fact that has long been known but incessantly covered over by clinicians. Turning to the literature that had till that point been written, Herman discovered “a vastly elaborated intellectual tradition which served the purpose of suppressing the truth about incest, a tradition which, like so many others, originates in the works of Freud. The patriarch of modern psychology stumbled across the incest secret in the early and

²⁴ Herman and Hirschman, *Father-Daughter Incest*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), vii.

²⁵ “In the past decade, women have directed public attention to the problems of rape, wife-beating, and child abuse, all previously forbidden subjects” (Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest*, vii).

²⁶ Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest*, 3.

²⁷ Freud, “Introductory Lectures of Psychoanalysis,” qtd in Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest*, 7.

formative years of his career.”²⁸ In an analysis to be confirmed by Masson, Herman sees Freud’s turn from the theory of sexual abuse as an attempt to protect the respectable social statuses of his patients’ fathers. Herman then points out the glaring silence regarding incest among clinical textbooks after Freud until new studies emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. According to Herman, Freud had effectively silenced victims of incest, the vast majority of whom were women, until feminists began consciousness-raising around sexual violence in the 1970s and onward.

In 1980, those who conceptualized the PTSD diagnosis described it as a reaction to an overwhelming event outside the range of ordinary human experience. Confronted by such a catastrophic event, the one experiencing it would likely not have sufficient adaptive capacities to cope with this kind of stressor, and PTSD would ensue. Rape was one such event along with war, torture, and natural or human-made disasters. The understanding of trauma that develops in the American psychological literature, especially as it is codified in the DSM, is in many ways a return to that framework that Freud had rejected.

Judith Herman’s work on incest developed into broader research on trauma, and in 1992, Judith Herman published *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, a book which remains foundational to trauma studies. In the opening pages, Herman acknowledges the debt she owes to the women’s movement for the work that developed into the book. Like her work on incest, Herman positions her work as avowedly feminist.

In *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman seems to view trauma similarly to the early Freud. It is clear that, for Herman, trauma presses upon the victim against her will or wishes. Herman states, “The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*. Atrocities,

²⁸ Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest*, 9.

however, refuse to be buried.”²⁹ Just as hysterical symptoms reveal an unconscious memory, for Herman trauma will show up in some way even if the victim’s consciousness has suppressed it. Consciousness buries trauma and at the same time, trauma refuses to be buried, pressing upon consciousness like a hand reaching from the grave.

For Herman, unless that hand is pulled from the grave, and allowed to testify in the presence of a safe and compassionate witness (the therapist), trauma will repeatedly press upon the victim through its symptoms.

The therapist is called upon to bear witness to a crime. She must affirm a position of solidarity with the victim. This does not mean a simplistic notion that the victim can do no wrong; rather, it involves an understanding of the fundamental injustice of the traumatic experience and the need for a resolution that restores some sense of justice. This affirmation expresses itself in the therapist’s daily practice, in her language, and above all in her moral commitment to truth-telling without evasion or disguise.³⁰

This framework for recovery, again, aligns with Freud’s early view that what is buried in the unconscious – an actual event – must be brought to consciousness in the presence of the analyst through the talking cure. Through work with the therapist, the survivor follows three steps of recovery: 1. The establishment of safety, 2. Remembrance and mourning, and 3. Reconnection with ordinary life. The victim is to testify of the trauma in the presence of a safe witness who believes her story, so that she can begin returning to normal life.

I would suggest that it is this understanding of trauma and recovery that tends to get applied in popular discourses around collective traumas. (Consider, for example, the #MeToo movement’s reliance on mass public witnessing through sharing stories of abuse and assault as a means for enacting social change around the treatment of women.) It is also this understanding of trauma that initially shapes much of the feminist theological work that begins engaging with issues around

²⁹ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence, from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 1.

³⁰ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 135.

women's experiences of sexual violence and abuse. As Herman and Hirschman had noted in their work, forms of sexual violence had become powerful issues in public consciousness through the women's movement, and Herman's work on trauma is informed strongly by these issues.

Sex-Gender or Sex and Gender?

Around the 1970s and 1980s, in tandem with the women's liberation movement more broadly, feminist theologians were discussing issues of sexual violence against women. Certain feminist theorizations emphasize the appropriation of the theory of sexual abuse by feminist activists and psychologists, which in turn makes its way into feminist theological engagements with sexual violence. I turn to parallel discussions in both feminism broadly and feminist theology specifically to see how women's identity becomes attached to suffering in ways that will later influence trauma theologies.

As I mentioned, feminists had advocated for the revival of the Freudian scene of childhood sexual abuse, and it was within this framework that women's experiences of sexual violence shaped trauma's official diagnoses in the American psychological community. Put simply, a temporality of traumatic sexual violence might be presented as follows: A female child is seduced by an adult male into an early sexual experience prior to her ability to say "yes" or "no." An experience later in life reveals the repressed memory of sexual abuse is being enacted or repeated symptomatically. Bringing the memory to light through talking with a safe witness allows the woman to experience recovery and to regain control over herself, such that she no longer repeatedly acts out symptoms against her will. One might present a model parallel to the scene of seduction but amplified to the systemic level in early feminist theorizing, as follows: Women live under conditions of patriarchy where women experience everyday violence through male systems of power. These experiences cause women to live with the potential threat of patriarchal violence, something that comprehensively structures their

relations and being-in-the-world. Through speaking out in communities with other women about the violence experienced under patriarchy, women can reclaim their power and reverse the patriarchal order of violence and suffering, enacting new, life-affirming political futures for women.

As I will show, these feminist political projects tend to collapse sex and gender into a patriarchal system under which women are defined in terms of their rapability and, as a result, unable to enjoy anything other than, at best, bad sex, and at worst, sexual assault. In response, the argument of feminist theological literature tends to be that in order to reject patriarchy, one must reject all glorification of suffering and violence in the Christian tradition – throwing the Christian narrative of redemption into question. On the most extreme end, some feminist theologians suggest that the Christian tradition must be thrown out altogether. The residues of these issues can be seen in the feminist trauma theologies that begin to arise in the twenty-first century, namely, through attempts to refigure redemption, freedom and grace, and death and life that remain faithful both the Christian tradition and to the challenges of trauma theory.

Perhaps the most famous rejection of the Christian tradition is exemplified by Mary Daly. In her 1985 “Original Reintroduction” to her 1973 book, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation*, Mary Daly tells the reader that one of the major theses of the book is that “rapism” is “the paradigm of all oppression, as the root and model of the nuclear arms buildup, racism, man-made poverty, chemical contamination.”³¹ For Daly, rape is the paradigmatic form of oppression because it is a relation in which one (read: man) violently objectifies another (read: woman). Almost unremarked upon among feminist theologians is the way that Daly took this form literally, in highly transphobic ways. On Daly’s account, gender is tied to one’s sex assigned at birth,

³¹ Mary Daly, “Original Reintroduction,” *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), xvi. Daly’s work in *Beyond God the Father* was known to represent a break from the Christian tradition, which was only to become sharper in later books. Daly describes her first book, *The Church and the Second Sex*, as a “reformist feminism,” and her work after as “postchristian radical feminism.” See especially her footnote beginning on page xii.

and “the figure of the transsexual became for Daly a central metaphor for patriarchal religion.”³²

Daly, and her famous transphobic student, Janice Raymond, describe trans people as duplicitous and patriarchal, and would then ostensibly be part of the very rapism Daly calls paradigmatic of oppression.³³ Daly, whose work is known to be foundational to feminist theology and important to feminism more broadly, provides an early glimpse into the way that rape had become almost synonymous with patriarchy, and literal men *and* trans people, in radical feminist writing of the 1970s and 1980s.

Daly describes rape as a mentality which can be extended beyond individual relations to any social or structural relation in which there are victims and perpetrators of violence. She writes, “Rape is the primordial act of violation but it is more than an individual act. It is expressive of a basic alienation within the psyche and of structures of alienation within society. Rape is an act of group against group: male against female. As I have pointed out, it is also an act of male against male, in which the latter is attacked by the pollution of his property.”³⁴ Rape is representative of patriarchy, racism, poverty, war, and ecological devastation on Daly’s account. As Daly’s work gets even more extreme,³⁵ and her writing attempts to break from any semblance of patriarchy, including Christianity, she imagines a solution in which (cis) women return to their own origins. For Daly, these origins are the reverse of the masculine affirmation of death and suffering, and include life, creation, and becoming. For her, the Christian tradition glorifies patriarchy qua glorifying suffering and death. She writes: “The Tree of Life has been replaced by the necrophilic symbol of a dead body hanging on dead wood. The Godfather insatiably demands more sacrifices, and the fundamental

³² Max Strassfeld, “Transsing Religious Studies,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Transsing and Queering Feminist Studies and Practices of Religion, 34, no. 1 (Spring 2018), 45.

³³ Janice Redmond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994).

³⁴ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 118.

³⁵ She calls her next book “an extremist book, written in a situation of extremity.” Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 18.

sacrifices of sadospiritual religion are female.”³⁶ (Cis) women must return to images like the Tree of Life that precipitate (cis) women’s becoming instead.

In the introduction to the 1989 volume entitled, *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, editors Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn echo some of the issues raised by Daly. They state that one of the major questions being explored by the volume is “Is there anything worth saving in the Christian tradition?”³⁷ One of the primary areas of contestation throughout the essays in the volume is around the doctrine of atonement and the theological story of redemption in Christian traditions which emphasizes the self-sacrifice of Jesus of Nazareth. As Elizabeth Betenhausen writes,

“When the cross is also interpreted as the salvific work of an all-powerful paternal deity, women’s well-being is as secure as that of a child cowering before an abusive father. Theological revolution is made all the more urgent by the daily suffering that theological metaphors of redemptive violence only encourage. At the same time, a theological interpretation of suffering is essential....But how can we give meaning to suffering without sanctioning it?”³⁸

The question of attributing meaning to suffering haunts liberation theologies more generally, and I will return to this in a later chapter. For now, the general argument running throughout the essays in the volume is that the Christian tradition is undergirded by patriarchy, and insofar as this is the case, the Christian tradition likewise may be a supporter of domestic violence and abuse, even if unwittingly.

Therefore, Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, following Mary Daly, argue that “Christianity is an abusive theology that glorifies suffering.”³⁹ They go on to suggest that if God the Father demands the death of his own son, this is an image of “divine child abuse” that supports and

³⁶ Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 18. See also 39-40.

³⁷ Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn, eds., *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (New York, N.Y: Pilgrim Press, 1989), xv.

³⁸ Elizabeth Bentenhausen, “Foreword,” *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse*, xii.

³⁹ Brown and Parker, “For God So Loved the World?,” *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, 26.

perpetuates abuse in modern society. This critique of the atonement as sanctioning abuse becomes famously associated with feminist theology. Unlike Daly, however, Brown and Parker do not exit the Christian tradition altogether, but rather call for the tradition to jettison its doctrine of atonement, while retaining some of its more liberatory doctrines. “We do not need to be saved by Jesus’ death from some original sin. We need to be liberated from the oppression of racism, classism, and sexism, that is, from patriarchy.”⁴⁰ The authors squarely reject any redemptive attribution to suffering: “Suffering is never redemptive, and suffering cannot be redeemed.”⁴¹ On this account, Christian theology’s glorification of suffering is abusive, particularly to women. Other essays in the volume seek to reformulate Christian images and doctrines to be sensitive to women’s experiences of suffering and abuse under patriarchy.

At the same time, there is no feminist consensus, even at the time, around the extent to which suffering can play a role in women’s liberation. In particular, black feminist and womanist critiques of Daly’s emphasis on life and women’s becoming evidence this lack of consensus. Therefore, not only has Daly’s account been critiqued for proffering a transphobic theology, but a racist one as well. In 1979, Audre Lorde wrote a letter to Mary Daly, critiquing her for presenting a monolithic view of women’s oppression. Daly turns solely to “white, western European, Judeo-Christian” images of goddesses to fund her feminist theological vision, while the non-European women that do figure into Daly’s account are depicted “only as victims and preyers-upon each other.”⁴² As Lorde points out, black women are cited merely to support Daly’s critiques of African genital mutilation, such that black women’s lives are circumscribed within victimhood. This is a point that Jacquelyn Grant follows up on in her 1989, *White Woman’s Christ, Black Woman’s Jesus*.⁴³ It

⁴⁰ Brown and Parker, “For God So Loved the World?,” 27.

⁴¹ Brown and Parker, “For God So Loved the World?,” 21.

⁴² Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, Calif: Crossing Press, 2007), 67.

⁴³ Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, American Academy of Religion Academy Series, no. 64 (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1989).

is not only problematic that Daly's goddesses are based upon white images, but Daly furthermore subsumes racism and classism under patriarchy. For Grant, the effect of such subsumption is to cover over "the real substance of racial existence" in Daly's vision of redemptive community.⁴⁴

Furthermore, Grant develops a Christology that emphasizes the experience of black women, and does so with an emphasis on Jesus' identification with black women through his very suffering. While Grant does not directly discuss white feminist theologians' rejection of the atonement as supporting a kind of divine child abuse, one might recognize an implicit critique of such an account coming from a Grant. Like others in the black liberation tradition, such as James Cone and later M. Shawn Copeland, Grant emphasizes the importance of Jesus' death and resurrection.⁴⁵ According to Grant, Black people's primary experience of Jesus "was the belief in Jesus as the divine co-sufferer, who empowers them in situations of oppression....As Jesus was persecuted and made to suffer undeservedly, so were they."⁴⁶ For some in the black liberation tradition, a God who does not suffer, die, and rise again is a God who does not identify with the oppressed. A feminist account that jettisons the centrality of God's woundedness would, on Grant's account, misrecognize a white god as God.⁴⁷

On the other hand, womanist theologian Delores Williams has made a very different argument regarding the place of suffering in the Christian story of redemption. Williams's 1993 *Sisters in the Wilderness* addresses the atonement directly with explicit attention to black women's experience, famously critiquing atonement theories, including those of black liberation theologians,

See also Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*, 25th Anniversary Edition (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2019).

⁴⁴ Jacquelyn Grant, *White Woman's Christ, Black Woman's Jesus*, 172.

⁴⁵ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 20th anniversary ed (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1990); James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Paperback edition (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2013); M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Human Being* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2010).

⁴⁶ Jacquelyn Grant, *White Woman's Christ, Black Woman's Jesus*, 212.

⁴⁷ This is a point I will discuss further in later chapters.

for presenting an image of a “surrogate-God.”⁴⁸ The surrogate-God is a God who stands in for sinful humankind, taking sin upon himself on the cross. According to Williams, black women must ask if the surrogate-God image “supports and reinforces the exploitation that has accompanied [black women’s historical] experience with surrogacy.”⁴⁹ With this worry in mind, Williams turns from the cross to the wilderness to reimagine how Jesus conquers sin. Williams argues that Jesus conquers sin in life – that is, in his ministry, where he resisted evil and death. Jesus’ ministerial vision shows black women that God did not intend their surrogacy and rape, nor does God intend any kind of defilement of humans, nature, and cultures. Thus, for Williams, “Jesus did not come to be a surrogate. Jesus came for life, to show humans a perfect vision of ministerial relation that humans had very little knowledge of. As Christians, black women cannot forget the cross, but neither can they glorify it. To do so is to glorify suffering and to render their exploitation sacred.”⁵⁰ As such, Williams advocates for shifting away from the centrality of the cross in the Christian story. I will follow up on Williams work in a later chapter, but at this point, I want to note that there are certainly tensions among feminists and womanists regarding the role suffering should play in a theology that wants to take seriously the lived experiences of women.

Therefore, while I will return to some of the work around suffering, redemption, and atonement in chapters four and five especially, for now, I have provided some of the basic concerns that animated feminist and womanist theologians early on. The extent to which women can be freed from images of suffering and pain, and the extent to which particular understandings of God and woundedness are racially motivated remain pressing questions. But these questions extend further into debates around sex, gender, and violence more broadly in the late twentieth century in ways that

⁴⁸ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2013).

⁴⁹ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 143.

⁵⁰ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 148.

will continue to shape the aims of later feminist trauma theologies. The concerns raised by feminist and womanist theologians, in other words, were tied up with larger discourses and debates being waged within feminism more broadly at the time, a context worth exploring before moving specifically to trauma theologies.

The relationships between sex, gender, and violence were an area of great contention within feminism throughout the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in a period known as the feminist sex wars. Radical feminists like Mary Daly tended to use rape and patriarchy almost synonymously, at least in theory. Gender could not be pulled apart from sex in that women were defined by their vulnerability in relation to violence at the hands of men. Furthermore, Daly's was a transphobically motivated account: anyone assigned female at birth who would transition was merely a traitor under the spell of patriarchal desire, and any male at birth who would transition was disingenuous, according to Daly.

One can likewise see the strength of the association between rape, women, and patriarchy starkly in the work of legal feminist theorist, Catherine MacKinnon, whose writings in the 1980s purposely (and notoriously) use sex and gender interchangeably. Reading MacKinnon's early work, one gets the impression that patriarchy is all-encompassing and powerfully hegemonic in the structure of (hetero-)sexual relations. After all, she calls male dominance "nearly metaphysically perfect" – a system from which there is no escape for women, no outside, no tools to use except those given by patriarchy.⁵¹ MacKinnon criticizes "left" (socialist) feminism for ascribing to a theory of the state that renders it impotent and liberal feminism for ascribing to a theory of the state that renders it omnipotent. In other words, left feminism sees the state as unable and unwilling to

⁵¹ Catherine MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward a Feminist Jurisprudence," *Signs* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1983): 639. For MacKinnon, the socio-political sphere is determined and shaped by the male perspective, but that does not mean that men must literally all take up these positions of power. It would be more right to say that in MacKinnon's view, men *tend* to be, but are not necessarily, associated with the normative sexism of the state and its laws.

advance feminist political projects and liberal feminism sees the state as the one and only avenue in which to pursue a feminist political future. MacKinnon claims to offer a middle way: to reveal the normative sexism that structures the state and its laws so as to open possibilities for new relations between women's lives and the law. MacKinnon does so, however, while collapsing the distinction between sexuality/gender and violence.

This collapse is part of MacKinnon's point. The state only sees women from the perspective of men such that equality is only measured in terms of this (violent) male perspective. One can see the force of this collapse in MacKinnon's discussions of rape laws. MacKinnon questions the distinction between gender and sexuality by means of rape. According to her, defining rape as violence allows the law to affirm heterosexual sex (while rejecting violence). Yet, for many women, says MacKinnon, it is difficult to tell the difference between sex and rape. MacKinnon writes, "Perhaps the wrong of rape has proven so difficult to articulate because the unquestionable starting point has been that rape is definable as distinct from intercourse, when for women it is difficult to distinguish them under conditions of male dominance."⁵² For MacKinnon, even consent is structured by patriarchal hegemony. Rape benefits men both socially and sexually because women's constant fear of the threat of rape leads them to comply with sex even when they don't want it. In a dramatic statement typical of MacKinnon, she writes, "To be *rapable*, a position which is social, not biological, defines what a woman *is*."⁵³ For MacKinnon, gender is constituted by violent sexual relations such that good sex is inaccessible to women.

In 1995, another volume of essays was published that offers feminist theological discussions of sexual violence, *Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*.⁵⁴ The

⁵² MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State," 647.

⁵³ MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State," 651.

⁵⁴ Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune, eds., *Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

epigraph to the book is a quote from Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, and Herman is cited in various essays in the volume. Therefore, one can see trauma studies entering feminist theology at this time. Editors Carol J. Adams and Marie Fortune tell the story of the book's genesis in the preface as follows. Sexual and domestic violence began being included in pastoral education during the late 1970s, but it was not until women entered the clergy that the issues of battering, incest, rape, and sexual harassment were being recognized as major issues facing church congregations. The authors attribute the first Theological Education and Domestic Violence Conference, held in 1985 in San Antonio, to the growing awareness among clergypersons that there was a lack of sufficient seminary training around issues of sexual violence. The conference led to discussions at the American Academy of Religion in the 1990s, and the conversations and papers at both conferences led to the publication of the collection of essays.

In an analysis of the context of events that led to the publication of the book, the editors offer a justification for its publication: personal violence cannot be understood outside of gender analysis. In a description of women's experience reminiscent of MacKinnon, Adams and Fortune write, "This is the biggest difference between women's and men's experiences: for men, personal violence is episodic. It occurs occasionally to individuals....But as women, we live in harm's way: everyday, everywhere. There is no respite....Physical and sexual violence is the context of our lives."⁵⁵ Adams, a student of Mary Daly, continues this line of thinking in her essay in the volume incorporating MacKinnon's theory of the state into a political theology. For Adams, the erotic is oppressive – the space where sexual domination and violation gets enacted in women's relationships to men. Drawing upon the work of both Judith Herman and Catherine MacKinnon, Adams states that sexual violation within the structure of patriarchy means "there is no space in which to speak

⁵⁵ Adams and Fortune, *Violence against Women and Children*, 12.

it.”⁵⁶ As such, one of the major forms of redress Adams offers for feminist theology to pursue is to raise consciousness around women’s experience through speaking from women’s point of view.

This volume, like the one discussed earlier, continues to explore issues around feminism’s relationship to the Christian tradition and valorizations of suffering in doctrines of atonement. The volume expands to include, however, essays on the imbrications of colonialism, heterosexism, and racism with patriarchy.⁵⁷ But even, and perhaps especially, in these accounts of the violence of a colonialist, racist, capitalist, hetero-patriarchal system, one might get the impression that women turn out to be victimized and entirely unable to escape violent sexual relations. Further, the question of who occupies the site of ‘woman,’ even if gender is taken to be a social construction, is rarely broached.

At the same time, the question of women’s sexual freedom within patriarchy was contested within feminist theology just as it was more broadly in feminism during the 1970s and 1980s. Theories like MacKinnon’s were (and continue to be) controversial, especially in relation to the question of women’s sexual freedom.⁵⁸ During the “sex wars” of the 1980s, MacKinnon was clearly on the side of those feminists investing much of their political energy around the issues of rape and pornography. Feminists on this side saw sex as a dangerous and violent tool of patriarchy. On the other side, advocates of diverse and sometimes “deviant” forms of sexual pleasure worried that radical feminists were marginalizing and erasing queer forms of sex and desire. The 1982 “Scholar

⁵⁶ Carol J. Adams, “Toward a Feminist Theology of Religion and the State,” *Violence against Women and Children*, 27.

⁵⁷ See especially contributions by Karen Baker-Fletcher, Andy Smith, Stan McKay, and Emilie M. Townes.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Wendy Brown’s critiques of MacKinnon in Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Book, 1995). Wendy Brown called for a divestment from contemporary identities in “insistently unredeemable injury.” For Brown, the traumatic past “cannot be redeemed *unless* the identity ceases to be invested in it, and it cannot cease to be invested in without giving up its identity as such.” (Brown, *States of Injury*, 73). Insofar as particular identities become inextricable from woundedness, disinvestment in the wound requires a disinvestment in identities tied to injury.

and the Feminist” conference at Barnard College led to the publication of some of the papers presented in a volume called, *Pleasure and Danger*.⁵⁹ The volume explores the tension of, on the one hand, women’s sexual freedom and agency (pleasure), while on the other hand, facing the threat of sexual violence in patriarchal society (danger).

In her essay that would become foundational to gay and lesbian studies, Gayle Rubin seeks to disarticulate gender from sexuality, a turn away from her earlier work where she had coined the term “sex-gender system.”⁶⁰ For Rubin, what is needed is not a fusion of sex and gender, such that all sex is bad sex under patriarchy. “I want to challenge the assumption that feminism is or should be the privileged site of a theory of sexuality. Feminism is the theory of gender oppression. To automatically assume that this makes it the theory of sexual oppression is to fail to distinguish between gender, on the one hand, and erotic desire, on the other.”⁶¹ Just as gender is not natural or biological, neither is sexuality. For Rubin, sexual desire is shaped and constituted in the midst of historically particular social practices.⁶² While someone like Catherine MacKinnon would agree with Rubin that sexuality is as socially constructed as gender, MacKinnon, nevertheless frames gender within heterosexual relations and limits women’s sexual experiences to those that can only be harmful or painful under patriarchy. Rubin does not see such invariable alignments between one’s gender and one’s sexuality, for while sexuality is constituted within historically specific social

⁵⁹ Carole S. Vance, ed. *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, (Boston and London: Routledge, 1984).

⁶⁰ Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157–210.

⁶¹ Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 177–178.

⁶² “The body, the brain, the genitalia, and the capacity for language are all necessary for human sexuality. But they do not determine its content, its experiences, or its institutional forms. Moreover, we never encounter the body unmediated by the meanings that cultures give to it....Sexuality is as much a human product as are diets, methods of transportation, systems of etiquette, forms of labor, types of entertainment, processes of production, modes of oppression.” Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” 147.

practices and mediated by cultural meanings, sexuality is not limited to pain nor is the generation of new sexualities occluded even within this socio-cultural specificity.

Furthermore, theorizing sexuality as mobile within specific social and cultural conditions, for Rubin, opens up ethics toward thinking a democratic morality of sex. Such a democratic morality would be concerned with the question of how to change social practices and cultural meanings to allow for greater attention to the *quality* of sexual relationships rather than the *preferences* of sexual partners. Put another way, Rubin sees an anti-democratic force to political implications of eliding sexuality and gender. For example, when sexuality and gender are collapsed, feminist political energies have often been directed at individuals and minoritized groups (e.g. the rhetoric in the 1970s around protecting children from gay men) at the expense of solving the larger structural issues that create the conditions under which women experience violent sexual relations.⁶³ "A democratic morality should judge sexual acts by the way partners treat one another, the level of mutual consideration, the presence or absence of coercion, and the quantity and quality of the pleasures they provide. Whether sex acts are gay or straight, coupled or in groups, naked or in underwear,

⁶³ She describes five major ideological formations around conceptions of sex, each of which, in their own way, fail to see sex outside a heterosexual, marital relation as anything but dangerous. These five formations include: 1. Sex negativity, where sex is considered a dangerous, sinful force (here, she cites Pauline Christianity); 2. The fallacy of misplaced scale, where laws around sex institute the harshest punishments as if sex is the most heinous act; 3. Hierarchical value of sex acts, where married, reproductive heterosexuals are rewarded economically, socially, and culturally, whereas certain sex acts and sexual others are pathologized; 4. A domino theory of sexual peril, where anything crossing the line between sexual order and chaos leads directly to chaos; and 5. A single standard of sexuality with no concept for "benign sexual variation" (Rubin, "Thinking Sex," 168). Within these ideological formations, sexual minorities and queer forms of desire are denigrated and scapegoated, a scapegoating happening especially through feminist activism around rape and pornography, focused as it was almost exclusively on the dangers of sex. Rather than criticizing those institutions which imperil women's safety, such as education, employment, media, and the state, these feminists were directing their primary political energies at criticizing sexual minorities, contributing to a broader social climate of moral panic. "During a moral panic, fears attach to some unfortunate sexual activity or population. The media become ablaze with indignation, the public behaves like a rabid mob, the police are activated, and the state enacts new laws and regulations. When the furor has passed, some innocent erotic group has been decimated, and the state has extended its power into new areas of erotic behavior (Rubin, "Thinking Sex," 168).

commercial or free, with or without video should not be ethical concerns."⁶⁴ For Rubin, the focus of feminists' political energy needs to shift from rules and prohibitions to the quality of sexual relationships, regardless of one's gender or sexual preferences.

In the 1989 volume, *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, Beverly Harrison and Carter Heyward enter the debates around women's sexual freedom discussed in *Pleasure and Danger*, the volume in which Rubin's essay was first published. Harrison and Heyward, like Rubin, view sex negativity as a problem, and it is a problem made acute in Christianity where sex has often been associated with sin. The authors seek instead to affirm, with Audre Lorde, "eroticism as essential to our well-being" and "the source of creative personal power and, as such, essential to creativity."⁶⁵ For Harrison and Heyward, however, sexual relations are ambiguously and inevitably mixed with pain and pleasure. As they state, "That women now must seek sexual fulfillment in a context where 'pleasure and danger' are intertwined seems to us obvious."⁶⁶

On the one hand, they present a historical survey of the ways that the Christian tradition has valorized pain and suffering while eschewing erotic pleasure. Harrison and Heyward point out that Christian theology has been shaped by a *heterosexist* patriarchy embedded in racism and cultural imperialism. They explain that they are concerned to attend to how Christianity has often made pain the only vehicle through which pleasure can be experienced, simultaneously denigrating both social and sexual pleasure. While Harrison and Heyward want to maintain their commitment to the Christian tradition, they also seek to affirm "erotic pleasure as a source of moral good."⁶⁷ On the

⁶⁴ Rubin, "Thinking Sex," 154.

⁶⁵ Beverly W. Harrison and Carter Heyward, "Pain and Pleasure: Avoiding the Confusions of Christian Tradition in Feminist Theory," *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, 149. See also Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, Calif: Crossing Press, 2007).

⁶⁶ Harrison and Heyward, "Pain and Pleasure," 150.

⁶⁷ Beverly W. Harrison and Carter Heyward, "Pain and Pleasure: Avoiding the Confusions of Christian Tradition in Feminist Theory," *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, 151. For the authors, the most exemplary instance of Christian sadomasochism is Anselm of Canterbury's doctrine of atonement, which focuses on the "punitive character" of Jesus' crucifixion.

other hand, Harrison and Heyward question certain assumptions within feminisms at that time around women's sexual agency, ones that they see tied to liberal enlightenment theological and philosophical views. They write,

Feminists too have been schooled by life as well as books in a highly individualized and possessive understanding of personal power: an ability to generate action, a capacity to effect. Our power, we see clearly, includes our feelings which can serve to catapult us into commitment or action. We must not forget that in the West (especially in the United States), our senses of personal power (including our feelings), our sexualities (how we use this power), and our eroticism (our specifically *sexual* feelings) *always* are mediated to a degree by these deities of individualism and possession. A feminist reconstruction of sexual theory must acknowledge that the continuing confusion between pain and pleasure that besets patriarchal Christianity cannot be disentangled without also challenging the bias that personal pleasure consists primarily in the realization of independence.⁶⁸

For these authors, sex stands as a potential site of transcendence where agency, at least conceived as independence and freedom from possession, is challenged. I take it that Heyward and Harrison do not intend to solve the issue of how pain and pleasure structure sexual relations – for them, both pain and pleasure are inevitable. However, these relations need not be fully and inherently violent, for sex and desire can lead to a kind of transcendent experience beyond alienated relations.

Furthermore, Heyward and Harrison illuminate the ways in which sexuality becomes managed and governed by particular assumptions around subjectivity, such as whether pleasure must align with independence or sexuality with personal possession or preference. In so doing, they provide a helpful precedent for turning to one's theory of subjectivity when adjudicating the most promising avenues for addressing sexual ethics. This is a precedent that, in part, I will take up in the constructive work to come in this dissertation.

At the same time, part of my intention in rehearsing some of the history thus far has been to illuminate the tensions and conflicts that arise around theorizations of the relations between sex, gender, and violence during the period in which trauma begins to make its way into theology. By in

⁶⁸ Beverly Harrison and Carter Heyward, "Pain and Pleasure," 162.

large, feminist theologians view patriarchy as either the cause or the accomplice to the traumas commonly experienced by women. But more than that, patriarchy's traumas inescapably structure women's experience of sex such that women, in certain conceptions, become attached to woundedness and victimization in ways that potentially marginalize those sexual 'others' that fall outside these gendered sexual dichotomies. Not only is this the case for black women, but for queer and trans people as well. The relationship between pain and pleasure, desire and violence, and its implications for women remains a site of contestation. For feminist theologians, this problem continues to arise most acutely around theories of atonement, grace, suffering, and sin. My next task will be to show how these tensions likewise arise among theologians who begin engaging substantially with trauma theory in the early twenty-first century.

Feminist Trauma Theologies and the Politics of Wounds

In the introduction to *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, Serene Jones describes the circumstances that led her to write the essays contained in the volume.⁶⁹ These circumstances, in many ways, reflect those described by the feminist theological volumes on sexual violence discussed earlier. Jones attributes her discovery of trauma studies to her own personal and pastoral encounters with people who had experienced overwhelming violence. She cites several scenes of encounter: a sweatshop in South Korea, a domestic violence center in Connecticut, her own university office. In 1992 amidst these encounters, a friend offered her a book on trauma theory. Years later, Jones began working on trauma, writing essays over the span of a decade, that were finally collected and

⁶⁹ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

published in 2009. A cohort of theologians publishing on trauma also emerged around this time, including two of Jones's doctoral students.⁷⁰

As should be clear by now, feminist advocacy around sexual violence became a site in which feminist theology and trauma studies begin to converge. As I have noted, these theologies arose due to a pastoral impulse to be sufficiently prepared to support congregants with histories of abuse. Serene Jones's story of how she became interested in trauma studies affirms this point. Beyond that, there is also a methodological and theoretical resonance between certain feminist political projects around sexual violence and feminist theology. It is here that the Freudian framework with which I began this chapter will come more clearly into view.

The kinds of politics amplified by feminist accounts of sexual agency under patriarchy tend to parallel American ego psychology's post-Freudian account of the subject and her therapeutic recovery. In addition, this account strikes a chord with the trajectories of feminist theology more broadly. This comes as little surprise since it is Freud's scene of seduction, actual experiences of sexual abuse and rape, around which much feminist activism was congealing in the late twentieth century. Recall Freud's early view of trauma: a traumatic experience is an event in the past that overwhelms and rearranges a victim's psychical economy in the present. Traumatic symptoms occur because the memories and affects built up around the event of trauma do not disappear. These

⁷⁰ Two of Jones's students, Jennifer Erin Beste and Cynthia Hess, wrote dissertations engaging with trauma theory. As Beste acknowledges, for example, a two-year reading course on trauma and theology with Serene Jones shaped what was to become her 2007 book, *God and the Victim: Traumatic Intrusions on Grace and Freedom*. In addition, Beste acknowledges Hess and Shelly Rambo as two friends who discussed and wrestled with her around the issues of trauma and theology. All of the authors cite stories of encountering persons or communities who were traumatized, some tell these stories of encounter in the opening chapters of the books. Beste opens her book by describing her time as a mental health care intern while an MDiv student, meeting many sexually abused children. Serene Jones describes a church member she mentored who had been sexually abused as a child and who spoke to her about the traumatic effects of the abuse. See Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009) and Jennifer Erin Beste, *God and the Victim: Traumatic Intrusions on Grace and Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

energies attached to the now suppressed traumatic memory will intrude repeatedly upon the patient. However, if the patient can release the energy by talking through the traumatic event in detail along with its accompanying affects, the symptoms will disappear, now integrated into normal consciousness. American ego psychologists take up Freud's view that making conscious what was once unconscious restores control to the patient. That is, whereas the patient once had an impoverished ego, which was the seat of agency and control for Freud, and the patient repetitively act out repressed memories against their will, the patient's ego can now be replenished and function normally.⁷¹

There is a kind of linear redemptive temporality to this framework, one that at times gets taken up into feminist-leaning theological accounts around trauma. By redemptive temporality, I simply mean that in talking about a trauma, one saves what was once lost (a traumatic memory and one's agency and control along with it) such that one can function normally again in life. A traumatic event that happened in the past can be remembered and brought to light, such that the one once burdened by the past can move forward, more in control of themselves and able to decide how their future will look. The Christian story and the church community, in certain accounts, become the vehicle for such moving forward.

When integrated into theological accounts, at least two potential problems arise. First, while many theologians of trauma share feminist sensibilities, gender and sexuality are rarely theorized in these works. Whereas relations among sex, gender, and violence were areas of contention in feminist theological work of the eighties, the question of the relationship between gender and sex largely drops out in the trauma theologies that arise at the turn of the century. Sexual abuse and rape are taken to be definitive cases of trauma for women, and the framework for recovery coming from the Freudian scene of sexual abuse that makes its way into the work of Judith Herman and others is

⁷¹ Jacques Lacan provides an alternative understanding of Freud, as the next chapter will show.

taken in as the paradigmatic theory of trauma theologies. Identities become attached to trauma and victimization in ways that not only limit the ability to attend to multifaceted interactions among race, gender, sexuality, and class, but also struggle to recognize the ways that subjects, even those who have experienced grave harm, are at minimum making life in harm's midst. Second and relatedly, then, lacking such recognition, ethical approaches to trauma when taken up in broader socio-political discourse can be undergirded by the redemptive temporality that shoehorns those who have experienced trauma into victims that need to be saved. This becomes particularly problematic insofar as this victimhood likewise has become sutured to the figure of woman, further implying then that all women need saving. Such a view shares somewhat strange parallels with patriarchal theological logics that have associated women with sin and evil, for in such a case, women need saving as well. Therefore, when I advocate for shifting away from trauma-centric approaches in considering instances of structural harm in the latter half of this project, such shifting will include a movement away from this kind of identity-centric approach (especially where women represent the traumatized victim) to redemption.

In theological accounts, the kind of redemptive approach and its implications for subjectivity and victimhood described above show up in the work of Serene Jones and one of her students, Jennifer Erin Beste. While neither necessarily explicitly associate women with victimhood, the paradigmatic survivors of trauma these authors discuss are presumably women – women survivors of incest, domestic violence, and sexual violence. Furthermore, both Beste and Jones present views of freedom and grace in relation to trauma in ways that tend to support the notion of the subject that has undergirded the Freudian framework traced in this chapter thus far.

The central questions of Serene Jones's *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* revolve around the ability to know God's redeeming grace in spite of or in the midst of overwhelming

violence.⁷² For Jones, trauma can cause cognitive and psychic breakdown such that victims struggle to experience the healing power of God's grace. The result is the loss of the self as agent, the inability to make meaning, and the loss of the capacity to imagine a future. This leaves subjects of trauma unable to accept grace and wholeness, without the proper help of a witness. Jones suggests that, in light of trauma, the subject needs to be reimagined as "the nonagential, hopeless, fragmenting, death-carrying self,"⁷³ and while this shattered view of subjectivity seems to recede in some of Jones's other essays, the view of subjectivity presented is either this nonagential and fragmented one, or the nonagential and broken one that can be healed. For Jones, the church community, by acting as a witness, can be a part of reordering the imagination of people broken by violence. In a safe space, as stories of trauma are told, a new story can come to the fore and restore agency and hope to those affected by violence. She argues that viewing God as sovereign, even in the midst of overwhelming violence, can provide a sense of safety for the survivor and restore her agency and control. Through bringing memories of trauma to the surface, giving language to that which seems unspeakable, and mourning them, one can reintegrate into daily life. Violence does not have the power to completely overwhelm one, for grace always accompanies the power of sin.

In *God and Victim: Traumatic Intrusions on Grace and Freedom*, Jennifer Erin Beste similarly centers her work around questions of freedom and grace in ways that follow the redemptive temporality and accompanying view of subjectivity described above.⁷⁴ Beste attempts to reconcile two seemingly incongruous positions: while Karl Rahner, following others in the Catholic tradition, contends that God's grace enables every person full self-determination to say yes or no to God's offer of communion, psychological research suggests that some people may be so severely

⁷² Jones, *Trauma and Grace*.

⁷³ Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 143.

⁷⁴ Jennifer Erin Beste, *God and the Victim: Traumatic Intrusions on Grace and Freedom*, AAR Academy Series (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

traumatized that their freedom for self-determination is completely incapacitated. Focusing on the experience of survivors of incest, there are two ways in which Beste argues that Rahner's theology of freedom and grace should be emended. First, his theology must take seriously the possibility that interpersonal harm may devastate a person's freedom for self-determination, sometimes entirely. Second, his theology must recognize that God mediates grace indirectly through interpersonal, supportive relationships in order to remedy interpersonal harm. Beste tends to view the subject of trauma as fully constituted before the event but incapacitated after the event of trauma. For Beste, trauma affects a person's self-awareness, self-coherence, and self-continuity and results in an impaired ability to develop autonomy, establish boundaries with others, and reflect on one's actions. But this awareness, coherence, continuity, and agency is not irrecoverable. Like the solution provided by Jones, Beste argues that one's agency and autonomy can be revitalized through participation in a loving and affirming church community.

Both Jones's and Beste's accounts of freedom, grace, and subjectivity align quite well the early Freudian understanding of trauma based on the theory of sexual abuse. On this account the subject is understood to be fully constituted, even if that experience of subjectivity is lost due to the traumatic experience. That is, the subject of trauma is able to recover the feeling of control and the ability to make choices in life after the traumatic event. While the survivor may have been aloof during the experience of trauma, as if a spectator to the event, the survivor is nevertheless able to see and represent the traumatic scene to herself and to others. As such, the survivor's testimony is fully reliable, since the traumatic event is understood to have happened and be accessible to the survivor. Testimony and witness remain important, however, for moving on from the trauma: if the victim is able to give voice to the event in the company of witnesses, the survivor can experience recovery.

This view of trauma also gets amplified to the level of the social in trauma theologies, especially those that consider themselves explicitly feminist. Much feminist theology at this time shares with this particular framework in trauma studies a view that bringing to light hidden wounds leads to sufficient redress. In the case of feminist theology, patriarchal oppression must be uncovered because it is otherwise masked by a hegemonic tradition of Christian theology. In the case of trauma studies, bringing to light repressed memories leads to reintegration into normal psychic life. Both work on trauma and feminist theology aim, then, to uncover hidden suffering in service of its reprieve. Bringing to light suffering is meant to allow one to integrate into normal political and social life.

This view can be further seen in Flora Keshgegian's, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation*, published in 2000.⁷⁵ The book is based partially upon Keshgegian's 1992 dissertation, which centered around childhood sexual abuse and memory. In the 2000 book, Keshgegian discusses several additional cases of trauma, including war and genocide. For Keshgegian, oppression works through repressing certain memories and authorizing others, and, in that, oppression works much like trauma. Keshgegian urges a turn to Christian community and practice to remember what has been ignored.

Keshgegian argues that powers and institutions seek to deny violence, such that victims of trauma are silenced and the truths of their experiences purposively ignored. As such, Keshgegian argues that the Christian community must enact a practice of redeeming memory. That is, the community must recall the memories of suffering and loss threatened by erasure, reclaim times of resilience and agency within victimization, and incorporate stories of resistance into a larger narrative of wholeness not defined by suffering. Witness is an ethical imperative and requires not only

⁷⁵ Flora A. Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

listening to stories of those who have experienced domination, but also includes working to change the situations of power which created victimization. Hearing, remembering, and witnessing to silenced and denied stories therefore leads to redemption—for Keshgegian it is liberative work that leads to a new and different future.

The theologies discussed thus far therefore draw upon the framework of trauma where trauma destroys one's abilities and capacities to act in the world. The goal of recovery is to restore these lost abilities and capacities by restoring repressed memories, and communal witness is the space for that recovery. This view easily attaches to feminist theology. One of the primary desires of much feminist trauma theology is recognition – recognition of suffering, of the truth of experience, and of the patriarchal forces which prevent women from living fully flourishing lives. Furthermore, trauma is understood to extend to various forms of harm against women, and the aim of writing trauma theologies is to unearth those harms in an effort to bring healing to the women traumatized.

Shelly Rambo has very recently affirmed these parallel aims and investments of feminist and trauma theologies. Rambo writes,

Feminist theologians empowered me to speak my truth. They offered me routes for proclamation. Theories of trauma assured me that what is unspoken will, nonetheless, be registered. Trauma surfaced the testimonial function of theology; while everything on the surface of things appears to be OK, trauma theories track the undertow of traditions and their impact on those who are afforded less representation. Analysis of trauma offers a way of accounting for the unstated and invisible forces that continue to diminish women, even as our traditions afford us greater access to positions of leadership.⁷⁶

And this is no wonder, for feminist theology has had a long tradition of unveiling patriarchal symbols, doctrines, language, and practices within the Christian tradition. Valerie Saiving Goldstein's inaugural 1960 article critiques Anders Nygren and Reinhold Niebuhr "from the viewpoint of

⁷⁶ Shelly Rambo, "Foreword," *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture and Church in Critical Perspective* ed. Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross, (London: SCM Press, 2020), ii.

feminine experience.”⁷⁷ Judith Plaskow’s 1975 dissertation at Yale drew upon women’s experience to critique the prevailing theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich.⁷⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether’s 1983, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, uncovers patriarchy in the Christian theological tradition and, following Plaskow, draws upon women’s experience to develop a feminist theology that “promot[es] the full humanity of women.”⁷⁹ And in 1989, Rebecca S. Chopp published, *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, and God*, arguing that patriarchy had denied women the access to speech about God and seeking to offer instead “discourses of emancipatory transformation that proclaim the Word to and for the world” through feminist theology.⁸⁰

While more examples could be given, the precedent of seeking women’s emancipation through uncovering patriarchy in the Christian tradition and testifying to women’s experience has been significant within feminist theology. Theology’s truth-telling genres of testimony and proclamation align with what some think facilitates trauma’s healing – bringing traumatic wounds to light – just as feminist theology commits to justice for women by bringing to light oppressive patriarchal structures. One assumption underlying both versions of these accounts is that experience, and particularly the experience of the one considered the victim, is the source of truth. So long as the victim can testify to the truth of her experience and be recognized, justice may prevail. However, even as the testimony genre is considered germane to the facilitation of justice on the levels of the social and political, tensions remain within the feminist theological literature around sexual violence especially as it comes to be conceived more within the framework of trauma theory.

⁷⁷ Valerie Saiving Goldstein, “The Human Situation: A Feminine View,” *The Journal of Religion* 40 no. 2 (April 1960): 100-112.

⁷⁸ Judith Plaskow, “Sex, Sin, and Grace: Women’s Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich,” PhD diss., (Yale University, 1975).

⁷⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology: With a New Introduction*, 10th anniversary ed (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 19.

⁸⁰ Rebecca S Chopp, *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 3.

As has already been noted, even as bringing to light the wounds and traumas of patriarchy remains a significant attachment of feminist theology, the extent to which such bringing to light within a tradition that lifts up death and suffering as means to life and salvation can accord with a feminist project remains a question. For some, only life, becoming, and pleasure are central to the Christian story, but, for others, a God who does not suffer is based upon a theological imagination undergirded by whiteness. Still others might say that to be concerned only about patriarchy's violences would be to overlook the heterosexism that forecloses the agency and pleasure of queer subjects, or that the relationship between patriarchy and gendered subjectivity gets conceived in ways that are undergirded by transphobia and white supremacy. I will return to all of these issues in the chapters to come, as they will, in part, motivate the concepts of 'quotidian crises' and 'resurgent grace' I will develop in chapters three, four, and five.

For now, what I have hoped to show is that as trauma makes its way into theology, it comes through a feminist tradition and a Freudian framework that accords well with a redemptive theological approach. While this redemptive approach might be congruous with the concept of trauma coming from the early Freud and Herman, it carries with it a number of contestations around gender, sexuality, race and accompanying conceptions of agency, recovery, and subjectivity. In the next chapter, I will elucidate a different understanding of trauma than the one detailed in this chapter.

The notion of trauma to be described in the next chapter, which makes its way into theology primarily through the work of Shelly Rambo as I will show, illuminates how the notion of trauma elucidated in this chapter can overlook the way that certain traumas may never be overcome. For the thinkers to be discussed in the next chapter, trauma is, by definition, a suffering that remains. Because of this, a redemptive account, like the one associated with the notion of trauma in this chapter, has a tendency to erase traumas, as it is premised upon a progressive and optimistic hope.

Joseph Winters has criticized this kind of hope as being tied to a logic of American exceptionalism and supremacy, calling instead for a melancholic hope that recognizes the trauma of race and nation-building in the American present.⁸¹ In other words, American national discourse displays a kind of affinity to the redemptive approach described in this chapter. In this case, trauma is a loss which can be known and overcome in a way that strengthens the future of the citizen-subject and the nation.⁸² At the collective level, a sovereign plays the role of the therapist/Christ figure that offers healing for the nation to move into a brighter future.

Shelly Rambo's theological work has attended to the ways in which redemptive stories, like that of American exceptionalism, can border on a triumphalism that erases the ways in which trauma returns and remains. For example, she has illuminated a tendency in Christian theology to read traditional accounts of redemption, like John Calvin's reading of the post-resurrection account of

⁸¹ "According to this alternative logic, national exceptionalism, America's supremacy, and the American difference are ideals and strategies that justify and render acceptable the erasure and suppression of the nation's internal and external others. I have suggested in this chapter that the strong, triumphant sense of the postracial either minimizes the trauma of race and nation-building or displaces this trauma. This process allows us, for instance, to accuse other nations and communities of being cruel and violent while Americans are imagined as tolerant and free, a distinction that contributes to the general consent to American empire...A better, more melancholic hope entails a difficult willingness to allow the traumas of nation-building and racial difference to unsettle and interrupt our sense of stability, achievement, and the coherence of self and collective identity" (Joseph Winters, *Hope Draped in Black*, 235).

⁸² Consider Joe Biden's bid for Presidency during a time of mass grief, confusion, and loss. Several journalists have attributed Biden's rise to the presidency in part to his reputation and skill at leading people through loss and crisis. He's been dubbed "The Designated Mourner" by the New York Review, "[The] Emissary of Grief" by the New York Times, and "America's Grief Counselor" by Time Magazine. When one listens to Biden's eulogies – of which there are countless – one will note a certain repeated pattern: for one, Biden recognizes and affirms the grief and pain of the family, often with an empathetic nod to his own grief around the loss of his family members. And, two, Biden will offer a promissory statement about how, over time, the elegiac memories one holds will hopefully turn into fond memories accompanied by a smile. President Biden might be the embodiment of the compassionate therapist witness – the sovereign bringing a nation through her loss and on to recovery through a recognition of the pain but with an attendant hope for some relief in the future.

Jesus, in ways that elide trauma.⁸³ Her work, however, is based largely upon a different framework of trauma than the one delineated in this chapter, particularly a framework that comes from the literary theory of Cathy Caruth. This understanding of trauma is different from the one proffered by the work of the early Freud and scholars like Judith Herman, for Caruth is inspired by the work of the later Freud along with deconstructive literary theory and memory studies. That is, as trauma theory becomes more developed in the 1990s, particularly in literary and cultural studies, the assumption that trauma could be fully overcome and the assumption of the fully constituted patient-subject gets thrown into question. Trauma on these accounts is viewed as a relentless, open wound at the core of subjectivity that cannot be fully healed. In the next chapter, I will trace this understanding of trauma to Freud's later work and to readings of Freud that come through the work of Jacques Lacan, psychoanalytic feminisms, and literary theory. I will tell this story in the chapter that follows.

⁸³ Rambo looks to John Calvin's reading of the Johannian account of the upper room as an example of the traditional redemptive account and extends the implications of this traditional interpretation by exposing the drive to cover over wounds underlying understandings of both racism and war in the United States. Rambo transforms these dominant narratives by re-reading the Upper Room story as one of healing in after-living. Witnessing is less about seeing and believing than it is about remaining with trauma; the witness is attuned to how resurrecting happens in the ongoingness of death.

Chapter 2

Witnessing Irreducible Phenomena: Trauma and Lack

Something 'falls' into the psyche, or causes it to 'split.' There is an original inner catastrophe whereby/ in which an experience that is not experienced (and so, apparently, not 'real') has an exceptional presence – is inscribed with a force proportional to the mediations punctured or evaded.¹

The challenge to theology, then, is to account for what exceeds death yet cannot be interpreted as new life. The challenge is to account for what remains--to provide a discourse of remaining that can speak to life in the aftermath and to the shattering of familiar frameworks by which persons and communities have oriented themselves in the world.²

In the previous chapter, I told a story about the confluence of trauma, feminism, and theology that centered around largely Anglo-American uptakes of Freud. However, I will tell a different story in this chapter, one that centers around a figure who saw himself to be the orthodox interpreter of Freud: Jacques Lacan. Lacan's work became central to continental philosophy in the mid-twentieth century (his lectures in Paris drew the likes of Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze, Luce Irigaray, Michel Foucault, and Jean Hyppolite) and Lacan saw his interpretations of Freud in opposition to that of American ego psychologists'. In this chapter, I will trace a framework of trauma that stems from this Lacanian interpretation of Freud.

In this framework, a theory of the subject comes into view that is strikingly different from ones put forward in the previous chapter, and one in which trauma plays a distinct role. In the last chapter, I described a view where trauma can be traced to an exogenous precipitating factor, one that is shut off from the victim's system at the time of its occurrence but the memory of which can be recovered. In this chapter, I trace a second conceptual history of trauma, where trauma is unrelenting yet unrepresentable. On this account, trauma is an encounter with an endogenous and

¹ Geoffrey Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," *New Literary History* 26, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 537.

² Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 8.

unavoidable lack around which subjectivity is constructed. Trauma, in this case, takes on an almost transcendent status, like the unfathomable and unknowable God.³ Moreover, trauma brings one up against the limits of oneself, revealing that the wholly constituted subject, master of himself and his thoughts, is a ruse that placates the shattering experience of one's entrance into the symbolic field of language. Trauma cannot be expressed concretely, for trauma arrests the survivor in ways that throw into question a linear understanding of history and progress.⁴ Attempts to bring this shattering experience to representation through language can only fail to mend the undone subject. As such, thinkers following this framework of trauma would be critical of the theory of trauma presented in the previous chapter, for no redemption or recovery of what was lost can take place.

Thus, if in the previous chapter traumatic events were to be brought to light in order for recovery occur, in this chapter, trauma theorists argue that representing such horrendous experience is impossible, and for some, even ethically reprehensible. Ascribing meaning to gross injustice does further harm to the one broken by such unimaginable horror. And yet, trauma places an ethical demand upon us to witness to the testimony of the survivor. For one of the founding trauma theorists, Cathy Caruth, the wound of trauma which cries out to us may defy understanding, but it nevertheless "demands our witness."⁵ This witness allows for us to see how we are "implicated in each other's traumas," opening up the possibility of a transhistorical and transcultural ethics.⁶ Put another way, such witness reveals to us the lack at the very foundation of all of our subjectivity and enacts an ethical mode of relation that can transcend history and culture.

³ For a longer account of how trauma is akin to certain conceptions of God, see Dominick La Capra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

⁴ See Shoshana Felman's discussion of the "expressionless" in Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002), especially p. 13-14; 163-164.

⁵ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 5.

⁶ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 24.

This framework also makes its way into theology, despite the centrality of redemption to the Christian narrative. For example, as I will discuss at the end of this chapter, theologians such as Shelly Rambo have drawn upon the concept of trauma described above, where trauma is an open wound that resists redemptive healing. Even so, Rambo sees theology as “a healing discourse, a discourse that seeks to transform lived realities,”⁷ and, as Serene Jones has stated in her work on trauma, “The balmlike work of theology and of religion is to uncover and mend such [traumatic] wounds.”⁸ The view of trauma above, however, seems to disallow for the very work of theology Jones names. Therefore, trauma theologians have tried to reformulate Christian doctrines, and especially redemption, so as to be more amenable to the challenges of trauma.

While this framework avoids some of the risks of the redemptive one discussed in the previous chapter – namely, an over-confident political optimism and triumphalism, it nevertheless risks flattening out the historical specificity of traumas and the ways in which loss is variously experienced and distributed under particular social and institutional conditions. Since, in this framework, trauma is universalized yet unknowable and irrecoverable, one risks a political quietism when applying this framework to instances of structural harm. Mary Rubenstein has described this political quietism as one of three risks that come with ascribing to this view of trauma, risks that I will discuss as this chapter develops.⁹ Another risk, according to Rubenstein, is the “evicerat[ion] of the political” insofar as trauma gets configured to “the global condition of being as such.”¹⁰ When trauma conditions ontology, it is not clear how things could be otherwise than they are, and, as

⁷ Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 9.

⁸ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 1.

⁹ Mary Jane Rubenstein, “Afterward,” in *Trauma and Transcendence: Suffering and the Limits of Theory*, ed. Eric Boynton and Peter Capretto (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2018). This critique has been raised by many scholars working within trauma theory. See also, for example, Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds* (Basingstoke New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

¹⁰ Rubenstein, “Afterward,” 286.

Rubenstein avers, “even if [things] could [be otherwise than they are], we are too (de)constituted by trauma to envision a concrete alternative.”¹¹ Finally, Rubenstein points to the flattening effect this view of trauma can have on the specificity of harm’s unequal distributions. According to Rubenstein, because “we do not share the burden of trauma equally,” for various traumas are more likely to affect certain people along lines of race, class, sexuality, and ability, “we must find a way to think—and think clearly” while not reducing trauma to the strictly thinkable.¹² What marks trauma, at least in the framework to be detailed in this chapter, is precisely its non-integrateability and breach with normalcy, such that to render traumas fully calculable and understandable would do an injustice to trauma as such. Yet, to refuse to provide *any* understanding of trauma at all very quickly throws the possibility of ethics into question (if one cannot know what happened, how can one even begin to imagine a way to address it?).

The tension between the excessiveness of trauma and the need for a kind of thinkability in order to make political and ethical action possible is part of what will lead me, in the next chapter, to offer a different framework for understanding structural harms. Thus, the tension Rubenstein points to is well taken, and it might mean that, at least in certain cases, trauma frameworks cannot in and of themselves provide the necessary tools for the sort of nonreductive historicizing that would motivate the political and ethical action to which Rubenstein gestures.

Furthermore, as in the previous chapter, I am interested in attending to the dynamics of gender and sexuality in tracing this notion of trauma, especially as they relate to the risks just described. Therefore, in this chapter, I examine the ways that trauma theory’s conceptions of lack intersect with theorizations of gender and sexuality that stem from the work of Freud and Lacan. For example, Lacan puts his theory of subjectivity, which is structured around a traumatic

¹¹ Rubenstein, “Afterward,” 286.

¹² Rubenstein, “Afterward,” 286.

confrontation with lack, in terms of masculine and feminine positions. Similarly, theorists after Lacan conceive of compulsory forms of gender and sexuality in relation to this lack, such that lack potentially becomes sutured to concepts of gender (as I will detail, women, in this configuration, lack what men have). But, as feminists after Lacan have also argued, when gender is tied to lack, women come to bear the symbolic weight of loss in ways that potentially stifle women's political possibilities.

Therefore, trying to understand women's historical losses in terms of an abstracted foundational lack risks, on one end, flattening out losses that disproportionately affect women or, on the other end, in trying to avoid such flattening, reifying the category of 'women' itself. At the end of the chapter, I will show that this same tension has been recognized within theologies that draw upon the framework of trauma traced in this chapter. Yet, these theologies continue to risk conflating an abstract notion of lack with historical losses in ways that perpetuate the very risks just named.

Once I have the framework from this chapter on board, along with the one from the previous chapter, I will argue in the next chapter that neither framework does the conceptual work needed to fully confront the kinds of losses produced through domination – the kinds of domination disproportionately enacted along various racial, gender, sexual, and economic lines. I wager that the apparatus that accompanies the two trauma frameworks I am tracing, and especially their assumptions around subjectivity, may get in the way of holding together some of what trauma theory has revealed: the limits of human knowledge and action yet, at the same time, the necessity of confronting harm and even terrible loss. Such holding together may require a shift away from the trauma concepts, for they carry with them certain risks that might inhibit recognizing human epistemic limits in ways that nevertheless allow for appropriate action in response to structural harm. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will offer an alternative framework that has not yet made its way into the theological literature, a framework I will call 'quotidian crises.'

Trauma as Disaster

In the next section, I will delineate the theory of trauma as a lack that structures human subjectivity, coming from Lacan, with particular attention to theories of gender and sexuality. However, before doing so, it will be helpful to provide some basic background on the philosophical work that came to shape this version of trauma theory. An interdisciplinary field known as ‘trauma theory’ began developing in the early 1990s, with thinkers such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, and Geoffrey Hartman at the helm. It is not only the work of Freud and Lacan that shaped these accounts, but, in addition, the horrors of the early twentieth century. These accounts generally reject ‘redemptive’ responses to trauma, opting instead, as mentioned above, for an ethical response of witness to an unknowable phenomenon.

It was the profound implications of the Holocaust that catalyzed a reevaluation of human understanding and knowledge, as exemplified by Theodore Adorno's reflections on the aftermath of Auschwitz. The absolute horror of the Nazi extermination camps threw into crisis previous understandings of the depths of human evil and the limits of human knowledge. In light of this, Adorno stated that after Auschwitz, “metaphysics must measure itself against the ultimate, the absolutely unthinkable [Auschwitz], to have any right to be thinking at all.”¹³ For Adorno, the atrocities of WWII reveal that life is built upon the loss of others, and one cannot make meaning of such losses. In fact, Auschwitz demands the contradictory recognition of the limit of human knowledge.¹⁴ This turn to what is unknowable, what is excessive, what survives, or what cannot be accounted for is part of what has occupied post-war European philosophy.

¹³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concepts and Problems*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 115.

¹⁴ “The affirmative character which metaphysics has in Aristotle, and which it first took on in Plato’s teaching, has become impossible. To assert that existence or being has a positive meaning constituted within itself and orientated towards the divine principle (if one is to put it like that),

Take, for example, Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster*, where he discusses the impossibility of thinking disaster. "To think the disaster (if this is possible, and it is not possible inasmuch as we suspect that the disaster is thought) is to have no longer any future in which to think it."¹⁵ As Blanchot intimates, disaster cannot be thought because there would not be a future in which to think it. In other words, constitutive of disaster is the destruction of the possibility of the future, for it is always already past, yet never arrives. Some suffering has withdrawn from knowing and stands outside of one's grasp, and while it cannot be forgotten, it also exposes the limits of our being able to grasp it.

But this refusal to epistemically master catastrophic loss presumably does not evacuate ethics. For Blanchot and others in this post-WWII tradition, the death of the other places a radical demand upon one to witness to the loss, something that would be an impossible ethics, for one must witness to a loss that one could never understand.¹⁶ That is, the events of disaster must be spoken and remembered so that they are not repeated, and, at the same time, because the atrocities are unknowable, the idolatry of representation must be resisted by remaining silent. The disaster of writing is therefore, for Blanchot, the impasse between silence and speech, forgetting and memory. Blanchot resists both making victims martyrs and any attempt to make meaning out of their death. One might say that there is a refusal to underwrite any kind of redemption of loss – if redemption, in this case, requires a loss to be knowable so as to repay or make up for it.

would be, like all the principles of truth, beauty and goodness which philosophers have concocted, a pure mockery in face of the victims and the infinitude of their torment." Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 102.

¹⁵ Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, ed. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 1.

¹⁶ "It is through the other that I am the same, through the other that I am myself: it is through the other who has always withdrawn from me myself. The Other, if he calls upon me, calls upon someone who is not I: the first come or the least of men; by no means the unique being I would like to be. It is thus that he assigns me to passivity, addressing himself in me to dying itself. (The responsibility with which I am charged is not mine and causes me not to be I)." Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of The Disaster*, 18.

The rejection of the redemptive framework is further emphasized in Lawrence Langer's work on the Nazi genocide. Defining the titular phrase of his book, *Preempting the Holocaust*, he writes,

When I speak of preempting the Holocaust, I mean using...its grim details to fortify a prior commitment to an ideal of moral reality, community responsibility, or religious belief that leaves us with space to retain faith in their pristine value in a post-Holocaust world. Although I find this strategy both misleading and presumptuous, I have no corrective vision of my own to provide, other than the opinion that the Holocaust experience challenged the redemptive value of all moral, community, and religious systems of belief.¹⁷

Langer rejects making any kind of instrumental use of horrors, arguing that one should not discuss the Nazi genocide as if it is a treatable trauma. It is not as if telling the narrative of a past loss can all the sudden liberate someone from horrible memories; and in any case, many do not want to forget, because forgetting would be a desecration or illusion. The Holocaust was "an event to be endured, not a trauma to be healed."¹⁸

As Tamsin Jones has shrewdly pointed out, the ethics of alterity (the ontological prioritization of the Other over the Self) that arises in continental philosophy of religion in the mid-twentieth century can be understood as a reaction to the horrors of the two World Wars as well as a rejection of the modern autonomous 'man' developed beginning in the Enlightenment. "These two pressures—a critique of the individualism of modern philosophy and the added force of its inability to begin to account for the violence and savagery of the first half of the twentieth century—turn philosophy's attention to the excessive, all that remains or survives and that cannot be conscribed."¹⁹ Jones goes on to suggest that there are structural similarities between how religious experience, or encounter with an Other that transcends the self, is theorized in Continental philosophy and how

¹⁷ Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, 1.

¹⁸ Lawrence L. Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 72. It is worth noting that while Langer argues that nothing will redeem what happened in the camps, he says that individual perpetrators should be individually named for their guilt and punished. Such an impulse perhaps undoes his allergy to redemption.

¹⁹ Tamsin Jones, "Traumatized Subjects: Continental Philosophy of Religion and the Ethics of Alterity," *The Journal of Religion* 94, no. 2 (April 2014), 144.

trauma is theorized. Both describe an experience of something overwhelming, uninvited, ineffable, nonintegrable, and transgressive.

But Jones raises a crucial point – that while there are structural similarities between certain philosophers’ understandings of the subject and trauma theorists’ understandings of the subject of trauma, when one considers trauma’s real violences, some important distinctions should be made. Like Rubenstein’s suggestion, noted at the outset of this chapter, that conceiving trauma as a condition of being as such can flatten trauma’s historical specificity and unequal distribution, Jones recognizes that it is one thing to theorize a subject that survives a ‘death of self’ and yet quite another thing to talk about a real person that has survived an actual death such as torture or rape. At this point, Jones mentions two potential objections to the fragmented Continental subject:

First, feminist and postcolonial critics might well object that this treatment of the self as subjugated to the other runs the risk of not being attuned sufficiently to the ethical ramifications of glorifying a fragmented and silenced subject. Paradoxically, however, one might also object that this treatment of the self as subjugated to the other risks placing the Western colonial male ‘self’ (which needs chastening) in the role of the victim.²⁰

People experiencing domination may not identify with a shattered subject, for it seems to reinforce the very fragmenting effects of domination itself. And further, such a view of the subject seems to put those doing the dominating in the same category as those so dominated.²¹

While Jones does not spend much time on this point, it is the crux of the matter for me in this chapter. When the theory of fragmented subject is assessed by the lights of historical traumas such as rape, torture, and genocide, and especially when one considers proximities to race, gender, class, and sexuality, the theory of the fragmented subject appears misguided, for the reasons Jones

²⁰ Jones, “Traumatized Subjects,” 153-154.

²¹ Katie Cannon, for example, argues that self-love and self-regard are necessary to collective liberation for black women. Cannon’s work will be key for the notion of grace I develop in chapter five. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*.

names.²² At the same time, there does seem to be something right about a view of the subject that cannot (and, indeed, should not) master himself or others. Yet, the inability of the fragmented view of the subject to do justice to instances of historical trauma is precisely a criticism that gets waged against trauma theory more broadly. I see this criticism as arising in part because trauma theory does not merely share structural similarities with continental philosophy as Jones argues, but trauma theory, at least the kind I will discuss in this chapter, itself arises from continental philosophy, drawing upon an ethics of alterity to theorize trauma. For example, trauma theorist Cathy Caruth, whose work will be discussed later in this chapter, reads Lacan's concept of trauma as facilitating this ethics of alterity discussed by Jones above.²³

Therefore, before turning to the ways in which trauma theory develops in the work of Caruth and others, I would like to take a closer look at how Lacan understands trauma. Lacan's notion is distinct from the concept of trauma discussed in the previous chapter, but crucial to the way trauma is taken up in literary and theoretical accounts of trauma such as Caruth's. Lacan, seeing himself as the true interpreter of Freud, brings structuralist theories of language to bear upon psychoanalysis. Furthermore, the way that Lacan draws upon Freud's theory of trauma accords well with a view that trauma cannot be healed and that redemption should be resisted, particularly as Lacan draws upon Freud's later work that turns to grander narratives regarding human development.²⁴ Lacan's elaboration of this view of trauma, taken together with some of the

²² One can see a somewhat parallel argument arising in Ricoeur's response to Levinas's prioritization of the Other over the Self. For Ricoeur, while there is a place for this prioritization, he rejects its strict unilaterality, arguing that one must also be able to give an account of the Self prior to the Other, for the Self structures one's epistemic awareness of the Other. See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2008).

²³ See especially Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*.

²⁴ See especially Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989) and Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism: An Outline of Psycho-*

philosophical work described above, shapes some of the trauma theory that makes its way into the theological literature. I now turn to briefly describing Freud's later work on trauma and the ways Lacan incorporates this into his own understanding of trauma, subjectivity, and gender.

Trauma as Lack: Lacan Re-Reading Freud

In the previous chapter I described a concept of trauma coming from Freud known as the seduction theory or, as I called it, the theory of sexual abuse, one that was heavily criticized by American feminists and feminist psychologists. What Freud had framed as a child being "seduced" by an adult into a premature sexual experience was, according to feminists, abuse undergirded by patriarchy. Freud's later work, however, moves away from being centered upon the theory of sexual abuse and instead frames trauma in terms of developmental dramas, one of which is known as the Oedipal complex.

In the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud is committed to finding where the sexes come from, arguing that they come from the presence or the absence of the phallus.²⁵ During what he calls the "phallic phase" a boy and a girl at first share the same masculine sexual history. They both desire the mother and believe that they have the object of their mother's desire, the penis. However, the girl will recognize that the penis is different from her own genitalia and will be overcome with "penis envy," leading to the girl to wish to be a boy herself. The boy will become sexually attached to the mother, and hostile and jealous toward the father, vying for the desire of the mother. The boy will experience anxiety that his father will castrate him as punishment for this tabooed, incestuous desire he has for the mother. In order to cope with this anxiety, the son will

Analysis and Other Works ; (1937-1939), The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, trans. James Strachey, Vol. 23 (London: Vintage, 2001).

²⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

identify with his father, the aggressor, which leads to the development of what Freud calls the superego—that law which keeps in check the desires and the drives. In this Oedipal drama, the girl will transfer her object of love from the mother to the father who has the phallus, while identifying with the mother who lacks the phallus. In sum, the man has claim to the phallus, the castration complex acts as a law which governs the relations of the family in the drama (prohibiting incestuous relations), and the woman will desire the phallus which she lacks. Trauma is this foundational anxiety (fear of castration for the boy child) and lack (of the phallus) for the girl child.

Feminist psychoanalysts have long raised criticisms of Freud based upon his very theories of sexuality and gender. Whereas American feminists – and especially radical feminists like Florence Rush – questioned Freud’s turn away from the theory of sexual abuse, criticisms of Freud’s theories coming from the continental side tended to revolve around Freud’s so-called phallogocentrism in his theory of sexuality. For example, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* raises two primary objections to Freud’s account of the division of the sexes: first, Beauvoir argues that Freud’s theory of sexuality is fundamentally a masculine model, such that the female sex can only ever view herself in relation to the male sex. “[Freud] assumes that woman feels that she is a mutilated man.”²⁶ Second, on Beauvoir’s reading, Freud fails to account for the “social origin” of the father’s sovereignty over the mother.²⁷ That is, Freud refuses to see the patriarchal nature of his developmental account of the sexes. The result of this paradigm is that the woman is destined only to be determined in relation to the man, as his Other and as an object, unable to transcend the situation and achieve full subjectivity and independence as a woman.

²⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Howard Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 41.

²⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 42.

One can see similar lines of criticism running through other continental feminisms such as the work of Luce Irigaray.²⁸ Irigaray, in her mimetic style of writing, reveals how Freud's theories present women as the mere copy of man. "The little girl is then indeed a little man, and all her sexual drives and pleasures...are in fact 'masculine.'"²⁹ Freud's theory is governed by a patrimonial order – the law of the father – suppressing maternal lines of decent, something Irigaray calls phallogocentrism. According to her, "Female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters."³⁰ Therefore, like Beauvoir, Irigaray thinks Freud has precluded women from being subjects, confining them within a male-centric economy of subjectivity. Freud's explanations around trauma in the seduction theory and what would later be taken up as lack in his Oedipal theory have thus posed controversies and criticisms especially from the purview of feminism, even as feminists draw upon psychoanalysis.

However, Irigaray is responding not only to Freudian psychoanalysis, but to the Lacanian school as well. Lacan expands the Freudian work on trauma, taking it in a different direction than the one described in the previous chapter. On the Lacanian view that gets taken up into trauma theory, trauma is tied to the lack that founds human subjectivity, and Lacan will also describe this subjectivity in terms of masculine and feminine positions. Feminists like Irigaray argue that not only is Freud's theory of the sexes phallogocentric, but Lacan's is as well. It is worth, then, delving deeper into the notion of trauma that develops out of this Lacanian interpretation of Freud.

Lacan, who completed his doctoral work in psychiatric studies in the midst of the two world wars, brought Freud's theories together with the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude

²⁸ Julia Kristeva, in contrast to Irigaray, does not reject the Oedipal narrative, but seeks to redescribe it. See for example, Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, New York: Columbia University Press (1984).

²⁹ See "Psychoanalytic Theory: Another Look," in Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1985), 35. See also, Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1985).

³⁰ Irigaray, "The Sex Which is Not One," in *This Sex Which is not One*, 23.

Lévi-Strauss, and Roman Jakobson.³¹ Applying the insights of linguistics to Freud's theory of the unconscious, Lacan famously stated that "The unconscious is structured like a language."³²

According to Lacan, one of Freud's major insights in psychoanalysis is his discovery of the unconscious. In fact, Freud's work on the unconscious presages developments in linguistics that both confirm and enhance Freud's concept of the unconscious. Thus, drawing upon contemporary structuralist theories of language, Lacan ultimately puts forward a theory of human subjectivity by way of the unconscious.

It is important to note that Lacan develops his theories in opposition to ego psychologists who were also readers of Freud – the kind of reader described in the previous chapter. Put simply, the subject, according to ego psychologists, was a coherent, free, acting subject. On this account, the subject's thoughts always correspond to external reality and can be spoken. In the realm of speech, the subject performs act A (external reality) for reason B (conscious thought). Furthermore, for the ego psychologist, the goal of analysis was to strengthen the ego. The analyst was to help the patient regain what had been lost – whether that was control, a sense of reality, or one's true self – by bringing unconscious thought to conscious thought and eventually to speech. However, for Lacan, these psychologists misread Freud to develop a theory of the consciously thinking subject who can be master of their thoughts and actions. Lacan views himself as remaining more faithful to the trajectory of Freud's project, rejecting the humanistic theory of the subject developed by ego psychologists.³³

³¹ "Freud could not have taken into account modern linguistics, which postdates him, but I would maintain that Freud's discovery stands out precisely because, in setting out from a domain in which one could not have expected to encounter linguistics' reign, it had to anticipate its formulations." Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, ed. Bruce Fink (New York, NY: Norton, 2006), 687.

³² Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 20.

³³ See, for example, *Seminar XV*, where Lacan describes the conscious, acting ego supposedly in control and master of its thoughts that correspond to external reality as a kind of 'false being.'

In contrast, Lacan argues that thought does not revolve around rational, conscious reflection, but rather around the unconscious, where the unconscious consists of what might be thought of as forgotten or ignored inscriptions, passively registered in the person.³⁴ Lacan calls this the realm of the Real, a realm that cannot be fully conceptualized but nevertheless surfaces in unintended speech and actions. Consider what we today call “Freudian slips.” The unconscious, in certain moments, bubbles up against one’s intentions. One calls one’s lover by an ex-lover’s name, revealing one’s continued attachment to one’s previous lover. On Lacan’s view, the ego merely retrospectively provides conscious rationalizations and explanations for the blunders and unintended slip-ups that spill out from the unconscious. These retrospective rationalizations allow one to accord with the ideal self-image one’s ego has painted for itself.

This ideal self-image develops as one enters the realm of the social, along with its rules, prohibitions, and expectations. On Lacan’s view, the ego might be thought of as a kind of constructed self that arises in what he calls the mirror stage of the development of the child. In the mirror stage, a child sees themselves in the mirror and recognizes that what is reflected back is an image of themselves. Prior to that moment, the child was simply a blundering, moving being that eats, sleeps, and poops according to its natural drives. The mirror stage is when a child develops a sense of themselves as a whole – a conceptualization of oneself when mirrored back to oneself. Next, in what Lacan calls the Imaginary realm, the child sees themselves like it sees its parents: as an ideal, whole self. The child will later enter the realm of the Symbolic, or the realm of language and rules. A parent might say things like, “That’s you!” when the child sees themselves in the mirror, and “Good girl!” when the child does something pleasing to the parent. The child then develops a sense

Jacques Lacan, *L’acte psychanalytique: 1967-1968*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan, livre XV (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2024).

³⁴ Here I am indebted to Bruce Fink’s, *The Lacanian Subject*, for a cogent explanation of Lacanian theory. Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton university press, 1997).

of themselves as a girl, reflected in the mirror, and the child internalizes this image. For this reason, Lacan suggests that the subject is caused by the Other's desire. For example, the subject is caused by the parent's ideal views of the child, which the child then internalizes.³⁵ In this example, the child takes on a particular gender, she is a girl, but not because she is essentially a girl prior to the realm of the Symbolic. Thus, the subject, for Lacan, is a sign in a chain of signifiers rather than an essential or substantial entity.³⁶

Lacan also thinks that there is a loss incurred in such subjectivization. One can't ever fully live up to the rules and expectations created in the realm of the Symbolic, and this creates a certain alienation for the subject as they try to come to grips with the desires of the Other. It is in the excess (i.e. the loss between the realm of the Symbolic and the failure to fully align with that realm) that Lacan locates the Real. Again, as mentioned in my discussion of the unconscious, the Real cannot be fully encompassed by language nor is it fully accessible to the subject. "For what we have in the discovery of psycho-analysis is an encounter, an essential encounter—an appointment to which we are always called with a real that eludes us."³⁷ The purpose of psychoanalysis is to decipher what lies in the realm of the Real by glimpsing beyond merely apparent meanings.

³⁵ This view of development aligns with theories of subjectivity that view the subject's condition of possibility to be language. Power both acts upon and creates the subject. "The subject is the linguistic occasion for the individual to achieve and reproduce intelligibility, the linguistic condition of its existence and agency." Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1997), 11.

³⁶ Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. Bruce Fink, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, XX (New York (N. Y.): W. W. Norton & Company, 1999). Lacan draws upon Ferdinand Saussure to argue for the arbitrariness of meaning effects, since these effects do not bear any necessary relation to what causes them. Our expectation, however, is that what causes them bears a relation to what Lacan calls the real. To explain this, Lacan uses the example of smoke. When one sees smoke, one expects it to be the sign of a fire. Yet, smoke "can just as easily be the sign of a smoker.... Thus, a sign is not the sign of some thing, but of an effect that is what is presumed as such by the functioning of the signifier" (*Seminar XX*, 48). The subject is one such sign—an effect of a signifier in a chain of signifiers. As soon as one enters into language, one is constituted as a subject.

³⁷ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 53.

It is here that Lacan's notion of trauma can come into view. Trauma is an interruption of the Real into the realm of the Symbolic, constituted by the moments when one does not have control but that which is held in the unconscious bubbles up. Unlike the ego psychologist, who would read trauma as a phenomenon that has not been signified and therefore needs to be brought to signification in order for recovery to happen, for Lacan, the Real is completely foreclosed from the domain of the Symbolic. One must glimpse "the signifier—which has no meaning and is irreducible and traumatic – to which he, as a subject, is subjected."³⁸ There is no bringing to consciousness that would allow for recovery on this view, for the Real cannot be signified and therefore stands as a gap in the subject's history. This gap presses upon the subject in ways that the subject cannot control, and this being out-of-control is also an experience of overwhelming trauma to the subject.

On the one hand, the traumatic event is understood to be registered rather than experienced at the moment of its occurrence; it corresponds to a kind of literality in that it falls directly into the psyche without mediation by perception and consciousness. On the other hand, the memory of the event, like a figurative poetics, perpetually returns to the split psyche.³⁹ On this kind of account, an account common to trauma theory in literary studies, Freud's turn to the fantasies and desires of psychic life is not read as a betrayal of real victims' empirical experiences of trauma. Rather, following Lacan, on this reading Freud's search for the Real became even more heightened, as Freud's turn to fantasy is in view of peeling such fantasies back and allowing the Real to show forth.⁴⁰

³⁸ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 251.

³⁹ Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies."

⁴⁰ "The real is beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle. The real is that which always lies behind the automaton, and it is quite obvious, throughout Freud's research, that it is this that is the object of his concern" (Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 54).

One can now begin to see the contrast between this Lacanian view of trauma and the one put forward in the previous chapter. Like the concept of trauma in the previous chapter, trauma retains a connotation with what is extraordinary or excessive; yet, whereas what was extraordinary to normal life could be reintegrated in the previous framework, in Lacan's configuration, trauma is nonintegrateable and inaccessible. Take the example of Emma Epstein from the previous chapter. Epstein was a patient of Freud's who had a phobia of entering shops alone. On the Lacanian reading, the sexual assault Epstein had experienced as a young child at the hands of the shopkeeper would be a shock without signification, something she does not consciously remember, but her unconscious has not forgotten. The shop worker's laughter in the second instance, when Emma enters the scene, gets superimposed on the experience of sexual abuse. Whereas the first experience was a shock without signification, the second becomes a kind of signification without shock. In substituting one signification for the lack of the other, the subject can only recognize the trauma in its misrecognition. The initial trauma has been repressed and substituted by a possible representation. Like Freud's interpretation of dreams, where "The real has to be sought beyond the dream—in what the dream has enveloped, hidden from us, behind the lack of representation of which there is only one representative," the trauma as the Real must be sought behind its substitutions. "This is the real that governs our activities more than any other and it is psychoanalysis that designates it for us."⁴¹ The project of psychoanalysis becomes about uncovering what cannot be fully uncovered or mastered, and that is the Real that structures one's psychic life.

This view of trauma, in part due to its resonances with and roots in the post-WWII philosophy and literary theory that opened this section, becomes central to founding trauma theorists, such as Cathy Caruth, in the 1990s. Like Lacan, Caruth draws primarily upon Freud's later work to develop her theory of trauma. According to her, trauma has two primary characteristics:

⁴¹ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 60

first, that “the experience of trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will,” and second, it poses an “enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that [the witness] cannot fully know.”⁴² For her, much like Lacan, trauma’s etiology is *decidedly not* in an originating event, but in its effects. In fact, there is no knowable originating trauma to be unearthed. Trauma’s reception, or the way it shows up in the survivor’s repetitive enactments, seems to be the trace of a paradoxically unknowable truth, not unlike Lacan’s conception of the Real. It is not just others that cannot fully know this truth, however, for the one experiencing the trauma also cannot fully know it, despite its repetitive, if belated, reenactment. Therefore, for Caruth, trauma is first and foremost a “crisis of truth,” in that the subject does not experience the event as it happens, but only as it is forgotten.⁴³

Readers of Caruth have identified her project in part as an attempt to show how poststructuralist literary theory does not foreclose ethics and politics, a common criticism of the poststructuralist enterprise. She suggests that in trauma’s occurrence and yet its resistance to straightforward understanding, a history that is at least not straightforwardly referential (where experience aligns with concepts) is opened up. “Through the notion of trauma, I will argue, we can

⁴² Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 3. Caruth goes on to describe the way that trauma is a mental rather than physical wound. Whereas a physical wound is usually inflicted by an exogenous cause, a mental wound is the kind of event “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor....[T]rauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on.” Caruth’s interest is therefore in how to write about, or represent, the kind of experience that cannot be written, and she turns to literature as the kind of language that “defies, even as it claims, our understanding.” She writes, “If traumatic experience, as Freud indicates suggestively, is an experience that is not fully assimilated as it occurs, then these texts, each in its turn, ask what it means to transmit and to theorize around a crisis that is marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness” (Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 5).

⁴³ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 6.

understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not.”⁴⁴ It is in the resistance to immediate understanding that Caruth takes psychoanalytic writing itself to produce a model for the one who witnesses the wound of another’s trauma – to listen “to a voice that [one] cannot fully know but to which [one] nonetheless bears witness.”⁴⁵ The challenge of trauma, especially viewed through Caruth’s broadly deconstructive influences, is that no fusion of horizons can take place between the one who has experienced this trauma and the one who has not. And yet, for Caruth, one must nevertheless bear witness to such unconceptualizable experiences.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 11.

⁴⁵ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 9.

⁴⁶ One can see this especially in her reading of Lacan’s analysis of the father who wakes up from the dream to find his child dead. According to Caruth, Freud interprets the dream to mean that humans have trouble facing up to death. Lacan, however, departs from Freud. On Caruth’s reading, “In Lacan’s analysis, Freud’s dream is no longer about a father sleeping in the face of an external death, but about the way in which, in his traumatic awakening, the very identity of the father, as subject, is bound up with, or founded in, the death that he survives.” The inability to grasp the death of the child “becomes the foundation of his very identity as father.” Caruth takes this interpretation from Lacan to develop what she calls an “*ethical relation to the real*.” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 92). Caruth views the father’s awakening, after hearing the child’s voice in the dream, to reveal that while it is impossible for the father to confront his child’s death, he nevertheless must respond. “The force of the trauma is not the death alone, that is, but the fact that, in his very attachment to the child, the father was unable to witness the child’s dying as it occurred. *Awakening*, in Lacan’s reading of the dream, *is itself the site of a trauma*, the trauma of the necessity and impossibility of responding to another’s death.” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 100.) The father’s survival now is bound up with the “address of the dead child,” for the father.

Caruth takes Lacan’s interpretation of the dream here a step further to argue that it represents a broader ethical relation to the real. All consciousness is related to death and especially to the death of other people. “Ultimately, then, the story of the father and child is, for Lacan, the story of an impossible responsibility of consciousness in its own originating relation to others, and specifically to the deaths of others. As an awakening, the ethical relation to the real is the revelation of this impossible demand at the heart of human consciousness.” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 104). The child, alive in the dream but dead outside the dream, cannot be accessed. She says that in the father’s awakening, he must live with the imperative to survive not as the father of the child, but as one who testifies to his own not seeing of the child’s death. It is this failing to see and the father’s survival, that, according to Caruth, should be translated into an ethical imperative to witness to the death of the child. “Lacan’s transmission of the future of Freud’s text on repetition, and, in general, the passing on of psychoanalytic writing, does not consist in the knowledge of a death that could simply be seen, but in the transmission of, precisely, an act of awakening. In opening the other’s

Trauma is a catastrophic experience marking a crisis of knowledge, which “simultaneously defies and demands our witness,” and therefore, can only be spoken about in a “literary” language, or “a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding.”⁴⁷ Doing so ultimately, for Caruth, opens up an encounter with another, conditioned upon trauma—in encountering another’s trauma, one may be surprised to learn of one’s own wounds.

While Caruth’s trauma theory might be right in its refusal to grasp certain extreme catastrophes (such as the Holocaust), it is not clear that this view of trauma is helpful for addressing every kind of harm, especially within its historical particularity, that has come to be associated with trauma. Here I am echoing the risks mentioned at the beginning of this chapter by way of Mary Rubenstein and Tamsin Jones, and further emphasized by trauma theorists, Wulf Kansteiner, Stef Craps, and Dominic LaCapra. What all of these scholars point out is a tendency of the Caruthian kind of trauma theory to evacuate trauma of its historical and cultural specificity.⁴⁸ For example, Caruth’s work, according to Kansteiner conflates a traumatic, post-deconstructive view of human language (that is, that all language relies on absence which reveals the limits of what we can know) with the actual suffering of those who have experienced physical and psychological traumas.⁴⁹

eyes, the awakening consists not in seeing but in handing over the seeing it does not and cannot contain to another (and another future).” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 111).

⁴⁷ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 5.

⁴⁸ La Capra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*; Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds*, First published in paperback (Basingstoke New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); and Wulf Kansteiner and Harald Weinböck, “Against the Concept of Cultural Trauma or How I Learned to Love the Suffering of Others without the Help of Psychotherapy,” in eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. New York: de Gruyter, 2009, 229-240. For example, Kansteiner says trauma theory offers an “aestheticized, morally and politically imprecise concept of cultural trauma, which provides little insight into the social and cultural repercussions of historical traumata.” Wulf Kansteiner, “Genealogy of a Category Mistake: A Critical Intellectual History of the Cultural Trauma Metaphor,” *Rethinking History* 8 (2004), 194.

⁴⁹ For a response to this critique, see Robert Eaglestone’s introduction to Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant, and Robert Eaglestone, eds., *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

Similarly, Dominic LaCapra has described this as a conflation of what he calls historical trauma, which is due to specific historical and material losses, and what he calls structural trauma, which is due to the absence supposedly structuring the failure of reference described by poststructuralist literary theories. LaCapra is particularly concerned about the limits this conflation places upon ethics. First, LaCapra argues that a culture of trauma is created wherein everyone would be a victim of structural trauma (absence structures all language, and when applied as trauma theory, it means all people are universally victims of trauma). Second, LaCapra says that structural trauma does not allow for any kind of productive working through of loss – only melancholic acting out. Because structural trauma sees absence as endemic to language, in application to human experience, loss is likewise endemic in such a way that it can never be productively mourned. As subjects structured by traumatic lack, there seems to be no way out of trauma's effects.

As a result, some have argued that greater distinctions need to be made between different kinds of suffering. For example, Gregg M. Horowitz argues that trauma and loss need to be distinguished, although the two are often made identical in psychoanalytic theory. It is a distinction between “the losses that condition the possibility of development,” or what I am calling the trauma as lack framework, from “the violence that impedes development,” or what I am calling the trauma as loss framework.⁵⁰ The need for such distinctions becomes particularly acute when one considers how, for lack of a better term, identity categories come to play a role in this theory of trauma. To see how this is the case, in the next section, I detail first, how Lacan's theory of lack is expressed in

⁵⁰ According to Horowitz, "Traumatic suffering, then, is characterized by the incessant return not of something incomprehensible, but of something immediately familiar. Far from being the same as the unbelievable loss that constitutes the psyche, trauma is its opposite: in the aftermath of the traumatic blow, the sufferer has seen it all before, undergoes the necessity of his suffering, and rests confident that he will see it all again. Trauma is the absolute assurance that the past, present, and future cannot be mediated." Gregg Horowitz, "A Late Adventure of Feelings," in *The Trauma Controversy: Philosophical and Interdisciplinary Dialogues*, Kristen Brown Golden and Bettina Bergo, eds. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 35.

terms of gender; second, how feminists critically respond to Lacan's theories; and third, how lingering problems within the discourse spill into feminist trauma theologies.

Trauma, Lack, and Gender

In the trauma as lack framework, if one can accept the limitedness of one's creatureliness, then one might, for a moment, stop striving to fill that gap through mastery and manipulation of another. But this acceptance can only come when confronted by the very impossibility of fulfilling the responsibility demanded by other. Lacan puts this in terms of the masculine and the feminine: the one in the masculine position seeks to be all, desiring that which he cannot have (the feminine). The desire for what he cannot have is never satiated, such that he repetitively attempts to master the feminine without success. And while Lacan's use of masculine and feminine is not meant to signify literal men and women, as readers of Lacan have pointed out, Lacan's framework may in fact risk a certain reification of the masculine and feminine. Thus, while Lacan does not intend to conflate biological sex and gender, the standard criticism of Lacan's theory coming from feminist psychoanalysis is that Lacan in fact, in virtue of naming the masculine the universal and the feminine the lack, ends up sustaining phallogocentrism. To see why feminists raise this critique, let me provide some further explication to Lacan's theory of the sexes.

According to Lacan, language operates as the law determining one's gender identity, such that the human subject will be designated male or female in language.⁵¹ (Think back to my example of being named a girl by one's parents when I discussed the realm of the Symbolic above). Man is placed on the side of universality, the subject who desires to be all and makes a claim to the phallus. Woman, on the other hand, is on the side of the 'not-all,' the one lacking the phallus. Woman is therefore constructed in relation to the man who is whole and in possession of the phallus.

⁵¹ See, for example, "The Signification of the Phallus," in Lacan, *Écrits*.

However, for Lacan, it is not really just women who lack. While women lack the phallus in not being it, men also lacks because he can never fully attain his object of desire, such that his claim to the phallus turns out to be a ruse. In fact, for Lacan, desire is itself premised upon an interminable insatiability, or a perpetual lack of an object, something I will discuss further below. Yet, because man cannot attain what he desires, man displaces his desire onto an object (Lacan calls this object the *petit a*). Even in this displacement, however, man's desires go unfulfilled. Only by dissociating the *petit a*, the object upon which man has displaced his desire, from the signifier as such can one occupy the site of the woman and experience what Lacan calls *jouissance*.

Therefore, for Lacan, the masculine subject must renounce his fantasy of totality, recognizing the function of the Father, the Law, or the Signifier for what it is – a mask for the gap that the masculine subject tries, but fails, to fill. Trauma plays a role in Lacan's theory when considering the misplaced desire of the one who occupies the site of the masculine. According to Lacan, traumatic repetition occurs when one fails to accept, or disavows, one's constitutive lack and instead fetishizes an object. In fetishizing, one believes the presence of the object to be the cause of one's desire.⁵² The Real, for Lacan then, is also akin to a trauma, for it is the lack which is the cause of one's desire, to which we are "as a subject, subjected."⁵³ Due to these dynamics of lack and desire, and especially due to the impossibility of one's desires being fulfilled, for Lacan, there is no possibility of harmonious relations between the sexes.

Lacan's is a theory that explains the ways in which genders are conferred upon subjects, but it is also explanatory of human sexuality through his notion of desire. In "On Jouissance," Lacan describes desire through the concept of love. Lacan argues that love interminably demands love—in desire, that is, my desire for José is a desire for José to desire me. Because desire is premised upon

⁵² See Lacan, "God and the Jouissance of the Woman," in *Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*.

⁵³ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 251.

this other that I lack, desire is sustained upon the impossibility of it being satisfied. If I could be One with José, I would no longer desire José, nor would I be myself. But since I can never be one with José, since the desire itself is premised upon the lack of attaining oneness, love reveals the impossibility of establishing a relationship between the male and female sexes.

At the same time, for Lacan, one can attain what he calls *jouissance* in the very failure to master one's desires. Jouissance, while a term that is difficult to pin down as it develops in the Lacanian corpus, can broadly be thought of as a kind of excess or enjoyment in desire's failure to attain its aim; it is therefore not enjoyment *qua* satisfaction of an aim. Lacan develops the notions of jouissance and desire in relation to what Freud calls the death drive, a concept that will be key to some of my discussions in the next chapter, and so, it will be helpful to briefly define it here. Freud enters highly speculative territory when he begins to develop a theory of the drives, including the death drive or death instinct [*Todestriebe*], first in his 1920 *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.⁵⁴ Freud develops the death instinct initially, in part, because he could not make sense of why soldiers returning from the first World War would repeatedly dream of traumatic combat experiences, essentially reliving the pain of war when they were asleep. Such repetitive reliving of painful experiences seemed to fly in the face of what Freud had called the 'pleasure principle,' which, put simply, was the notion that people instinctually seek pleasure and avoid pain. In order to explain instances where people seemed to relive pain, then, Freud speculates that organisms have a drive toward returning to the inorganic state from which they came, an aggressive drive he calls the death drive. According to Freud, though, in response to the death drive, people's internal systems divert this tendency toward destruction away from themselves and outwards toward the external world, such that Freud likens this external manifestation of the death drive to Nietzsche's will to power – a will for mastery and an aggression directed at those around one.

⁵⁴ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

Lacan then draws upon Freud's drive theory to develop his notion of *jouissance*. *Jouissance*, while literally translated enjoyment or pleasure, is, like Freud's death drive, beyond the pleasure principle, for pleasure is associated with desire for Lacan, and desires and drives are two distinct concepts. Desire seeks pleasure through satisfaction, that is, through the attainment of a goal or an object. *Jouissance* arrives in the very failure of desire – the failure to attain the satisfaction of achieving the ends one wants. *Jouissance* is therefore a function of the drives, reaching gratification in desire's frustration. Moreover, this pleasure beyond pleasure, or *jouissance*, sometimes in Lacan's work seems to be interchangeable with the Real, indicating the way certain painful or traumatic experiences repeatedly interrupt the equilibrium of a subject's reality within the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Returning to the discussion above around desire and the structure of the masculine and feminine positions, one can now see why Lacan would locate *jouissance* in the feminine position, for it is only in the feminine position that one encounters the lack (the failure of mastery over what one desires) that structures subjectivity itself.

However, for some feminists, insofar as women have been relegated to the status of “not-whole,” those who lack the phallus, there is no possibility for their subjectivity and freedom. This is Simone de Beauvoir's main critique of psychoanalysis in *The Second Sex*. She argues that while women are constrained by that which is given to them, they nevertheless have the possibility of subjectivity by realizing their own projects amidst the social forces which govern them. Consider, additionally, Irigaray's critiques of both Freud and Lacan for presenting phallogentric psychoanalytic models. According to Irigaray, to claim that the sexes are determined in and through language, as Lacan does, only reinforces masculine epistemic hegemony. Remember that, according to Lacan, subjects come into being by way of discourse. Furthermore, the Real is prediscursive and inaccessible to consciousness – that which is lacking but which nevertheless marks the discourse grounding the subject. Facing up to this lack is traumatic, so, whereas the feminine subject is the one

who lacks, the masculine subject attempts to master the lack. Yet, for Irigaray, if the woman is theoretically in the place of lack, and empirically tends to be in the place of lack due to patriarchal oppression, there is no possibility for women to break free from this oppression.

Moreover, language, says Irigaray, has been written and controlled by men. Turning to language, a discourse controlled by men, only excludes women. “Their exclusion is *internal* to an order from which nothing escapes: the order of (man’s discourse).”⁵⁵ In other words, if all reality is discursive, and all language is defined by men, then women cannot escape the law given to them. Woman is understood to be the lack or flaw in discourse that sustains the desire of man, the speaking being. Hence, Irigaray describes women as the “unconscious womb” of masculine language. Woman is reduced to the passive body saturated with man’s language, a mere support to the function of the signifier. As at once a mere support to the masculine and circumscribed by the law of the phallus, women cannot hope to escape that order according to Irigaray. Hence, she advocates a kind of utopian project, insisting on the creation of a separate feminine subjectivity to coexist intersubjectively with the masculine one. Yet, in so doing, Irigaray seems to double down on sexual difference, an issue that will show up again in the trauma theology to be discussed at the end of this chapter.

But feminist worries after Lacan do not only center around phallogocentrism. Lacan’s use of linguistics and the unconscious to theorize the subject seems, to some, abstracted from the material conditions under which subjects experience Lacan’s symbolic order. In other words, questions also arise regarding whether Lacanian psychoanalysis can account for history and materiality. For example, Monique Wittig’s “The Straight Mind,” which she first presented in 1978, critiques various strands of structuralism, including Lacanian psychoanalysis, for relying on and reproducing a

⁵⁵ Irigaray, “Cosi Fan Tutti,” *This Sex Which is Not One*, 88.

symbolic system of heterosexuality.⁵⁶ As Wittig states, “[W]oman has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women.”⁵⁷ In this early paper, Wittig critiques structuralist obsessions with language and discourse for abstracting material oppression, and, in the case of psychoanalysis, argues Wittig, this abstraction appears in the notion of the unconscious. “The ensemble of these discourses produces a confusing static for the oppressed, which makes them lose sight of the material cause of their oppression and plunges them into a kind of ahistoric vacuum.”⁵⁸ Such theories fail to account for the class conflicts and histories shaping the subject, and are imposed upon patients by ‘experts’ like the psychiatrist, whose job is to interpret the psychic manifestations of broader symbols (the Oedipus complex, castration, exchange of women) for the subject.

Moreover, it is unclear the extent to which psychoanalysis can account for racialized forms of gender, for who counts as ‘woman’ has not only been theorized within a heterosexual system of thought, but within a racialized system as well. While Lacan claims all subjects in language are forced into the door of ‘man’ or ‘woman,’ these signifiers mean differently for racialized bodies. Hortense Spillers’s groundbreaking 1987 “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,”⁵⁹ for example, illuminates how black life and black women in particular could not be captured in the socio-cultural and psychoanalytic language of identity available at the time. Spillers demonstrates that one must account for slavery’s afterlife (i.e. how slavery continues to shape, mark, and haunt American life and language) in order

⁵⁶ Monique Wittig, “The Straight Mind,” *Feminist Issues* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 1980): 103–11.

⁵⁷ Wittig, “The Straight Mind,” 110.

⁵⁸ Wittig, “The Straight Mind,” 104.

⁵⁹ Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987), 64–81.

to peel away the signifiers that name and constrain black women, for the discourses available could not “entertain the sexuality of black women in any way that was other than traumatic.”⁶⁰

For example, according to Spillers, black women are (mis)marked by tropes and stereotypes (“Peaches,” “Sapphire,” “Granny”) that shoehorn them into deviant subjects. “[T]hey are markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean. In that regard, the names by which I am called in the public place render an example of signifying property *plus*.”⁶¹ Such mismarking shows up starkly in Spillers’ discussion of the patently racist Moynihan Report, for the report attempted to explain disparities in the life chances between white people and black people by chalking them up to black deviance. As Spillers points out, according to Moynihan, black families are matriarchally structured, having “no Father to speak of,” and because “his Name, his Law, his Symbolic function” are missing in the black community, “it is, surprisingly, the fault of the Daughter, or the female line” that black families are marked by all sorts of aberrant pathologies.⁶² This is, Spillers notes, a reversal of the castration theme coming from Freud, as the Law of the Father gets transposed to the Mother, becoming another “aspect of the African-American female’s misnaming.”⁶³ Moynihan essentially attributes ‘the tangle of pathology’ supposedly characterizing black families to their ‘matriarchal’ structure.

Yet, Spillers reveals that one cannot understand forms of black life and kinship, and how gender is configured therein, outside the histories of white supremacy and chattel slavery. Spillers returns the reader to the New World, “a scene of *actual* mutilation, dismemberment, and exile” and to the “theft of the body,” both female and male, where gender difference was insignificant or

⁶⁰ Hortense Spillers et al., “Whatcha Gonna Do?: Revisiting ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book’: A Conversation with Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Shelly Eversley, & Jennifer L. Morgan,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 1/2 (2007), 301.

⁶¹ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 65.

⁶² Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 66.

⁶³ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 66.

erased.⁶⁴ When one accounts for chattel slavery, it is clear that black women could not claim their own biological children due to the prohibitions of slave law. Slavery, in its management and disciplining of black life, therefore prohibited and tried to destroy normative biological nuclear family arrangements. Thus, while symbolically speaking, there is not necessary alignment of a particular body with a particular gender, race and gender have nevertheless come to mark Western vocabulary and praxis.⁶⁵ Language comes to *matter* as it marks bodies once literally marked by the whip of captivity.⁶⁶ The Moynihan Report, then, cannot recognize black life and black kin because it is structured by the same grammar as that of slave law.

As Spillers shows, it is not as if black families and black life ceased to exist; instead, black people maintained relationships that were unrecognizable to the dominant order. Drawing upon historical narratives, Spillers illuminates how Africans and African American slaves developed and sustained complex forms of support and family – in and in spite of captivity, forced dispersal, compulsory patriarchal order, and masters determined to kill them – exceeding those of normalized kinship forms. Spiller’s demonstrates, then, that gendered arrangements of black life do not neatly align with Freud’s Oedipal drama, castration complex, or Lacan’s symbolic system of masculine and feminine. At the same time, one could take Spillers to be drawing upon the tools of psychoanalysis and language, even as she contests them, in order to “speak a truer word” for black women.⁶⁷ Thus,

⁶⁴ Spillers is not insisting that gender is decidable, but rather that thinking the terms apart in their historical and racialized contexts could in fact allow for “gender differentiation as it might express itself along a range of stress points...” (Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 65).

⁶⁵ She writes, “...dominant symbolic activity, the ruling episteme that releases the dynamics of naming and valuation, remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation so that it is as if neither time nor history, nor historiography and its topics, shows movement, as the human subject is ‘murdered’ over and over again by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism, showing itself in endless disguise” (Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 68).

⁶⁶ “This body whose flesh carries the female and the male to the frontiers of survival bears in person the marks of a cultural text whose inside has been turned outside.” Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 67.

⁶⁷ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 65.

the ability of psychoanalysis to address material losses incurred by oppression remains a point of contention.

Psychoanalysis, after all, has been a crucial field in which theorists have developed conceptions of gender and sexuality long after Freud and Lacan. In particular, the fragmented subject of lack in psychoanalysis opens space for theorizing a wide range of non-normative genders and desires. In general, queer theorists especially have been critical of the kind of subject assumed by the ego psychologists associated with the concept of trauma in chapter one. Lacan's view of trauma as a negative, violent split and the subsequent story of lack and desire not only shatters a presumably whole subject, but also puts sociality as such into crisis, making Lacan's work a fecund site for theorizing what has now become known as anti-social queer negativity, often associated with the work of Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman.⁶⁸ For example, in his famous piece addressing the AIDS epidemic, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," Leo Bersani contends that every desire is violent, whether one knows it or not, and draws upon the experience of gay men to make his case. Like Lacan, desire, for Bersani, is always a desire for mastery, enacting a violence over an other that cannot be separated from love. In contrast, Bersani offers gay male sex as a heuristic category for rethinking social relations in terms of the self's undoing, rather than the self's mastery over itself or others. In the words of Douglas Crimp, Bersani sees gay sex as a "deeply disruptive, anticivilizing psychic force."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ See Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Leo Bersani, *Homos*, 3. print (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); and Robert L. Caserio et al., "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory," *PMLA* 121, no. 3 (2006): 819–28.

⁶⁹ Douglas Crimp, Douglas Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002), 295. Whereas dominant models of masculinity would consider passive sex to be demeaning, Bersani flips the tables. Bersani suggests that "the value of sexuality itself is to demean the seriousness of efforts to redeem it" (Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," 222). The rectum is then a grave to be celebrated because it has the potential for death. And while AIDS (Bersani is writing in 1987) has literalized that death, it is there that the gay man might be able to challenge his very identification with the "murderous judgment against him," a judgment grounded in a hallowing of selfhood. "Gay men's 'obsession' with sex, far from being denied, should be celebrated—not because of its communal virtues, not because of its subversive potential for

Bersani's negative, violent view of sex resonates with MacKinnon's view from the previous chapter that all sex is violent. Yet, unlike MacKinnon, Bersani does not attach this violence to heterosexual men in power. Rather, for Bersani, the violence of sex (regardless of one's gender or sexuality) opens the possibility of dissolving the boundaries of self in ways that challenge the dominant order. Risking the coherence of selfhood is a theme that runs throughout queer theory drawing upon psychoanalytic theory, even if not always turning to the highly negative as Bersani does. Problematizing gender and sexuality, especially insofar as these are sedimented into identity categories, is meant to expand the range of possibilities in which gender is performed and desire is lived. These are themes that I will take up again in the chapters to come.

It should now be clear that trauma is taken up by readers of the Lacanian version of Freud in ways quite distinct from how trauma was described in the previous chapter. As I have described it in this chapter, trauma plays a part in a broader theory of subjectivity. It is a structuring mechanism of the subject in language, one that exceeds representation. Whether it be a lack associated with the development of the sexes or an absence around which identity fails to cohere, trauma in this case does not mean a literal event of loss that could be recovered. This is, in part, why in the trauma theory of this version, witnessing can be the only possible ethical response. Losses come to be historicized lack, such that in witnessing to trauma, one supposedly simultaneously acknowledges the limits of human subjectivity. By witnessing to what one cannot fully know, one is meant to also be affirming the lack – perhaps a finitude, fallibility, or violence inherent to sociality – that occludes the coherence of one's subjectivity. Put another way, lack resides at the heart of all human subjectivity, standing as its unacknowledged condition of possibility.

parodies of machismo, not because it offers a model of genuine pluralism to a society that at once celebrates and punishes pluralism, but rather because it never stops re-presenting the internalized phallic male as an infinitely loved object of sacrifice. Male homosexuality advertises the risk of the sexual itself as the risk of self-dismissal, of *losing sight* of the self, and in so doing it proposes and dangerously represents *jouissance* as a mode of ascesis" (Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," 222).

Trauma Theologies: Lack, Loss, Both?

This framework also makes its way into trauma theology, particularly by way of Shelly Rambo, although primarily through the work of Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman rather than directly through Freud or Lacan.⁷⁰ Trauma, for Rambo, is a return of the past, a mark or a wound that continues to affect the person long after the event which precipitated it ends.⁷¹ While most trauma theologians affirm that trauma is unique in its ongoing temporality, many nevertheless maintain a kind of hope in the possibility of full recovery in some form or fashion. Rambo, on the other hand, takes up the challenge of the notion of trauma delineated in this chapter thus far, where trauma's ongoingness (especially as a founding ontological lack) occludes the very possibility of a straightforward full and complete recovery. In a sense, then, I see Rambo as taking on the concept of trauma most challenging to Christian theology, and in so doing, she seeks to navigate a number of paradoxes facing trauma theologians attentive to feminist concerns. Considering the frameworks of trauma detailed thus far, these paradoxes include the following:

1. Trauma exceeds comprehension and debilitates one's capacity for knowing, yet trauma must be remembered and shared by the one who has experienced, in the presence of a safe and compassionate witness.

⁷⁰ Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2018); and Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*.

⁷¹ "Trauma is not solely located in the actual event but, instead, encompasses the return of that event, the ways in which the event is not concluded. This phenomenon is described in different ways, but the nature of trauma is such that an inability to fully process an event means that it returns. This return distinguishes trauma and suffering. Suffering is what, in time, can be integrated into one's understanding of the world. Trauma is what is not integrated into time; it is the difference between a closed and an open wound. Trauma is an open wound" (Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 7).

2. Trauma is located in a real event (for feminists, this is usually a real experience of sexual assault) or trauma is located in the return of an unknowable event that can never be fully represented.
3. Trauma is by definition an open wound or a wound that cannot be fully healed, yet trauma places an ethical demand on a witness to seek healing for the victim.
4. The paradigmatic traumas faced by women are sexual abuse and rape, and these paradigmatic cases make the experience of sex violent for women under patriarchy, yet feminist theology seeks the affirmation of pleasure and the political liberation of women.
5. Trauma is justified by redemptive stories insofar as such stories valorize suffering, yet the story of redemption is central to Christian theology.

While many theologians have avoided solving these paradoxes by remaining with one side or the other, Rambo has tried to attend sensitively to the middle – attempting to account for the ways that lack is historicized in real instances of traumatic loss (e.g. war, racism). However, I wonder if, in so doing, she risks a conflation between trauma as ontological lack and trauma as historical loss that does not, in the end, frustrate her intentions.

I take Rambo's project to be concerned with attending to traumatic wounds in ways that do not cover over or suppress the strength of their challenges, doing so in ways that aim to attend to both the psychological notion of trauma discussed in the previous chapter and the literary/philosophical notion discussed in this one. She does so by reformulating theological doctrines in light of the challenges that arise in so doing. For example, in Rambo's first book, she seeks to refigure redemption, and in her second book, she seeks to refigure resurrection in light of trauma.⁷² For her, trauma includes a wide range of phenomenon – from racism, to sexism, to the

⁷² "The aim of this book is to configure a theology of resurrection that links the promises of Christian theology to the realities of trauma that we are witnessing in our time. Thus, the challenge is to rethink the trajectory of the major plotline of the Christian story and to revisit its central

death of a loved one, to war. Drawing primarily on the framework of trauma described in this chapter, while she herself does not put it in these terms, I take it that as each kind of historical loss is acknowledged through witness, it reveals the lack upon which human subjectivity founded. The recognition of this lack then allows new communities of healing to be formed. However, in subsuming the range of these historical losses under a framework that leads to the recognition of a shared subjective lack, Rambo also risks the flattening effect that critics have noted tends to follow the trauma as lack framework. For example, while witnessing a person's suffering (i.e. listening to and holding another's grief) as they deal with the sudden murder of their friend might be an appropriate response, witnessing alone is not the appropriate in the case of an ongoing state-sponsored genocide. The latter requires political attention and action that addresses and changes the conditions under which such violence is taking place, and such action would not fit easily into a vision of communities of healing.

But Rambo does not only risk the flattening effect, for when she tries to attend to historical and structural injury, particularly in discussing women's losses, there is an almost opposite risk of reifying the very category of 'women' itself, despite her best intentions. It is this latter risk I would like to provide more detail to presently. In her second book, Rambo presents a reframed narrative of resurrection, wherein she correlates a desire to know with the male characters of resurrection accounts, while associating women with a sense of goodness and healing. She offers a feminized healing narrative, meant to challenge the traditional masculine desire for completeness, in ways that risk reinforcing a normative version of gender difference. To see how this is the case, I turn more specifically to Rambo's discussion of the Johannine story of the resurrection.

assumptions: that life triumphs over death, and that resurrection hope points to the future." Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 8.

For Rambo, the Johannine story of Thomas and the resurrected Jesus is one of a male desire to know (to believe the truth of Jesus' resurrection). Yet, drawing from the concept of trauma described in this chapter, for Rambo, trauma poses problems for knowledge and belief, for trauma enervates the certainty of experience. Trauma follows, according to Rambo, a temporality of the "past in its ongoingness."⁷³ As such, one should not approach trauma looking for truth claims, nor should one expect that trauma will ever be fully overcome. Rambo intends instead to focus on a landscape of survival in light of trauma—life that is lived amidst death—suggesting that there is an ambivalence in the image of survival. That is, survival suggest something "more" or "beyond" trauma which "does not come at the expense of denying suffering."⁷⁴

One of Rambo's strategies is to shift away from truth claims when considering trauma, which, for her, is to also shift Christian narratives away from a focus on belief to a focus on goodness, a move she makes within a particularly gendered configuration.⁷⁵ One can see this more specifically in her discussion of Macrina. In place of the Thomas account, Rambo offers a new resurrection account, based on *Life of Macrina*, Gregory of Nyssa's hagiography of his sister.⁷⁶ Rambo reads the scar scene in *Life of Macrina* as a new Thomas scene, where faith is replaced by healing, and the plunging of the finger by Thomas into Jesus' wounds is replaced by a mother's touch.⁷⁷ In this

⁷³ Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 5.

⁷⁴ Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 5.

⁷⁵ Rambo argues that she is less interested in the contours of belief that come through in the narrative, and more interested in the goodness of the surfacing of wounds: "Wounds surfacing in life are foreboding images, but they are also productive ones. The same is true, I argue, for resurrection wounds....The question is whether this surfacing is for good." Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 15.

⁷⁶ Gregory, *The Life of Saint Macrina*, trans. Kevin Corrigan (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2005).

⁷⁷ Whereas in the Thomas scene, a masculine desire to know and overcome loss structures the narrative, in the image of mother-daughter, Rambo suggests that loss and healing are held together. In the scar scene to which I am referring, the body of Gregory's sister, Macrina, is being prepped for burial. One of the women preparing the body for burial, Vetiana, invites Gregory to look at a scar on Macrina's skin, calling it a miracle. Vetiana pulls back the garments in order for Gregory to see the mark, which Rambo reads as a mark of resurrecting, a "pivot between past suffering and future becoming" (Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 44). Vetiana proceeds to tell Gregory the story of the scar: the scar came from a life-threatening mass Macrina had developed. Macrina's mother, Emmelia, had

scene, a story is recounted where Macrina's mom had healed a life-threatening mass on Macrina's skin – a mass that, through the mother's touch, disappeared but left a scar. The scar is, according to Rambo, a reminder of God's presence.

In what way does this scar remain a reminder that the divine was present? For Rambo, the answer to this question relates to the relationships among women. Like Jesus' invitation to Thomas to touch his post-resurrection wounds, Macrina (the Christ figure) invited her mother, Emmelia, (the Thomas figure) to touch her wounds, but in this case a miracle happens, leaving a scar behind. Rambo writes, "[W]e have something very different here from the plunging finger of Thomas who is invited by the risen Christ to reach into the pleural cavity. Instead, we have a mother-daughter healing scene; the mother touches the skin, as if to smooth the pharmakon [medicine] into her daughter's skin."⁷⁸ On Rambo's reading, Gregory's account recasts the Thomas story, as Macrina is now the risen Christ, Emmelia is Thomas, but Emmelia participates in healing the wound into a scar.⁷⁹ Thus, for Rambo, it is in the community of women, and particularly in the interactions between mother and daughter, that healing happens and belief is enacted. Returning to the burial

implored Macrina to seek medical help to cure the mass, but instead Macrina entered a time of lachrymose prayer and fasting. During this time, she took some mud upon which her tears had fallen and used it as a healing balm, rubbing it over the mass. Returning home, Macrina's mother made the sign of the cross over the growth now covered with mud. Rambo comments, "Immediately the mass disappeared. The mother's fingers trace skin, as if to *work* in the mud—the balm—created through prayer-filled tears. The mass disappears, but a mark remains. Vetiana assigns meaning to it; she indicates that it remains a reminder of 'divine consideration.' The memory is marked on her skin. God was here" (Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 46.)

⁷⁸ Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 51.

⁷⁹ In the second scene Rambo focuses on, it also the mother-daughter image which enacts healing and replaces the Johannine account of belief. In this scene, after Gregory leaves the monastery where Macrina was buried, he encounters a soldier who knew Macrina. The soldier and his wife had sought Macrina out in order to find a cure for their daughter's sickness. The soldier recounts that his wife talks with Macrina and Macrina offers medicine for healing the young girl's sickness. Once the soldier and his wife left the monastery where Macrina lived, they notice that the child has been healed. The wife holds the child close to her breast, presenting the image of a nursing mother, which for Rambo is an image of "rebirthing" and "regeneration." When the soldier sees the miracle, he now moves from doubt to faith, and Macrina has been the vehicle for that faith.

story, Gregory recounts that even as Macrina's body is covered with burial garments, her body glows through them. Rambo is careful to highlight how this illumination happens in a religious community of *women* and not in Gregory's "busy political activities (the world of men, we can presume—accompanied by his brother Basel)."⁸⁰ Rambo expounds upon this image of a community of religious women, suggesting that "The scar shines through the robes, because the mother's and daughter's flesh are already curiously woven together."⁸¹ For Rambo, this signals a the sewing of a new garment in the creation of a new community of women—but one that already began with the mother's touch.

In this chapter, Rambo is partially responding to a challenge raised by Amy Hollywood to find better ways to acknowledge both the losses and pleasures experienced by women as sites of the real (here, Hollywood is referring to the Lacanian notion of the Real, as I discussed above).⁸² Importantly, though, I take Hollywood to mean that we must make room for such acknowledgement, but in ways that open up rather than double down on gender binaries. One can see this in relation to Hollywood's discussion of Irigaray. According to Hollywood, Irigaray fantasizes a utopic feminine vision, where women's becoming is no longer predicated on a wounded identity, but rather on an idealized body. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in critique of the work of Freud and Lacan, Irigaray insists on a powerful female imaginary where subjectivity is not predicated on lack but on women's becoming. Irigaray, worried about associating the Real with lack, promulgates a critical form of utopianism: feminist philosophy must jettison the sacrificial logic to which phallogocentrism gives rise, and posit a new female divine on which to establish women's subjectivity. This subjectivity is reconfigured in terms of becoming and fluidity rather than lack or loss. But ultimately, on Hollywood's reading, Irigaray evades loss and mortality, especially in her

⁸⁰ Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 48.

⁸¹ Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 49.

⁸² Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*.

association with the female body. And according to Hollywood, "When sexual difference becomes the site of human becoming and divinity, bodies and the multiplicity of differences grounded in bodies that are and/or can be constitutive of human identity are effaced."⁸³

This is a challenge that Rambo takes up in her chapter on Macrina. Yet just as Irigaray's visions of goddesses become attachments for bearing but perhaps denying so-called women's experience of loss under phallogocentrism, overlooking the way that lack is not meant to be a matter of gender difference, so one could argue that Rambo's vision of women's healing communities risks doing the very same. While the image of the scar may be compelling for thinking about the ways that loss remains, situating a healing narrative at the site of women who now enact a new community of women's healing does not seem far afield from Irigaray's idealized feminine subjectivity of becoming. To end the chapter, Rambo returns to Hollywood and Irigaray, again suggesting that women need to imagine ways to counter losses in ways that do not reconstitute wounds. Rambo argues that the Macrina-Emmelia/mother-daughter relationship enacts the truth of the resurrection that pain and touch make humanity into a "new creation" through "weaving a new body," that is, it is an "interweaving of persons in a new community."⁸⁴ Recognizing the problematic status of the wound in the Western imagination (via Irigaray's work), Rambo nevertheless argues for reclaiming the womb in order to reimagine enwombing as "the stitching together of a garment, a continuous accompaniment in life."⁸⁵ Rambo suggests that against Irigaray's vision of "new-born," pure flesh, hers is a vision of "reborn," marked flesh. But is Rambo's vision really so far from Irigaray's? What happens when actual men are presented as the ones who fail to witness and actual women are presented as a new community of goodness and healing? Why are men presented as those who lack while women are not? What happens when a masculine story of belief (the Johannine account) is

⁸³ Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 233.

⁸⁴ Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 68.

⁸⁵ Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 68.

replaced with a feminine story of healing (Rambo's new feminized Thomas story)? What happens, I think, is not too far afield from Irigaray's reinscription of sexual difference. Does Rambo's fear not to reinscribe loss into *women's* becoming actually lead her to instead elide those losses that occur for those who do not fit normalized dichotomies of 'man' and 'woman'?

On my reading, Rambo substitutes the masculine desire and failure to know with women's wholeness and healing. In Lacanian terms, the goodness of the mother-daughter healing image serves as a fetishized substitution for the (traumatic) loss of belief in Rambo's rejection of the Thomas account. That is, if truth/belief has been lost thanks to the literary understanding of trauma, Rambo replaces it with goodness, and a goodness attached to women in particular. If the Johannine account populated with all-male characters unmasks a masculine desire to know (and to be all), Rambo replaces it with a feminized scene of healing that overlooks the way that a desire for goodness through healing could be equally linked to the masculine desire for wholeness (and to be all). The trauma as lack framework, when literally attached to particular bodies, risks eliding lives lived between or beyond the structure of 'man' and 'woman.' Part of the burden of black and queer theoretical responses to the psychoanalytic framework of lack has been to emphasize the importance of not suturing actual men and women to the framework of lack, attending more closely to materiality and history, and emphasizing the possibility of the proliferation of genders and sexualities outside of binary frameworks.

I am suggesting that the structural form of trauma described by Lacan and associated likewise with his theory of the sexes is just that: a theorization of the traumatic structure of subjectivity, which he puts in gendered terms, but has no necessary relation to gendered bodies (and when it does get associated with literal bodies, as continental feminists have pointed out, one can quickly face problems). "For Lacan, the unconscious undermines the subject from any position of certainty, from any relation of knowledge to his or her psychic processes and history, and

simultaneously reveals the fictional nature of the sexual category to which every human subject is none the less assigned.”⁸⁶ However, when taken up in theological accounts that seek to hold together historical traumatic losses with a traumatic foundational lack, normalized gender difference has been drawn upon to structure sites of healing. Yet, accounting for the contingency of the gendered structure itself is important to avoid attaching either sites of loss or sites of healing to gender difference.

Furthermore, some traumatic losses, especially those central to the framework described in the previous chapter, seem intractable if put together with a subject structured by absence. Taken together with the centrality of the redemptive story to Christian theology, it is perhaps impossible to fully integrate the trauma as lack framework into a Christian theology.⁸⁷ This is in part why some have opted for the more redemptive approach of the last chapter. Yet, when the framework of the last chapter is raised to the level of the socio-political, criticisms are raised around whether such a framework can truly recognize losses, or whether such a framework is too sanguine in its outlook. One could think here of Marilyn Adams’s horrendous evils – those “evils the participation in (the

⁸⁶ Jacqueline Rose, “Introduction” to *Feminine sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, comp. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 29.

⁸⁷ This discord between the trauma as lack framework and Christian theology, I take it, is why trauma theologian Jennifer Erin Beste, whose work on grace and freedom was discussed in the last chapter, is critical of certain notions of subjectivity associated with the frameworks discussed in this chapter, especially that of queer theorist, Judith Butler. For example, Beste appreciates Butler’s focus on discourse and power, which provides an explanatory mechanism for the prevalence of, for example, sexual abuse as well as for understanding why it is so difficult to undo the practices and experiences, such as trauma, that have constituted a person. However, Beste argues that Butler is unable to provide any account of recovery in the life of a traumatized person and in fact leans towards a determinism, such that the traumatized person is so constituted by her experiences that there is no possibility for recovery. Beste turns to Diana Meyers instead for an account of subjectivity because, according to Beste, Meyers is able to provide an explanatory framework for recovery, including an emphasis on social justice in creating the conditions of possibility for realizing self-autonomy. In other words, when it comes to individuals who are dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, there remain worries around whether the trauma as lack framework can sustain any form of recovery for the victim. And further, it is perhaps necessary to conceive of recovery in some sense if one is engaged in Christian theology.

doing or suffering of) which gives one reason *prima facie* to doubt whether one's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to one on the whole."⁸⁸ Adams's concern is how horrendous evils could be defeated in one's individual life, for "No amount of human political action can make the past not to have been or raise the dead."⁸⁹ Even if one can bring to light hidden oppression or forgotten memories, that does not necessarily make up for the loss or trauma incurred in an individual life. This is, of course, part of the point made by post-war European philosophers with which I opened this chapter.

So, on the one hand, I have described a view where trauma can be traced to an exogenous precipitating factor, one that is shut off from the victim's system at the time of its occurrence but whose memory can be recovered. On the second view, trauma is irrecoverable because it is a founding, endogenous lack at the heart of all human subjectivity. The first view aligns with liberative notions of recovery. If trauma can be recovered, one can also demand justice. The second view is less sanguine about the possibility of liberation. If loss is constitutive of subjectivity, then gender is a farce, and the attempt to recover or reclaim one's freedom is an attempt at covering over a loss that remains. It is merely an attempt at control, mastery, and overcoming one's lack – a lack we all share.

If the first has a tendency to sediment gender and to fall into utopian thinking that may cover over losses that remain, the second's pessimism and potential abstraction has problems of its own. Insofar as 'women' are positioned in the place of lack, women's experience of material oppression and loss makes lack ripe for being sutured to actual women. This creates a double bind: women cannot escape the position of lack either materially or theoretically; but in response, some

⁸⁸ Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, Vol. 63. (1989), 299. This article develops into her book, Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University press, 2000).

⁸⁹ For Adams, these evils cannot be defeated in this life. Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 198-199.

have merely flipped the logic, such that women are put in the place of wholeness or goodness in ways that nevertheless keep normalized gender difference in place. Similar issues have arisen in trauma theory. As mentioned in an earlier section, the evacuation of history and materiality has been a standard criticism of the Cathy Caruth's kind of trauma theory. Attention to the historical texture of particular traumas is needed so as to not flatten very different losses, entailing different responses, into one grand vision of the human.

In other words, I have tried to show that more work needs to be done, especially in the theological literature and especially in relation to gender and sexuality, to think more carefully about the implications that come with drawing upon concepts of 'trauma.' It is especially unclear to me whether drawing upon a notion of trauma motivates appropriate responses to structural injury. In the remainder of the dissertation, I delve more deeply into the theological resources available to rethink trauma's relation to contemporary structural harm. I do so in concert with a third view of trauma not yet discussed in this dissertation with the aim of opening space for, I hope, a more robust field of responses.

Bridge: From Trauma to Quotidian Crises

Thus far, I have described two different conceptual frameworks of trauma that have made their way into theology, especially within variously feminist-inflected texts. I have given particular attention to gender and sexuality in order to illuminate certain risks that accompany each respective framework, especially when applying them to cases of structural harm. The chapter that follows serves as a bridge between the previous two chapters comprising Part I and the final two chapters that comprise Part II. In this chapter, I offer an alternative framework for understanding structural harm that moves away from trauma-centric approaches, and in so doing, provides an alternative view of subjectivity and response to such harms. While this framework comes with its own risks (for example, it fails to do justice to the full magnitude of sudden, catastrophic forms of suffering), I argue that it offers possibilities for addressing some of the lacunae and risks accompanying trauma-centric approaches to structural harm.

Rather than thinking structural harm in terms of extraordinary traumas, I offer a concept of ‘quotidian crises.’ Whereas both trauma-centric approaches have, in different ways, been rooted in Freudian notions of human psychology and subjectivity, I turn to the resources of Melanie Klein to develop the philosophical anthropology of the quotidian crises framework. This chapter provides an account of that philosophical anthropology, which I will later fund with a more explicitly theological structure in the final two chapters.

Chapter 3

An Alternative Framework: Quotidian Crises, Object Relations, and the Reparative

“I should without question consider a person hysterical in whom an occasion for sexual excitement elicited feelings that were preponderantly or exclusively unpleasurable...”¹

“Not being a philosopher, Freud has refused to justify his system philosophically; and his disciples maintain that on this account he is exempt from all metaphysical attack. There are metaphysical assumptions behind all his dicta, however, and to use his language is to adopt a philosophy.”²

In a famous case analysis, Freud attributes traumatic symptoms displayed by his patient, ‘Dora,’ to the suppression of sexual excitation and stimulation when her parents’ friend, Herr K, tried to kiss her on the mouth. While Freud’s interpretation has come under criticism, not least because Dora’s immediate experience of disgust and proceeding ‘hysterical’ symptoms would be better explained in terms of Herr K’s sexual *assault* of Dora, Jay Greenburg and Stephen Mitchell have argued that Freud’s interpretation was in fact necessitated by the premises of his own drive theory.³ To wit, Freud’s theory of drives posits that individuals are driven by impulses and bodily demands that structure mental activity (e.g. *Thanatos*, or the death drive, and *eros*, or the life drive). In the case of Dora, then, a kiss on the mouth should have excited a libidinal impulse in Dora; instead, Dora pulled back, disgusted, frustrating her natural impulses, the repression of which led to hysterical symptoms.

This case instructively shows, therefore, how Freud’s interpretation is constrained by his own metapsychological, or one might say anthropological, commitments.⁴ For Freud, traumatic

¹ Sigmund Freud, “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,” in *A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey, vol. VII (1901-1905), The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (Vintage, 2001), 13–146.

² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

³ Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983).

⁴ See also Gila Ashtor, “Tender Pessimism,” *Differences* 33, no. 2–3 (December 1, 2022): 242–61.

symptoms arose not due to the transgression of consensual and age-appropriate relations, but due to a failure of the innate individual drives to do what they wanted to do. In short, the explanatory lever of Freud's model is the discreet individual's instinctual drives, arguably and crucially at the cost of social, environmental, and cultural factors. These factors will be pivotal for the notion of quotidian crises to be developed in this chapter, such that I will argue for shifting away from the kind of Freudian interpretation employed in the case example above.

The charge that Freud boils everything down to individual sexual urges is well-worn, not only among psychologists but among theorists and philosophers more broadly. For example, Simone de Beauvoir critiques Freudian psychoanalysis on similar grounds. Beauvoir, for a number of reasons, challenges the feminine version of the Oedipus complex known as the Electra complex, in which a girl child at one stage in development will envy men for the genitals she does not have and develop a sexual attraction to her father. One of Beauvoir's objections lies in Freud's lack of attention to socio-cultural factors for his analyses.

What deifies the father is by no means the feminine libido (nor is the mother deified by the desire she arouses in the son); on the contrary, the fact that the feminine desire (in the daughter) is directed toward a sovereign being gives it a special character. It does not determine the nature of its object; rather it is affected by the latter. The sovereignty of the father is a fact of social origin, which Freud fails to account for; in fact, he states that it is impossible to say what authority decided, at a certain moment in history, that the father should take precedence over the mother—a decision that, according to Freud, was progressive, but due to causes unknown.⁵

Beauvoir illuminates what we might in contemporary terms call the social constructedness of male privilege. It is not an inherent desire at a particular stage in a little girl's development that accords status to the male authority figure, rather the father has already been socially determined to hold the place of the sovereign. Beauvoir's is an early example of the kind of critique that gets raised against

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, First Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 2011: 42.

Freud, illustrating why a theory which can at once account for the social and individual nature of human life may be preferable to one that reduces it to the workings of two natural drives.

In that same vein, I will advocate for the theoretical shift away from Freud and what is broadly known as his drive-theory to what, in psychoanalysis, is called object relations theory.⁶ Object relations, crucially, will source what I will term ‘quotidian crises,’ an alternative framework to the trauma frameworks detailed in the previous two chapters for understanding structural harm. I am thereby aiming to expand the notion of trauma in an effort to address lacunae left open by the trauma theologies discussed thus far. I will argue that structural subordination should not be understood in terms of the trauma concepts previously discussed, both anchored in Freud, but rather as quotidian, diffuse crises akin to a dull headache rather than an open wound. I am suggesting that trauma’s extraordinariness – as what exceeds understanding and conceptual capacities, what takes one out of one’s normal experience of the world – be deflated when applied to structural subordination. In this framework, trauma is not understood as a life-shattering and indescribable experience, but as persistent and familiar harm with which people learn to survive. Doing so, in turn, will shift efforts of redress away from the testimony-witness models⁷ favored by trauma studies and theologians more generally toward an emphasis on changing the conditions in which wounds are perpetuated, reorienting the relations populating both internal-psychological and external-social worlds. I will then be set up, in the next chapter, to furnish quotidian crises with parallel work in theology, not only to show how the framework might be useful for theology, but

⁶ My choice of the word ‘shift’ is intentional. Object relations is not a *turn* or *replacement* of Freud’s theories, as representative adherents of object relations were readers of Freud, and therefore expand or move his theories rather than overturn them.

⁷ To be fair, there are certainly additional understandings of testimony and witness that have not been explored in this dissertation. For example, Ricoeur, to be discussed later in this chapter, provides a very specific notion of what it means to testify with his concept of attestation. However, my shift away from testimony-witness is meant to signal the uptake of these notions particularly in trauma theologies discussed thus far.

also to raise some important concerns that theology is especially positioned to shed light on. These concerns revolve around the extent to which object relations theory might include problematic assumptions around evil, death, and negativity that the earlier trauma theorists had sought to avoid. Therefore, I see the questions of this chapter to be inseparably theological.

This chapter, then, serves as a hinge point. Whereas in the previous two chapters, I demonstrated intersections among Freud's theories, work in gender and sexuality, and trauma theologies, in this chapter, I provide a different psychoanalytic theory that has not yet made its way into theology. Much of the theological work, then, will take place in the next two chapters after I have provided the basic characteristics of what I am calling the quotidian crises framework.

It's Not *All* Oedipal

As trauma theory reached its height at the turn of the twenty-first century, American critic Mark Selzer described American culture and politics as a "wound culture." Selzer defines wound culture as "the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound."⁸ Spectacles of pain and violence had become a powerful means for making justice claims in the American socio-political sphere. Nearly three decades later, one could argue that we are today still living in a wound culture. Social media's rapid circulation of footage of everything from police brutality to mass shootings in addition to widespread testimony of sexual violence on Twitter and TikTok have rendered structural subordination highly visible and accessible. Moreover, as I have discussed in the previous two chapters, theologians continue to apply trauma frameworks to structural oppression, advocating in turn for theological notions of witness as a form of redress.

⁸ Mark Seltzer, "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere," *October* 80 (1997): 3.

However, I argue that structural subordination is better captured and addressed in terms of what Lauren Berlant has called “crisis ordinarieness” and Christina Sharpe has described as “quotidian disaster,” or, what I will call quotidian crises. The notions of trauma as fundamentally unexpected or disturbing, whether viewed as a transformational event or as a foundational loss that exceeds representation, are not sufficient for making sense of structural injury. My turn to quotidian crises follows a broader movement in psychoanalytically-inclined projects away from Freudian drive models to object relations theory. In other words, object relations has become an increasingly prevalent, albeit sometimes implicit, basis for contemporary theory, and the work in this chapter will have broader implications regarding a general dissatisfaction with critique beginning in the 1990s and now associated with a number of scholars, including Eve Sedgwick, Bruno Latour, and Rita Felski.⁹ Sedgwick, for example, famously drew upon object relations theorist Melanie Klein to fund ‘reparative reading’ in contradistinction to what she characterized as the critical, suspicious readings commonly engaged by theorists at the time.

I also take the reparative to be not merely a reading strategy but a mode of politics – a way of engaging the world. Not only has Sedgwick drawn upon Klein’s work with expressly political purposes in mind, but Klein’s conception of the reparative was, after all, both drawn from and applied to her work with real patients. This may be, in part, why object relations has made its way beyond the bounds of literary theory and queer studies.

⁹ See especially chapter four of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). In a 2013 article, Wiegman associates a number of “queer feminist” critics with the reparative turn initiated by Eve Sedgwick: Ann Cvetkovich, Heather Love, Elizabeth Freeman, and, to a more ambivalent extent, Lauren Berlant. See Robyn Wiegman, “The Times We’re in: Queer Feminist Criticism and the Reparative ‘Turn,’” *Feminist Theory* 15, no. 1 (April 2014): 4–25. See also Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); and Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (January 2004): 225–48. I focus on Sedgwick in this chapter because I find her engagement with critique to be the most compelling. Sedgwick does not aim to do away with critique (as perhaps someone like Felski does), but rather to offer more options for scholarly engagement.

For example, writing in 2006, Axel Honneth argued that the object relations tradition of psychoanalytic theory is most suitable for critical theory.¹⁰ Honneth contends that psychoanalysis must provide critical theory an understanding of the human person that is both empirically accurate and explanatory of human action by accounting for rational and non-rational forces of the subject, namely, the unconscious. The best psychoanalytic theory to do so is object relations. Whereas the critical theory of the classical Frankfurt School (in particular, of Horkheimer and Fromm) had relied on Freud, Honneth cites several empirical studies that discredit Freud's theories. But more importantly, according to Honneth, what is compelling about object relations is that relationships with others, social bonds, are considered fundamental to the development of the person. Therefore, critical theory's interest in socialization can be furnished by a psychology that takes interactions among people as foundational to human development. It is here that I shall begin to distinguish object relations theory from the ideas of classical Freudian psychoanalysis.

Object relations theory finds its beginnings in 1940s Britain, but soon made its way to the United States. The major departure of object relations theory from Freudian orthodoxy lies in the presupposition that relations with objects/others, rather than biological drives, shape human behavior in a variety of ways. According to Jay Greenburg and Stephen Mitchell, object relations theory

confront[s] the potentially confounding observation that people live simultaneously in an external and an internal world, and that the relationship between the two ranges from the most fluid intermingling to the most rigid separation. The term thus designates theories, or aspects of theories, concerned with exploring the relationship between real, external people and external images and residues of relations with them, and the significance of these residues for psychic functioning.¹¹

¹⁰ Honneth thereby positions himself against Habermas, who rejected psychoanalysis in favor of the developmental psychology of Kohlberg and Piaget. Axel Honneth, "The Work of Negativity: A Psychoanalytical Revision of the Theory of Recognition," *Critical Horizons* 7, no. 1 (February 21, 2006): 101–11.

¹¹ Greenburg and Mitchell, *Object Relations*, 12.

Freud had located the activities of the psychic apparatus – motivations, meanings, etc. – in an endogenous bodily source of stimulation, furthermore seeing the drives as “inherently abrasive to the social order, constituting a ‘seething cauldron’ of chaotic and dangerous energies.”¹² In object relations, in contrast, human motivations and meanings are made from relationships with ‘objects’ in one’s environment – others, real or imagined, both internal and external. Furthermore, desires draw one into relationship with others rather than merely pose a chaotic threat to the social order.

Melanie Klein is one theorist who, while studying in the classical Freudian school, shifted some of Freud’s concepts in ways that provided a bridge for later object relations theorists. While her early work displays especially deep allegiances to Freudian drive theory, as she applies Freud’s work to a myriad of clinical cases working with children,¹³ beginning in the 1930s she moves to libidinal themes of love and reparation rather than sexuality. Her work is valuable not just for its connection to object relations, but for other reasons as well. While others have distinguished Freud from Klein in terms of their concepts of fantasy, objects, drives, and analytical techniques, there also seems to be a significant difference in their conception of the human being. Klein’s understanding of the human being affords possibilities of relating to others in ways not merely driven by innate drives seeking bio-psychological equilibrium. Reading her works, one comes to see Klein’s commitment to an ambivalent and complex view of human nature, as well as her faith in the goodness (even if never pure) inherent in each of her patients. For Klein, people relate to the world in a variety of ways, shaped but not entirely determined by their environment.

More to the point, Klein makes a deeper moral-psychological intervention, an intervention that will be clearer after first elucidating some of her basic concepts. Klein describes the human self

¹² Greenburg and Mitchell, *Object Relations*, 102.

¹³ One of the major controversies around Klein’s work was her disagreement with Anna Freud, who had argued that children were too young to be psychoanalyzed. See “Symposium on Child Analysis,” Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt, and Reparation and Other Works, 1921-1945*, *The Writings of Melanie Klein* (New York: Delacorte Press/S. Lawrence, 1975).

as an assembly of past relationships, experiences, feelings, and memories.¹⁴ Thus, Klein sees the development of the individual to be importantly tied both to the objects that make up their external environment as well as their internal processing of those events. At the same time, Klein is deeply interested in the individual's struggle to accept both the 'goodness' and 'badness' of the objects that populate their internal and external world. Infants in their earliest stages, according to Klein, cannot yet hold together the goodness and badness of others. Part of development is to "bear to realize that [objects are] not perfect, and yet not lose trust and love for [them], nor fear [their] revenge."¹⁵ This ability to bear ambivalence ties directly into Klein's understanding of paranoia and depression.

One of Klein's greatest innovations was the development of what she named the "paranoid-schizoid position" and the "depressive position." (It is these positions that Eve Sedgwick has famously drawn upon to develop her notion of reparative reading.) According to Klein's theory, during the first few months of life, infants rigidly separate positive experiences or 'good objects' (such as the mother's breast satisfying their hunger) from negative ones or 'bad objects' (such as the mother's anxious expression causing feelings of distress). This creates a sense of paranoia around negative experiences, and the infant tries to ward off perceived threats by keeping bad objects separate from themselves and their good objects. One key characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid position is that one suspiciously classifies others in terms of whether they constitute threats to one's well-being. Klein calls this persecution-anxiety. "Where the persecution-anxiety for the ego is in the ascendant, a full and stable identification with another object, in the sense of looking at it and understanding it as it really is, and a full capacity for love, are not possible."¹⁶ Around six months to

¹⁴ "Everything, good or bad, that we have gone through from our earliest days onwards; all that we have received from the external world and all that we have felt in our inner world; happy and unhappy experiences, relationships to people, activities, interests and thoughts of all kinds—that is to say, everything we have lived through—make part of our selves and goes to build up our personalities." Klein, "Love, Guilt and Reparation," 338.

¹⁵ Klein, "Mourning," *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works*, 355.

¹⁶ Klein, "Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works*, 271.

one year, however, the child learns to internalize whole objects, realizing that the mother, for example, has good and bad characteristics rather than split bad (anxious expression) and good (hunger-satiating breast) parts. Moving to this stage is the condition of possibility to both recognize others as *others*, separate from oneself, and to love them.

Now realizing that the bad objects at which the child had directed rage and aggression were actually their whole, beloved mother, the child experiences a depressive anxiety, a fear that they have harmed one whom they love. “Whereas paranoid anxiety involves a fear of the destruction of the self from the outside, depressive anxiety involves fears concerning the fate of others, both inside and outside, in the face of the phantasied destruction created by the child’s own aggression.”¹⁷ Terrified that the child is the only one who has survived their own destruction, the child tries to mend the depressive anxiety and guilt felt for damaging a loved one by repairing the mother. “In short—persecution (by ‘bad’ objects) and the characteristic defenses against it, on the one hand, and pining for the loved (‘good’) object, on the other, constitute the depressive position.”¹⁸ Because the child pines for the loved object, the child tries to restore it, or repair it, not only out of a phantasy that they are omnipotent enough to restore the other to what they once were, but also through genuine love. Love is not merely a concern for one upon whom one depends, nor is it pure, but exists “side by side with the destructive impulses in the unconscious mind.”¹⁹ Yet, it is constituted by “a profound urge to make sacrifices, in order to help and put right loved people who in phantasy have been harmed or destroyed. In the depths of the mind, the urge to make people happy is linked up with a strong feeling of responsibility and concern for them, which manifests itself in genuine sympathy with other people and in the ability to understand them, as they are and as they feel.”²⁰ At

¹⁷ Greenburg and Mitchell, *Object Relations*, 126. Klein’s notion of “phantasy” is often spelled as such to indicate her difference from Freud’s understanding of fantasy.

¹⁸ Klein, “Mourning,” *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works*, Melanie Klein, 348.

¹⁹ Klein, “Love, Guilt and Reparation,” *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works*, 311.

²⁰ Klein, “Love, Guilt and Reparation,” *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works*, 311.

the same time, the depressive position easily, and often does, lapse back into the paranoid-schizoid position. Overwhelmed by “the feelings of guilt and remorse which accompany this depressive position” in addition to anxieties around losing the good object or injuring external good objects, one moves back to the paranoid-schizoid position.²¹

That is not to say that the urge to repair one’s objects, even if it comes from intentions of love, leads to straightforward and pure moral action. In fact, in Klein’s view, I take it that attempts at repair can in practice be highly morally ambiguous or even outright unjust. In one rather astounding passage, Klein suggests that the urge to repair the mother experienced by the child can later manifest as an urge to explore new worlds, something she describes in terms of European colonization. She describes the hatred towards the bad object that the infant had associated with the mother as a hatred towards indigenous people encountered by European colonizers. Like the infant who, as a child, later wishes to restore the damage he did to the mother in viewing her as a bad object, the colonizer also experiences a guilt and wants to repair the land but does so *not* by returning the land to those from whom they stole it. Rather, Klein notes that the depressive guilt leads them to repair the land by filling it with people from their *own* nation. David Eng has read this passage and Klein’s object relations theory more generally not as mere description of the potential moral ambiguity of love and repair, but as a rationalization of the colonial project that leads to an eschewal of ethical responsibility for the violence of colonialism.²² Eng’s criticism is related to issues around negativity

²¹ Klein, “Love, Guilt and Reparation,” *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works*, 311.

²² David L. Eng, “Colonial Object Relations,” *Social Text* 34, no. 1 (126) (March 1, 2016): 1–19. Similarly, one could apply Klein’s comments on repair here, then, to contemporary debates around ‘reparations,’ and especially the idea that reparations can be mere symbolic attempts to fix what is unfixable. While I do not have *this* kind of reparation in mind when I use the term repair in this dissertation, I do see, as does Klein in the passage discussed, the risk of the reparative impulse as not (perhaps ever) enacting any pure or straightforward ethics of love. For some of the issues around reparations, see Roy L. Brooks, ed., *When Sorry Isn’t Enough: The Controversy over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustice*, Critical America (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1999); and Angelique M. Davis, “Apologies, Reparations, and the Continuing Legacy of the European Slave Trade in the United States,” *Journal of Black Studies* 45, no. 4 (2014): 271–86.

that I will discuss at the end of this chapter and echoes, as I will also discuss, worries that love and reparation merely mask the violent aggression and negativity usually associated with Freud's death drive. Regardless of how Klein herself conveyed repair, I understand the concept to reveal the possibility of a love that acts toward justice without any *guarantee* of that justice, such that moral action, while never fundamentally pure, at the same time, need not be wholly and *entirely* driven by violence and death (but certainly can be, as in Klein's example above).

Thus, as opposed to Freud's rather pessimistic and arguably mechanistic view of human nature, Klein offers a mixed optimism and pessimism regarding the way one's relationships to objects could change and the way one could have relationships along a spectrum of negative and positive potentials. One could realize that objects/others are "not perfect," but one can still *attempt* to "trust and love" them.²³ There is therefore an ethical potential, albeit not a perfectly pure one, to Klein's theory. As the introduction to the first volume of her works states:

In introducing the concepts of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, Melanie Klein also clarified the distinction between two vitally different types of morality....The child's earliest super-ego, containing his own projected destructiveness turned against himself...operates as an archaic internal god with an archaic morality of an eye-for-an-eye kind. This is not ego-syntonic, and a major aim of analysis is to weaken it. But around four months old the appearance of the depressive position ushers in the possibility of a different and far more ego-syntonic morality based...on depressive guilt at the injuries inflicted both in reality and phantasy on loved objects outside and inside the self in the earlier paranoid-schizoid position.²⁴

For Klein, then, one is not constrained within a morality governed by the destructiveness of the super-ego; one also has the possibility to relate to one's objects based upon a depressive guilt that opens one up to possibilities for loving one's objects (which, however, as the example of colonialism shows, can be taken in self-serving directions with devastating consequences). One might say that what Klein contributes to psychoanalysis is the possibility

²³ Klein, "Mourning," *Love, Guilt, and Reparation and Other Works*, 355.

²⁴ R.E. Money-Kyrle, "Introduction," *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works*, xi.

of relating to the world in a variety of ways: on a spectrum between destructive *and* loving, aggressive *and* nurturing.

Thus, one can argue that Klein holds a more flexible view of human nature than does Freud and does not see the relationship between individuals and their social environment as proceeding in the lockstep of drives-suppression/repression. This flexibility has been mined, now rather famously, by Eve Sedgwick. While Sedgwick draws upon Klein to discuss reading practices, I take the stakes of Sedgwick's project, in engaging psychoanalytic theory, to be more broadly about how one engages in the world – deeply and inextricably anthropological and political questions. Associating the Freudian psychoanalytic position with the suspicious, or to use Kleinian language, 'paranoid-schizoid' critical practices prevalent at the time, Sedgwick advocates for using alternative hermeneutical methods in order to offer more capacious possibilities for political engagement and change. Sedgwick's engagement with Klein helpfully illuminates some of the stakes of shifting from classical Freudian psychoanalysis to object relations.

As Sedgwick argues in her now well-known piece, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is about You,"²⁵ the hermeneutics of suspicion, which Sedgwick describes as a 'paranoid' practice, had become a mandatory methodological imperative at the time of her writing rather than just one way of doing theory among others. The paranoid method takes pleasure in knowing in advance that it will unmask the real ideology (Marx), unconscious drives (Freud), or power (Nietzsche) behind a given theory.²⁶ The detective work of this method culminates, like *Scooby Doo*, in that repetitive end scene – those meddling kids remove the mask and expose the culprit.

²⁵ The essay can be found in Sedgwick and Frank, *Touching Feeling*.

²⁶ These are, to the careful scholars of the respective thinkers, merely Ricoeurian caricatures. Yet, I would maintain that general uptakes and uses of these thinkers could reasonably be considered consonant with such caricatures. I will say more on Ricoeur at the end of the chapter.

However, in the case of knowledge-as-exposure, the kids knew the culprit all along. As Sedgwick argues, “It sets a thief (and, if necessary, becomes one) to catch a thief; it mobilizes guile against suspicion, suspicion against guile; ‘it takes one to know one.’ A paranoid friend, who believes I am reading her mind, knows this from reading mine.”²⁷

However, as Sedgwick argues, it would be better to view paranoid inquiry “as one kind of cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alternative kinds.”²⁸ The flexibility of Melanie Klein’s object relations theory, as shown above, lends itself to such a view. After all, “to practice other than paranoid forms of knowing does *not*, in itself, entail a denial of the reality or gravity of enmity or oppression.”²⁹ To authorize only paranoid forms of criticism is to disavow alternative modes of knowledge and to occlude the flexibility that might be necessary to changing socio-political circumstances. In a word, to engage only in paranoid criticism constrains the complexity and range of phenomena that might be drawn upon to enact political resistance. In any case, there is no necessary, self-evident relation between the truth of a claim and the practical use of such a claim: “whether or not to undertake this highly compelling tracing-and-exposure project represents a strategic and local decision, not necessarily a categorical imperative.”³⁰ In other words, Scooby Doo and his ‘gang’ *know* that Mr. Carswell is the one dressed up as The Creeper, and in the end unmask him as the villain and hand him off to the police. But the detective method is not the only way one could have learned who the Creeper is (if you were Mr. Carswell’s friend, he might have told you of his secret occupation), nor is unmasking and jailing a necessary and self-

²⁷ Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading,” *Touching, Feeling*, 126.

²⁸ Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading,” *Touching, Feeling*, 126.

²⁹ Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading,” *Touching, Feeling*, 128.

³⁰ Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading,” *Touching, Feeling*, 123.

evident solution (think here of arguments made by contemporary abolitionists around restorative justice).

In a later essay, Sedgwick describes, more explicitly, the reasons for her attraction to Kleinian theory, in part through contrasts with Freud. A closer look at this distinction will be helpful for understanding the similar kind of shift I am advocating from the Freudian to object relations. According to Sedgwick, Klein's theory provides a view of mental life as "populated, not with ideas, representations, knowledges, urges, and repressions" as Freud does, "but with *things*, things with physical properties, including people and hacked-off bits of people."³¹ Furthermore, Sedgwick points out several downsides of psychoanalytic theory:

And from a feminist and queer perspective I find it helpful to have a second, binocular angle of vision that begins farther outside of psychoanalysis than Klein, that is more programmatically resistant to some of the damaging assumptions that have shaped psychoanalysis in (what I think of as) its Oedipal mode: the defining centrality of dualistic gender difference; the primacy of genital morphology and desire; the determinative nature of childhood experience and the linear teleology toward a sharply distinct state of maturity; and especially the logic of zero-sum games and the excluded middle term, where passive is the opposite of active and desire is the opposite of identification, and where one person's getting more love means a priori that another is getting less.³²

Thus, according to Sedgwick, Kleinian psychoanalysis affords possibilities for shifting away from more constraining and overdetermined visions of human life typical of classical psychoanalysis. For example, on Sedgwick's reading, Freud views humans as tirelessly driven by a thirst for power and knowledge. "In Freud's view, notoriously, our relation to omnipotence is pretty simple: Bring it on. According to Freud's work, we want as much power as we can get and indeed start out with the assumption that we are omnipotent;

³¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (July 1, 2007): 629.

³² Sedgwick, "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes," 630-631.

everything after that is the big, disillusioning letdown called reality.”³³ According to Sedgwick, the Kleinian subject, in contrast, both wishes for omnipotence but also fears it. In Kleinian theory, the infant grapples with a sense of personal greed, where the aggressive and envious elements are seen as posing a significant threat to both essential objects and the infant's well-being. Consequently, the perception of one's own omnipotence is scarcely less unnerving than the perception of a parent possessing such power.³⁴ If Freud's theory tends toward an “all-or-nothing understanding of agency,” Klein allows for thinking along “the middle ranges of agency—the notion that you can be relatively empowered or disempowered without annihilating someone else or being annihilated, or even castrating or being castrated.”³⁵ Sedgwick traces the crux of the distinction between Freud and Klein to the notion of repression.

For Freud, repression is the foundation of psychoanalysis. Freud describes repression as an internal defense mechanism originating in external prohibition. That is, because individuals' have an insatiable desire for omnipotence, societies need to put a check on that desire to maintain stability. According to Sedgwick, for Freudian psychoanalysis, the developmental challenge for an individual lies in effectively internalizing societal prohibitions without being paralyzed by them. Various psychoanalytic perspectives may differ in their emphasis on the repressive demands of civilization versus the opposing assertions of individual desires. However, Sedgwick argues that psychoanalytic theories tend to consistently reinforce a fundamental assumption: that the core of psychic activity is defined

³³ Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes,” 631.

³⁴ Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes,” 631.

³⁵ Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes,” 632.

by the ongoing conflict between inherent individual desires and the constraints imposed or internalized by prohibition.³⁶

In distinction to these tendencies, Sedgwick sees Klein not as rejecting the concept of repression, but rather working around it – seeing it in the context of additional conflicts coming from internal forces of the psyche, namely, the paranoid-schizoid position. How an individual deals with a number of early conflicts and defense mechanisms comes to shape how repression is manifest in that individual. As Sedgwick notes, “Instead of the undifferentiatedly blind, pleasure-seeking drives of the Freudian infant, which encounter no check but the originally external ones of prohibition or lack, the Kleinian infant experiences a greed whose aggressive and envious component is already perceived as posing a terrible threat both to her desired objects and to herself.”³⁷ It is the dread felt in the face of this threat that comes to importantly shape one’s experience of repression.

Yet, the stakes of repression extend more broadly than the individual. As Sedgwick points out, Foucault has drawn upon the notion of repression to analyze the relation between sex and power in Western politics and religion. And, according to his analysis, power has historically worked primarily not to censor sexuality, but has in fact produced and managed it. This means that those projects that have sought to free sex from repression – a whole range of Western discourses of liberation – do not in fact break free of power, but instead function as “near-irresistible propaganda for the repressive hypothesis itself.”³⁸ For Sedgwick, while Foucault’s analysis is persuasive to be sure, it also leads to an impasse: there is no way out of the circle wherein power produces and manages sexuality, in part through the support of those very projects that seek to free sexuality from power’s management. The

³⁶ Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes,” 632.

³⁷ Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes,” 633.

³⁸ Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes,” 635.

impasse, as Sedgwick argues, is now a familiar one in critical theory and especially the queer theory of the 1980s, including her own early works: "where it is possible to recognize the mechanism of a problem, but trying to remedy it, or even in fact articulate it, simply adds propulsive energy to that very mechanism."³⁹

What Sedgwick finds compelling about Klein, among other things, is that she re-contextualizes repression such that possibilities for exiting the circularity described above are possible. There are therefore deeply socio-political implications to Sedgwick's engagement with Kleinian theory. Klein provides resources to recognize the "the importance of the circular mechanism," and to address it by "contextualiz[ing] it newly – just as she had reshaped the view of repression by framing it as a defense mechanism among others rather than the master key to mental functioning."⁴⁰ For Sedgwick, Klein's paranoid/schizoid position is akin to the sort of resentment structure of the vicious analytical circle. One can only be suspicious and paranoid of others' motivations as wholly bad – fueled by feelings of injury, disempowerment, self-righteousness, and envy. But Klein also offers the depressive position as a threshold for repair – for feelings of care that seek the well-being of one's objects.

In other words, Sedgwick suggests that resources of repair, or possibilities for social change, are possible despite the near-hegemonic forces of power. Thus, Sedgwick's concern is the possibility of political change, stating that it is in the very juncture between the paranoid/schizoid and the depressive positions, that "activist politics takes place..."⁴¹ For example, Sedgwick attributes the paranoid energies of much of the feminist and queer theory

³⁹ Sedgwick, "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes," 635. Sedgwick likens this to Nietzsche's analysis of resentment.

⁴⁰ Sedgwick, "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes," 636.

⁴¹ Sedgwick, "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes," 637.

of the 1980s to the socio-political context at the time: how AIDS was ravaging the queer community and homophobic discourse dominated the public sphere. No wonder queer people were experiencing intense dread and mobilizing resources to resist in the face of that dread. But that is not to say that even within and in spite of this paranoia, other resources for action and thought were not surfacing. By way of Sedgwick, then, an “an open mesh of possibilities” not *just* for resistance, but for survival takes shape.⁴² Moreover, Sedgwick suggests that reparation is not inherently conservative,⁴³ for an object of repair need not resemble “a preexisting object.” Yet, once the object has been repaired, “these more realistic, durable, and satisfying internal objects are available to be identified with, to offer one and to be offered nourishment and comfort in turn,” even if the eventual shift back to the paranoid/schizoid position is inevitable.⁴⁴

In terms of the themes of this dissertation, Klein and Sedgwick are helpful for presenting a view of trauma that is distinct from the one offered by Freud and those who draw upon his work. One can see this usefulness in terms of both, for lack of better words, diagnoses and cure. In the next section, I will provide a closer explanation of how this is the case. For now, however, it is worth mentioning that in terms of a concept of trauma itself, Sedgwick moves away from the Oedipal regularity of certain views of trauma: “It happened to my father’s father, it happened to my father, it is happening to me, it will happen to my son...But isn’t it a feature of queer possibility—only a contingent feature, but a real one, and one that in turn strengthens the force of contingency itself—that our generational relations

⁴² Ramzi Fawaz, “An Open Mesh of Possibilities: The Necessity of Eve Sedgwick in Dark Times,” in Lauren Berlant, ed., *Reading Sedgwick*, Theory Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

⁴³ This point about repair’s not necessarily being conservative will be discussed more fully later in this chapter, although it will remain an important question in chapters to come.

⁴⁴ Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes,” 637.

don't always proceed in this lockstep?"⁴⁵ Traumas do not, therefore, inevitably lead to the repetitive enactment of symptomology to regain control and omnipotence. In the words of Lauren Berlant, "*what survives* loss are so many decisions to patch up, or not. Doubts about how nextness will persist, then, persist as life goes on."⁴⁶ People respond to loss in a spectrum of ways – from deep depression to laughing it off. The Kleinian model allows for attention to a variety of ways in which people might make a world out of and despite injury.

With these preliminary explanations of the object relations framework in hand, I would now like to turn to a closer explanation of quotidian crises – a framework that I will offer as a third, and alternative one, to the two previously examined. Sedgwick serves as a kind of lever to some of the theoretical work that inspires my framework of quotidian crisis. In a recent article, Gila Ashtor has argued that object relations constitutes the metapsychology underlying the work not only of Sedgwick, but of Lauren Berlant.⁴⁷ While Ashtor's interests ultimately lie elsewhere than mine, I will take up the insight that object relations is crucial to Berlant's theory of 'crisis ordinairiness,' a concept that will deeply shape my own notion of quotidian crises in the next section.

Quotidian Crises

Quotidian crises refer to the way that structural harm is experienced not as an extraordinary and earth-shattering event, but rather as systemic and interminably unfolding and, therefore, with different degrees of intensity. I will advocate for expanding the theological work on trauma theory to include quotidian crises, a framework that is more 1. Phenomenologically resonant with experiences

⁴⁵ Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading, Reparative Reading," *Touching, Feeling*, 147.

⁴⁶ Lauren Gail Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, Theory Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 38.

⁴⁷ Ashtor, "Tender Pessimism."

of structural injury, 2. Adequate to describe the way that subjects live with and in spite of the diffuse rather than spectacular conditions under which structural subordination is usually enacted, and 3. Conducive to more effective, albeit difficult and slow-going, forms of redress. The shift from trauma to quotidian crises moves, at the same time, from testimony-witness models of response. Each of these points will be addressed in what follows.

In *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Christina Sharpe asks: “[H]ow does one memorialize the everyday? How does one, in the words so often used by institutions, ‘come to terms with’ (which usually means move past) ongoing and quotidian atrocity?”⁴⁸ Sharpe meditates on the grief-work of mourning transatlantic slavery and its American afterlife. As Sharpe’s questions indicate, transatlantic slavery’s impact is an interminable, familiar, even if devastating, encounter with white supremacy. Sharpe’s questions also reveal how structural subordination is not a radically singular event but drawn out; again, it is “ongoing and quotidian atrocity.”⁴⁹

Furthermore, the causes of structural subordination are varied rather than singular, recognizable in pedestrian forms in addition to more spectacular acts of violence. I am drawing heavily here upon Lauren Berlant’s ‘crisis ordinariness,’ which they define as follows:

A traumatic event is simply an event that has the capacity to induce trauma. My claim is that most such happenings that force people to adapt to an unfolding change are better described by a notion of systemic crisis or ‘crisis ordinariness’ and followed out with an eye to seeing how the affective impact takes form, becomes mediated. Crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness, but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what’s overwhelming.... The extraordinary always turns out to be an amplification of something in the works, a labile boundary at best, not a slammed-door departure. In the impasse induced by crisis, being treads water; mainly, it does not drown. Even those whom you would think of as defeated are living beings figuring out how to stay attached to life from within it, and to protect what optimism they have for that, at least.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 20.

⁴⁹ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, 20.

⁵⁰ Lauren Gail Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 10.

A contrast with a general understanding of trauma, drawn from the frameworks discussed in previous chapters, may be helpful here. Trauma theorists have often described trauma as an event that has the capacity to overwhelm and shatter a person's system, and theologians have taken up this understanding of trauma to rethink doctrinal positions. To understand trauma, then, one might think of it as a bomb that has exploded. The shrapnel can be at least picked up and the bomb is the traceable cause of the destruction. With crisis ordinariness, there is no bomb that can be reconstructed by the shrapnel. Instead, one might think of bombs endlessly exploding with different intensities or vibrations, in varying sizes and levels of destruction, with no recoverable beginning or endpoint. People learn to manage and go on amidst this unfolding. With this preliminary definition in mind, I will give further nuance to the concept by arguing for its phenomenological and analytic persuasiveness.

To begin, quotidian crises captures the varied and normalized experience of structural oppression. One way trauma has been described is in terms of its return. As Shelly Rambo notes, "Trauma is not solely located in the actual event but, instead, encompasses the return of that event, the ways in which the event is not concluded. This phenomenon is described in different ways, but the nature of trauma is such that an inability to fully process an event means that it returns...Trauma is what is not integrated into time."⁵¹ To be fair, one could see a parallel between trauma's structure of return and the redundant, almost banal ways that oppression can come to structure life. However, experiences of sexism, racism, and homophobia are often not events that return because they were temporally unintegrated or conceptually unrepresentable. To understand them as such risks rendering them abstract and shocking rather than materially enacted and familiar to the one experiencing them, like a span of mildly rainy days rather than a tornado. For example, one can see

⁵¹ Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010): 7.

through the work of Sadiya Hartman that white supremacy has historically operated under “the terror of the mundane and quotidian” just as much as “the shocking spectacle.”⁵² As Lauren Berlant writes, “[T]rauma takes you out of your life shockingly and places you into another one, whereas structural subordination is not a surprise to the subjects who experience it, and the pain of subordination *is* ordinary life.”⁵³

Furthermore, pointing to subordination’s ordinariness seems especially fitting in a contemporary milieu of so-called post-racial politics and neoliberal economic policy. Post-racial, among other things, refers to the idea that after the abolition of slavery and the success of the Civil Rights Movement, America has entered a time of equitable multicultural diversity where anyone can succeed regardless of racial or ethnic background. The evidence for this, so the story goes, culminates in Barack Obama’s election to the presidency in 2008. Yet, racism and white supremacy have by no means been eradicated – even if they have taken different forms.⁵⁴ While the persistence of white supremacy has been acutely visible around and proceeding the 2016 election in the United States, moments of amplification are just that – the temporary dilation of a structural violence that was always already there. Claudia Rankine narrates some of the textures of everyday life as a black woman in this post-racial America, where microaggressions abound even when spectacles of de jure segregation do not. “The head’s ache evaporates into a state of numbness, a cave of sighs. Over the years you lose the melodrama of seeing yourself as a patient. The sighing ceases; the headaches remain.”⁵⁵ Trauma, described by theologians as “shatter[ing] one’s key assumptions about oneself

⁵² Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Race and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.

⁵³ Lauren Berlant, “The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics,” in Austin Sarat and Thomas Kearns, eds., *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics, and the Law* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 76.

⁵⁴ “By any measure, however, African Americans under Obama are experiencing the same indifference and active discrimination; in some cases, these have become worse.” Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2016), 11.

⁵⁵ Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014), 62.

and one's relation to the world,"⁵⁶ does not capture how people are already born into a world that shapes one's relations and assumptions, and develop ways to survive structural harm and exclusion, rather than experiencing a shocking event that suddenly transforms one's understanding and causes one to develop new ways of living.⁵⁷

Quotidian crises can also better attend to the forms of precarity enacted by neoliberal economic policy. By neoliberalism, I am referring to a "set of economic policies promoting unrestricted actions, flows, and accumulations of capital by means of low tariffs and taxes, deregulation of industries, privatization of formerly public goods and services, stripped out welfare states, and the breakup of organized labor."⁵⁸ Wendy Brown goes on to describe the kind of political and moral ideology that tends to underpin these economic policies: societies are collections of private individuals, whose freedom resides in a freedom *from* any form of social or collective intervention or responsibility. The effects of neoliberal policy include increasing inequality coupled with limited resources and support for the downwardly mobile, increased securitization and policing, and the possibility of structural contingency and precarity for a greater variety of people. Economic precarity is felt as a wearing-away, captured in this pithy anecdote from Sam Pink: "You'd rather not be alive than organizing this candy aisle. Not meaning that in any dramatic way. More like in a situation where a genie asked, you'd opt for being dead. It's that simple—you think."⁵⁹ Pink's description of preferring inexistence to the blue-collar work of organizing a candy aisle is like picking out the pants one will wear that day, a banal thought that passes by.

⁵⁶ Jennifer Erin Beste, *God and the Victim: Traumatic Intrusions on Grace and Freedom*, (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

⁵⁷ See also Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

⁵⁸ Wendy Brown, "Neoliberalism's Frankenstein: Authoritarian Freedom in Twenty-First Century 'Democracies,'" *Critical Times* 1, no. 1 (April 1, 2018): 61.

⁵⁹ Sam Pink, *The No Hellos Diet* (Portland, OR: Lazy Fascist Press, 2011), 15.

Quotidian crises is not only a phenomenologically compelling way to shift from the concept of trauma, but it also provides better tools for analyzing the diffuse forms of structural subordination in the midst of which subjects manage to survive today. Turning to ordinary and diffuse forms of violence shifts the tight association between identity and victimhood that sometimes accompanies the trauma framework. In the early 1990s as trauma studies had begun to coalesce, Hal Foster points to the way that in trauma discourse “the subject is evacuated and elevated at once.”⁶⁰ While trauma theory radically critiqued the subject, popular trauma discourse guaranteed the subject of trauma as the one who alone has access to knowledge of a traumatic event. The survivor testified to the experience of trauma, and the witness was to believe her testimony.⁶¹ Amy Hollywood picks up on this paradox, pointing out the way that in trauma literature, the survivor supposedly represses or dissociates trauma, but at the same time occupies the site of the privileged one who knows the truth of what has happened. And, according to Hollywood, “[T]his in turn leads to a tendency to read people from marginalized or underrepresented groups *as* victims; increasingly, claims to epistemological privilege depend on the proximity to trauma and it is trauma, not justice, that makes ethical demands on others.”⁶² It is not difficult to see how and why this problem appears in theological literature as well.

Trauma theologians tend to describe victims of trauma like the pale ghost of one who was once a freely acting subject. These theologians describe trauma as an event that destroys one’s previous ways of engaging in the world, including thoughts, feelings, choices, and aspirations. Trauma overwhelms the psychological system of person, such they experience fragmentation and

⁶⁰ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 168.

⁶¹ Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 168.

⁶² Amy Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 45.

powerlessness.⁶³ Trauma is further described as an internal wound that disables one's ability both to think and to feel.⁶⁴ One's ability to think, act, and hope can only be restored in the presence of a safe witness willing to listen to one's story of trauma. If this first framework is applied to cases of structural harm, then, the problem raised by Hollywood above applies. As I have suggested in the previous chapters, coupling identity to lack can make underrepresented subjects victims, as if they lack the agency and ability to enact justice on their own terms – and to do so, at best, apart from the initiative of the more privileged and, at worst, at all. The familiarity of the structural harm of white supremacy, for example, and the everyday work of survival itself intimates how personhood is not necessarily anchored in extraordinary action and decision, but in the “insistence on existing.”⁶⁵ I am bringing to mind here Delores Williams' emphasis on survival: “Ordinary black women doing what they always do...”⁶⁶ Survival, the struggle of existence under precarious conditions, in itself requires choice and action, even a minimum attachment to aspiration. And, as Mujerista theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz observes, “[F]or the vast majority of women, life is an ongoing struggle.”⁶⁷ Yet, according to Williams, black women have survived when “liberated into precarious circumstances.”⁶⁸ To render underrepresented groups traumatic victims risks entrenching the view that only the privileged are agential, freely acting subjects.

Moreover, as Hollywood also points out, necessarily giving an experience of pain a directive function risks making trauma rather than justice the criterion for adjudicating ethics. I see two

⁶³ Flora A. Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 38.

⁶⁴ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), ix.

⁶⁵ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 11.

⁶⁶ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2013), 3.

⁶⁷ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1996), 35.

⁶⁸ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 176. For Williams, this is a very qualified sense of liberation, for she departs from the understanding of liberation offered specifically by James Cone.

potential problems for locating ethical principles in a group's proximity to trauma: first, one risks sentimental and symbolic gestures in place of effective strategies to facilitate structural change, and second, anyone, regardless of privilege, can exploit claims of injustice if they feel the sting of loss. The first point can be understood in terms of what Lauren Berlant has called "sentimental politics" and illustrated through the recent #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements.

According to Berlant, in a time of sentimental politics, people across the political spectrum tend to exalt feeling as the thermostat of justice. Feeling both organizes personhood (if I feel good, I am enjoying personhood) and stands as evidence of inequality (if I feel bad, I may claim injustice). In sentimental politics, efforts congeal around making "pain count politically"⁶⁹ and feeling serves as incontrovertible evidence based upon the premise that a person knows exactly what they feel, why they feel it, and how they want that feeling to change. Returning to a point I made above, so long as those with bad feelings are construed as victims, those in positions of privilege may enact sentimental and symbolic gestures of reparation. As Jo Carillo's 1981 poem, "And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures with You," uncovers, attaching certain identities to victimhood allows for symbolic and sentimental heroes. Carillo's "white sisters / radical friends" love owning pictures depicting women of color smiling in the midst of situations of oppression, but recoil when they see women of color "in the flesh."⁷⁰ In contemporary times, Carillo's radical friends might post pictures, tweet, or share videos on social media rather than own physical pictures.

The temptation to symbolically and/or sentimentally join a movement for justice is therefore even more acute in the era of social media. The sentimentality of wound culture, therefore, continues to shape feminist imaginations. Consider the Christian offshoot of the #MeToo

⁶⁹ Lauren Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling," 70.

⁷⁰ Jo Carillo, "And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures With You," in Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Fourth edition (Albany: State University of New York (SUNY) Press, 2015, originally published 1981), 66-67.

movement, #ChurchToo. On November 20th, 2017, River Paasch tweeted, “A day of reckoning is coming for the church, as it is with Washington & Hollywood. Share your story on #churchtoo.”⁷¹ On the heels of #MeToo, River’s friend and co-conspirator at the time, Emily Joy Allison, had begun a twitter thread detailing her experience as a teenager being groomed for abuse by a youth leader in her church. Both former graduates of the fundamentalist Christian college in Chicago, Moody Bible Institute, the two had previously worked on developing an online community for sharing and processing the harmful effects of purity culture, prominent in the evangelical communities of which they had been a part. Paasch and Allison not only saw direct linkages between purity culture and sexual violence in the church, but now opened space for an outpouring of stories around these experiences on Twitter. According to Allison, the day after she tweeted her story, she woke up to thousands of #ChurchToo tweets and counting.⁷²

By now, ‘scandals’ continue to rock not only evangelical churches, but just about every existent denomination. While #MeToo and #ChurchToo have been part of a movement to oust powerful men from their prestige and positions (Harvey Weinstein is currently serving a prison sentence), it is unclear that calling out powerful men and removing them, one by one, from their positions, effectively changes the institutions and mechanisms that upheld their privilege in the first place. In other words, while stories of abuse surface, allegations are investigated, powerful men ousted, repair is not enacted. The unlikelihood of abusers being punished or taking responsibility for their actions is well-known. But my broader concern here is with the way that testimony and even punishment does very little to enact change to the structures under which abuses are perpetuated. There is no guarantee that restoration does not act as a cheap bid at rhetorical restoration, in

⁷¹ While the original account on which the tweet was shared has since been deleted, one can find the tweet quoted in numerous news articles. See, for example, “#ChurchToo: Hashtag explains sexual assault goes beyond politics and Hollywood,” *Global News*, November 23, 2017.

⁷² Emily Joy Allison, *#ChurchToo: How Purity Culture Upholds Abuse and How to Find Healing* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2021).

practice returning power to those who perpetuate male supremacy. In line with the sentimental politics described by Berlant, if a perpetrator *seems* remorseful, they should be restored to their previous position. One can see a pattern: religious leaders temporarily step down from their positions, only to quietly, or in some cases, publicly, re-emerge after a period away from the public eye or a period of intentional “restoration.”

Take Johnny Hunt, who, after being removed from his position as executive vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s North American Mission for sexual abuse, has recently been a keynote speaker at an SBC-sponsored men’s retreat and will continue to preach at churches and conferences later this year. But his return comes after a group of four other men, long-time pastors and friends of Hunt, “observed [Hunt’s] genuine brokenness and humility before God” after a restoration process.⁷³ In a video announcing Hunt’s return, the four men cite their combined 150 years of ministry experience as evidence that they know how to recognize “when someone is truly repentant or not.” And in fact, according to one of the pastors, Mike Whitson, God’s restoration means that Hunt should not only be given his previous responsibilities back but should be given even *more* responsibility now that he has experienced being brought low. In the video, another of Hunt’s friends likens him to the beaten and broken man on the side of the road that only the good Samaritan would stop and help. The video ends by cutting to Johnny Hunt himself, seated next to his wife staring at the camera but never saying a word, thanking the men and the viewers for accepting his restoration.

What this example illustrates is a critique that Eva Cherniavsky has raised regarding #MeToo: that the intervention of #MeToo is based primarily in a politics that merely produces publicity and greater institutional surveillance. Johnny Hunt was publicly exposed through a review

⁷³ *Pastors/Hunt Video Combined*, n.d., https://vimeo.com/773976255/97cd42e4f6?fbclid=IwAR1J_yqk-OL07iGfO5957Rp__BAYSsnRURAQcBr8ljiD8L26XZgaHfcByf0&mibextid=Zxz2cZ.

of the SBC's continued mishandling of sex abuse cases, but through a process of 'accountability,' was eventually restored by a group of men to his previous position of authority. Increasing institutional oversight of male privilege does not attend carefully enough to the ways male privilege is constituted. Further, post-feminist mass witnessing tends to sidestep the labor of on-the-ground organizing that has gone into social movements in the past. "#MeToo represents a form of media-based activism that brackets the laborious, bottom-up work of organizing: analyzing institutional power; disseminating the analysis; forging alliances; and carefully building the conditions for the realization of political agency within defined institutional, organizational, and civic arenas."⁷⁴

Cherniavsky further observes,

[#MeToo] is less the means to an end (an incitement for women to organize--to assemble a 'movement') than the realization of an end: an *autonomous* (extra-institutional) framework to effect the social elaboration of new, equitable norms of male conduct. The political fantasy in which it traffics is that women could, collectively (as a multiracial, multiethnic, economically diverse class summoned into virtual being on Twitter) delegitimize and dismantle this privilege through the *serial* exposure on a *mass* scale of the men who (ab)use it.⁷⁵

What makes these issues particularly complicated from the perspective of Christian theology is that forgiveness, grace, redemption, and restoration can reasonably serve as a basis for reinstituting someone like Johnny Hunt to his previous positions. This point will require greater explanation, a task I will carry out in the final chapters. For now, I would like to raise one final concern around the identification of pain with injustice.

When bad feelings referee justice claims, broader questions of structural privilege and historical injustice are commonly overlooked. For example, suddenly losing unearned privileges one has traditionally enjoyed might feel like a traumatic, shocking loss that justifies a claim to regaining these lost privileges. The sting of lost privilege becomes grounds for claiming injustice – and in turn,

⁷⁴ Eva Cherniavsky, "Keyword 1: #MeToo," *Differences* 30, no. 1 (May 1, 2019): 15–23, 20.

⁷⁵ Eva Cherniavsky, "Keyword 1," 18.

it is the lack of trauma or pain that constitutes justice. Trauma in this case “so overidentifies the eradication of pain with the achievement of justice that it enables various confusions: for instance, the equation of pleasure with freedom or the sense that changes in feeling, even on a mass scale, amount to substantial change.”⁷⁶ Yet, the pain of those who have been historically and systemically excluded is not the kind of pain that the privileged have experienced, and therefore it is not universal. Here, one might recall the issue raised in chapter two when trauma is conceived as unknowable and unrepresentable: it becomes universalized in way ripe for comparison across very different kinds of harm. However, one must distinguish between simply losing the possession of a privilege one previously held, whether earned or not, and being *deprived* from such privileges, meaning one never had access to those privileges due to systemic exclusion.⁷⁷

Juliet Hooker has written about a similar phenomenon in terms of what she calls “white grievance” and white people’s inability to mourn lost privileges. According to Hooker, “white grievance, particularly the inability to accept loss (both material and symbolic), continues to be the dominant force shaping contemporary racial politics.”⁷⁸ Hooker goes on to describe the logic of the contemporary white political imagination as follows:

[T]he political imagination of white citizens has been shaped not by the experience of loss but rather by different forms of white supremacy and that this results in a distorted form of racial political math that sees black gains as white losses, and not simply losses but defeats. As a result, in moments when white privilege is in crisis because white dominance is [presumed to be] threatened, many white citizens not only are unable or unwilling to recognize black suffering: they mobilize a sense of white victimhood in response.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Berlant, “The Subject of True Feeling,” 54.

⁷⁷ Lawrence Rosenthal explains this distinction as one between dispossession and deprivation, and applies it to the kind of identity politics that fueled the 2016 election in the United States. See Lawrence Rosenthal, *Empire of Resentment: Populism’s Toxic Embrace of Nationalism* (New York: The New Press, 2020), especially page 24.

⁷⁸ Juliet Hooker, “Black Protest / White Grievance: On the Problem of White Political Imaginations Not Shaped by Loss,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no. 3 (July 1, 2017): 484.

⁷⁹ Hooker, “Black Protest/White Grievance,” 485.

When one's political imagination is shaped by access to privilege and power vis-à-vis 'others,' the loss of these privileges when these others gain access is perceived as a threat. It is perceived as a threat whether or not those losses are material or symbolic. For Hooker, one of the major challenges confronting American democracy is the need for whites to learn to cope with our political losses – “the loss of unearned privilege and unjustified advantage.”⁸⁰ In this case, loss does not justify a grievance that should be rectified by the law. Rather, according to Hooker, loss should be mourned without the entitlement of restitution, and one could add, that mourning could itself be its own form of veiled racism – as if the ‘losses’ one is mourning were ever ours to own.⁸¹

Thus, attending to the textures of the everyday allows for a more careful analysis of the conditions under which structural subordination is enacted. Furthermore and as a result, such analyses can fund more effective and appropriate responses. “Once the causes of trauma become more diffuse, so too do the cures, opening up the need to change social structures more broadly rather than just fix individual people.”⁸² A sentimental politics and symbolic gestures of social media solidarity are not enough to enact sustained and effective structural change. Rather, as Christina Sharpe suggests, for example, tending to those living and dying in the afterlife of slavery “means work. It is work: hard emotional, physical, and intellectual work that demands vigilant attendance to the needs of the dying, to ease their way, and also to the needs of the living.”⁸³

The burden of response in the quotidian crises framework is therefore not to be centered upon an epistemological crisis demanding witness and recognition. Recall that adherents to the previous frameworks have described trauma as instantiating a crisis of truth, as the one who has experienced trauma demands belief rather than knowledge. According to early trauma theorists,

⁸⁰ Hooker, “Black Protest/White Grievance,” 500.

⁸¹ I am grateful to Andrea White for pointing this out to me.

⁸² Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Series Q (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 33.

⁸³ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, 10.

trauma cannot be veridically verified. There are at least two reasons for this crisis of truth. First, psychological accounts of trauma generally find that the subject either disassociates or represses the traumatic event. Second, certain traumas are understood to be so horrendous that they cannot be adequately represented by concepts. In response, Freudian frameworks tend to facilitate a view wherein the only solution for injury is exposure and recognition – find the deeper loss, come to terms with it, and speak it out to a therapist. This is even the case in the Lacanian version, where there is no full access to the real outside the symbolic. One is still to testify and witness to what one cannot fully know, thereby coming to a closer realization of this inability to master the real that resides in the unconscious. Whether trauma is the veridical harm of sexism unveiled or whether it is the unconceptualizable and untraceable experience which later haunts the subject, trauma demands that someone witness to and believe the testimony of the traumatized. And, as already mentioned, the commitment to this strategy runs deep within feminism and feminist theology, such that it is almost second nature to turn to the testimony genre in an attempt to begin a process of justice. And, as the #MeToo and #ChurchToo examples show, beginning the process of justice can be as simple as tweeting from one's kitchen table.

With the quotidian crises framework, there is far less concern for the epistemological (Can traumas be known and remembered? What would bringing them to remembrance look like? Can there be an ethical relation when traumas shatter truth and knowledge?) and instead, a greater concern for the practical. Object relations provides room to notice a variety of ways that one might carry on amid loss. In the words of Lauren Berlant, one can read Sedgwick and her work in object relations, for example for “what [she] makes possible, for her belief in the work of concepts to make the unbearable livable.”⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Berlant and Edelman, *Sex or the Unbearable*, 54.

In addition, as I will show in the final chapter, the quotidian crises framework will allow me to respond to a problem left open by the Freudian-inspired trauma theologies explored in the first two chapters. Whether trauma is viewed as fully knowable or not, the testimony-witness framework assumes that proper witness will nevertheless facilitate healing. But one can ask: how does one become the *kind* of witness that could even come to recognize and believe another's experience of trauma? After all, not everyone makes a good witness (a person who has never experienced or heard of sexism might have a lot of difficulty making sense of another's experience of sexism, without additional explanation).

To summarize, structural subordination does not reside primarily in sensational, extraordinary, and highly visible acts of violence (although it can). It is far more ordinary, familiar, and predictable to those who experience it. When understood in this way, the response demands attentiveness to the contexts in which structural violence is upheld and the often slow, grassroots work of change. The work requires more than symbolic and sentimental witnessing sometimes prompted by a framework of trauma. That is, structural subordination is more complex than previous concepts of trauma and the accompanying testimony and witness demanded allow.

To be clear, my intention in turning to quotidian crises is to *expand* the resources with which theologians might address contemporary instantiations of suffering. The next two chapters will show one way of doing so. One might ask at this juncture if what I am offering with quotidian crises is not an expansion of trauma, but rather, an entirely different concept altogether, one that no longer *is* trauma. Perhaps trauma and quotidian crises are better thought as two different species of something called 'suffering,' 'pain,' or 'harm.' In a sense, I remain agnostic on this point – whether quotidian crises can be something *really* categorized as trauma is beside the point for me because I see 'trauma' as a moving target. The fact remains that 'trauma' has come to be used not only clinically but culturally, and this is the case for trauma theologians as well. As Ann Cvetkovich has

noted, trauma can refer to “a social and cultural discourse that emerges in response to the demands of grappling with the psychic consequences of historical events.”⁸⁵ Trauma has developed with and through consideration of structural harm all along, as I have shown in earlier chapters, more specifically in concert with feminist considerations of patriarchy and sexism and post-WWII philosophical considerations of genocide. Trauma’s use encompasses both the clinical and the social, making it unsurprising that theologians of trauma have applied the concept to analyses of racism, sexism, and various cases of oppression.

What worries me, however, is some of the underlying assumptions that come along with the application of classic trauma frameworks to contemporary oppressions, a move that has been made, as just mentioned, in trauma theologies. Hence, I am suggesting one might do better to draw upon some different equipment to fund both the analysis and especially the appropriate responses to structural harms that have till now come to be placed within earlier trauma frameworks by trauma theologians. To say that quotidian crises are *not* traumas seems too hasty, only because I see the two as perhaps practically inextricable. Structural harm, as I have argued, often is familiar and persistent, but that does not mean that in moments of amplification it cannot be felt in ways better captured by classical trauma concepts. (Sexism is familiar to me, but that doesn’t mean an instance of sexual assault would not feel earth-shatteringly horrifying and unspeakable.)

In addition, while I am framing quotidian crises as a movement away from previous frameworks of trauma, I recognize that theologians of trauma have not been wholly or uniformly inattentive to similar dynamics. For example, theologians have drawn upon insidious trauma, a concept, as mentioned in the preface, that was developed by psychologists to capture some of the

⁸⁵ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 19.

ways that symptoms of trauma show up due to the more diffuse and normalized effects of oppression.⁸⁶

Moreover, Shelly Rambo's work to reimagine redemption and Christian witness certainly has some resonances with the framework I am calling quotidian crises. For Rambo, to witness trauma is to remain in the ambivalence of life and death, an ambivalence anchored in her notion of trauma as a wound that persists. At the same time, for Rambo as for others, trauma still denotes something that shatters the subject and defies representation yet must be recognized even in its unrecognizability. My intervention resides in a more sustained and robust development of the work to apply trauma to social and structural harms, as well as an alternative approach to addressing such harms not previously offered by the testimony-witness models subscribed to by trauma theologians. Therefore, the shift to quotidian crises I am advocating is subtle, but crucial for the kinds of theological ethics one engages. Before providing a more robust theology of quotidian crises in the next two chapters, it is worth mentioning some of the problems that I will need to be mindful of as I bring the framework in conversation with theology. In the next section, I will discuss these problems in terms of critiques raised against, broadly, the 'reparative' basis and its association with what has come to be known as the 'post-critical'.

Where Goes the Sting of Negativity and Resistance?

The most common objection raised against reparative projects is that they do not sufficiently account for human fallibility, and replace material reparations for incremental, affective changes. I will rehearse three versions of this critique in what follows. These objections tend to center upon a premise that post-critical scholars jettison critique altogether. While this may be true in certain cases,

⁸⁶ See especially Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma*, Paperback edition (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2018), 78.

it is not how I understand Sedgwick, nor is it the case for the version of repair I will advocate. In fact, I see good reason, coming from Sedgwick and others, not to reject the negativity of critique, but to recontextualize it.

When Axel Honneth argues that object relations is the most suitable psychoanalytic theory for critical theorists to draw upon, he notes one potential objection. One can argue that object relations “underestimates those negative forces—whether in the form of the death drive, or whether in the form of an endogenous aggressive tendency—that always stood, after all, at the center of orthodox psychoanalysis.”⁸⁷ For instance, for Adorno, it is the human tendency towards transgression that also allows for humans to break free from social norms. Without recognizing this tendency (as Freud does through the death drive), one risks losing the negative force of critique. Honneth gives a rather quick response to this objection, but essentially, he argues that object relations does in fact recognize conflict and transgression, although more in terms of relational interactions. “The decisive difference with the orthodox [Freudian] conception is admittedly that this dynamic negativity is not to be conceived of as the dowry of our nature as beings with drives [*Triebnatur*], but rather as the unavoidable result of the process of our socialization.”⁸⁸ In short, Honneth addresses worries around the erasure of negativity by arguing that negativity is not expunged but put into a relational framework. In other words, negativity is recontextualized within the object relations paradigm.

This objection reflects some of the broader debates around the ‘post-critical’ that has come to be associated with reparativity of the sort discussed by Sedgwick above. One objection to the post-critical turn centers upon its reading of sources. On this view, post-critical scholars have rejected negativity and critique based upon a misreading of a host of theorists and philosophers. I

⁸⁷ Honneth, “The Work of Negativity,” 108.

⁸⁸ Honneth, “The Work of Negativity,” 109.

tend to agree with this objection, but I do not see it as invalidating Sedgwick's position. Rather, I think a more careful reading of sources tends to actually bolster Sedgwick's intention to offer the reparative as another practice among a host of critical practices, practices that include both the negativity of critique and the positivity of description and construction. For example, Ricoeur's "school of suspicion" has been wielded by post-critical advocates either to describe the skeptical tone and method of critique or to jettison critical interpretation altogether. Yet, a more careful reading of Ricoeur reveals that Ricoeur's primary interest in *Freud and Philosophy* is not to jettison critical interpretation, but to pursue criticism in a way that leaves room for revelation.⁸⁹ In a word, Ricoeur does not reject critique; he reworks it.

Categorized along with the psychoanalytic understanding of hermeneutics, Ricoeur poses the demystifying method of the masters of the "school of suspicion" (Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud) in opposition to the "restoration of meaning."⁹⁰ The school of suspicion exposes false consciousness, tearing off masks of wishes, ideologies, and wills to power, in service not of fully destroying consciousness, but to "extend" it.⁹¹ All three seek greater access to reality, whether it is by liberating praxis (Marx), increasing the power of the human (Nietzsche), or allowing patients to live better and more freely (Freud). The key for these three is to recognize that bare reality is necessity. "Over against the illusion and fable-making function, demystifying hermeneutics sets up the rude discipline of necessity. It is the lesson of Spinoza: one first finds himself a slave, he understands his slavery, he rediscovers himself free within understood necessity."⁹² For Ricoeur, the issue at stake is "the grace

⁸⁹ "Is the showing-hiding of double meaning always a dissimulation of what desire means, or can it sometimes be a manifestation, a revelation, of the sacred? And is this alternative itself real or illusory, provisional or definitive? This question runs throughout this book." Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr, 1970). 7-8.

⁹⁰ See especially chapter 2 of Ricoeur's *Freud and Philosophy*.

⁹¹ Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 34.

⁹² Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 36.

of imagination” which has “something to do with the Word as Revelation.”⁹³ In other words, Ricoeur’s interest remains situated in the question of whether objects might transcend bare reality and necessity and be given to the subject.

This latter option aligns with what Ricoeur calls the “restoration of meaning,” a method of faith rather than suspicion. However, what he calls the “postcritical faith” of this method is not *uncritical* or *anticritical*. Rather, it has undergone criticism, and it is rational and interpreting. This kind of faith seeks both understanding and belief through care and concern for an object, attempting to describe the object rather than simply explain it away.⁹⁴ For Ricoeur, in the restoration of meaning framework, symbols do not hide the bare reality of necessity, but give something that in turn ontologically changes the interpreter. “The movement that draws me toward the second meaning assimilates me to what is said, makes me participate in what is announced to me. The similitude in which the force of symbols resides and from which they draw their revealing power is not an objective likeness, which I may look upon like a relation laid out before me; it is an existential assimilation, according to the movement of analogy, of my being to being.”⁹⁵ For Ricoeur, then, the difference between the school of suspicion and the restoration of meaning frameworks resides in metaphysical premises around the nature of reality and human access to and interaction with that reality, however construed. Ricoeur remarks, “What psychoanalysis encounters primarily as the distortion of elementary meanings connected with wishes or desires, the phenomenology of religion encounters primarily as the manifestation of a depth or, to use the word immediately, leaving for

⁹³ Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 36.

⁹⁴ I generally agree with the commentary on Ricoeur’s use in post-critical debates offered by Constance Fury, Sarah Hammerschlag, and Amy Hollywood in their introduction to Constance M. Furey, Sarah Hammerschlag, and Amy M. Hollywood, eds., *Devotion: Three Inquiries in Religion, Literature, and Political Imagination*, Trios (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

⁹⁵ Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 31. For more on critique’s relationships to religion, see Asad et al., *Is Critique Secular?*

later a discussion of its content and validity, the revelation of the sacred.”⁹⁶ In sum, Ricoeur’s aim in distinguishing a school of suspicion from the restoration of meaning is not to reject critique; rather, he offers a hermeneutical method that places critique within an alternative metaphysical framework. This framework poses a depth of meaning that transcends a reality that would be construed as bare necessity. (Further, this depth of meaning is a far cry from the “surface readings” advocated by some scholars associated with the post-critical.)⁹⁷

To return to the objection at hand – that the post-critical jettisons negativity, one could argue, then, that this is more a symptom of certain uptakes of sources like Ricoeur and Sedgwick.⁹⁸ In response, one can say that the point of the “post-critical” should not be to jettison critique, but re-contextualize it, or at least offer it up as one possibility among others. In any case, I am less interested in who gets critical theory “right,” recognizes conceptual differences between critique and criticism, or provides accurate interpretations of philosophy after Kant’s critical works, and more interested in the pragmatics.⁹⁹ The stakes of these debates run deeper than disagreements around the terms of negativity and critique to the possibilities of political action.¹⁰⁰ What anthropological presuppositions, in particular, will fund quotidian crises? This question will animate my turn to a

⁹⁶ Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 7.

⁹⁷ See especially Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” *Representations* 108, no. 1 (November 1, 2009): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.1>.

⁹⁸ See especially Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, and Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction.”

⁹⁹ Some of these issues are rehearsed in the exchange between Bruno Latour’s, “Has Critique Run Out of Steam?” and Judith Butler’s response in Judith Butler, “The Inorganic Body in the Early Marx: A Limit-Concept of Anthropocentrism,” *Radical Philosophy*, 2, no. 6 Winter (2019). See also Butler’s chapter in *Is Critique Secular?*

¹⁰⁰ One can see this in Judith Butler’s reply to Bruno Latour referenced above, where Butler re-reads critical theory by way of Marx to show the possibilities it affords for environmental justice. Furthermore, David Shumway has described the post-critical trend in literary studies as a kind of reversion “to apolitical concerns” that is not necessarily a result of an attack on critique, but a habit that has been building for decades. See David R. Shumway, “Criticism and Critique: A Genealogy,” in Jeffrey R. Di Leo, ed., *Criticism after Critique: Aesthetics, Literature, and the Political*, First edition (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 15.

theological account of the relationship between evil and sin in the next chapter, and my use of Friedrich Schleiermacher to explore the extent to which individuals are constrained by and responsible for the social circumstances into which they are born. For now, in terms of the themes at hand, it is worth mentioning an especially pointed critique of the political effects of Eve Sedgwick's reparative framework.

Patricia Stuelke's 2021, *The Ruse of Repair: US Neoliberal Empire and the Turn from Critique*, argues that the turn to the affective and reparative occludes the kind of political change necessary to address collective traumas caused by US neoliberal imperialism and racial capitalism today. In fact, she aims to show that the reparative turn in the academy is part and parcel of the rise of neoliberal empire, both upholding and perpetuating it. I take the worry to be something like this: simply changing our feelings or making incremental "therapeutic adjustments," will not make the more revolutionary and tectonic shifts which will truly change the conditions under which structural harms are experienced. For example, paying attention to how a community survives in the midst of oppression and won't foment giving back stolen land to native peoples or abolishing institutions that underpin racial capitalism. So says Stuelke, "solidarity activism can sometimes seem less about dismantling empire and more about the affective renewal of relatively privileged subjects."¹⁰¹ In other words, according to Stuelke, repair fails to enact meaningful social change, and worse, merely sustains the status quo. On the one hand Stuelke's worries about the imbrications of repair with neoliberal individualization, monetization, and privatization, are well taken. On the other hand, I think Stuelke takes repair to be a placeholder for anything and everything ameliorative in ways that misread repair.

¹⁰¹ Patricia Stuelke, *The Ruse of Repair: US Neoliberal Empire and the Turn from Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 8.

Stuelke presents Sedgwick, for example, as suggesting that critique was a “useless” and “outmoded” tool to deal with violence.¹⁰² However, it seems truer to Sedgwick’s work on repair to say that she presents repair as an option along with critique as an option, with circumstances dictating which options might be better or worse to engage. Sedgwick was worried about critique’s status as a categorical imperative, not with critique as such. Moreover, it seems to me that Sedgwick recognizes the purchase of critical work, the ‘knowledge-as-exposure’ method, given her effort to contextualize critique, at least in queer theory, as coming from the devastating and dread-inducing socio-political atmosphere of AIDS. Sedgwick’s work, according to Lauren Berlant, was deeply driven by a concern for the lifeworld of queer people while she was writing, and especially the ways in which the antihomophobic rhetoric of AIDS at the time was a real threat to people’s lives.

Sedgwick saw it necessary to engage

the affective consequences of cultural abjection, humiliation, illness, and political hopelessness. Toting up the numerous ways in which government action and inaction alike seemed focused on the self-destruction of queer youth, she aligned her project in *Tendencies* with the opening of alternative, queer-empowering worlds through modes of thought intended not simply to encourage, but also to enact, political resistance.¹⁰³

Sedgwick’s is not a rejection of critique (to be so would be paranoid anyway!), but an offering of a range of modes in which to engage with political change.

Of more interest to me, in any case, is the way this disagreement hinges on some deeper questions around the relationship between human agency, collective action, and the traditions and norms one has been given, concerns likewise raised in the discussion of Ricoeur. This places some of the tension of the two positions on the continuum of a long-standing struggle within the history of philosophy and theology. How does one reconcile human freedom and change with what seem to

¹⁰² Stuelke, *The Ruse of Repair*, 5.

¹⁰³ Lauren Berlant, “Prologue,” *Reading Sedgwick*, 3.

be overdetermined structural or natural conditions in the world? This question is deeply anthropological and eschatological. Take this passage, for example, from Stuelke's book:

The turn to repair is entangled with the very history and practices of neoliberal empire and the settler colonial carceral state that advocates for such methods often imagine the world already understands all too well. Without grappling with such entanglements, the widespread commitment to the reparative—often recognizable by way of its earnest commitment to making room for pleasure and amelioration, in its celebration of survival strategies and coping mechanisms as beautiful seeds of that which might one day, in the future, save the world—can sometimes seem to stave off the difficult work of imagining possible worlds that break definitively with this one; instead, allegiance to the methods people use to survive things as they are becomes a form of solidarity.¹⁰⁴

The questions of whether the world as we know it can change, the possibility and effectiveness of human action in relation to such change, and even the degree to which change is incremental or radical – these are questions upon which theology might shine particular light. The criticism raised by Stuelke is reminiscent of arguments raised in liberation theology against the pacifying view that social change is not eschatologically present now but is only possible in the future to come – and that those in positions of structural subordination should bear and survive it now, putting their hope in life after death.

Finally, put in the key of trauma theory, one might wonder whether the ambivalent view of human nature inherent in object relations theory risks the kind of progressive optimism that made modern thought untenable after the events of the two world wars. Put simply, one can ask, is anything *just bad*? Does object relations not just accommodate a redemptive view wherein even the worst, most inexplicable traumas are not so bad after all? Wouldn't recovery be pretty simple then? Again, I view these questions as deeply theological, ones that would benefit from more careful work around evil, redemption, grace, and freedom.

¹⁰⁴ Stuelke, *The Ruse of Repair*, 17.

Therefore, the next two chapters will do such work. I will bring the notion of quotidian crises more directly into conversation with theology. Black feminists, *Mujerista*, and Womanist theologians, for example, while not drawing upon psychoanalysis nor the reparative framework per se, have long been attentive to struggles of ‘everyday’ people to survive. Their work provides crucial insight for the quotidian crises framework for which I will advocate. First, I will draw upon the resources of theology to clarify and respond to some of the problems noted above more fully. Then, I will, attending particularly to the Christian notion of grace, return to questions around the reparative and the redemptive. I don’t see the reparative approach as staunchly politically passive – as if all one is to do is look to survival mechanisms and feel better – a theology of love and abundance that is inattentive to power and pain. Practices of grief, care, and joy, I will argue, can very well be a part of the kinds of politics that calls for the dismantling of racial capitalist regimes and American imperialism and move toward making more livable worlds. Work in liberation theologies more broadly will show how this can be the case.

Part II

Toward a Theology of Quotidian Crises and Resurgent Grace

There is no such thing, we submit, as 'simple' or 'faithful' description, just as there is no act of reading that is not political. ...we are in any case not afraid to be 'suspicious and aggressive,' under historical conditions that call for nothing less.¹

Is there a place for devotion in criticism? What about love and desire?²

To eradicate evil is a process, not an event.³

In their introduction to the 2009 special issue of *Representations*, “Surface Reading,” Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus employ the concept of the reparative to characterize interpretive methodologies apropos to their contemporary political context. According to Best and Marcus, the reparative and the postcritical have gained prominence over what they term ‘symptomatic reading’ – interpretive practices that embraced the metalanguages of Marxism and psychoanalysis. More specifically, symptomatic reading “took meaning to be hidden, repressed, deep, and in need of detection and disclosure by an interpreter.”⁴ This mode of interpretation, influenced particularly by Freudian psychoanalysis, presupposed that both readers and texts possess an unconscious, a depth waiting to be unearthed and brought to light.

This kind of interpretation, and the association of Freud with uncovering what is hidden in the unconscious, should be familiar at this point in the dissertation. More specifically, one should be familiar with how this interpretive practice is also germane to the trauma frameworks detailed in the

¹ Nico Baumbach, Damon R. Young, and Genevieve Yue, “Introduction: For a Political Critique of Culture,” *Social Text* 34, no. 2 (June 1, 2016), 7.

² Eleanor Craig, Amy Hollywood, and Kris Trujillo, “Introduction: The Poetics of Prayer and Devotion to Literature,” *Representations* 153, no. 1 (February 1, 2021), 1.

³ Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 31.

⁴ Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” *Representations* 108, no. 1 (November 1, 2009), 1.

first two chapters of the project. That is, whether trauma is thought to be the inaccessible real behind appearances or it is thought to be the recoverable memory of personal or group harm, disclosure, in one sense or another, is a central response. In chapter three, I advocated for moving away from trauma frameworks toward thinking in terms of ‘quotidian crises,’ a phrase meant to denote the way that structural harm is not exclusively or often extraordinary or sudden. Rather such harms show up as amplifications of entangled and complex historical injuries. I have drawn upon some of the tools offered by those associated with postcriticism to make my case, specifically Melanie Klein’s object-relations framework that is foundational to Sedgwick’s notion of reparative reading.

However, my turning from trauma frameworks to a quotidian crises framework, and drawing upon postcritical resources to do so, serves a different purpose than that of, say, literary scholars like Best and Marcus. For example, Best and Marcus state that they have been drawn away from symptomatic reading to “modes of reading that attend to surfaces of texts” because “at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, so much seems to be on the surface.”⁵ By this, Best and Marcus mean that ‘domination’ no longer operates in hidden ways. In fact, according to Best and Marcus, at the time of their writing, domination worked in ways quite obvious and visible.⁶ For them, because domination works on the surface as much as in the depths, it is time to read for what is manifest, obvious, and visible.

⁵ Best and Marcus, “Surface Reading,” 1-2.

⁶ “Those of us who cut our intellectual teeth on deconstruction, ideology critique, and the hermeneutics of suspicion have often found those demystifying protocols superfluous in an era when images of torture at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere were immediately circulated on the internet; the real-time coverage of Hurricane Katrina showed in ways that required little explication the state’s abandonment of its African American citizens; and many people instantly recognized as lies political statements such as ‘mission accomplished’” (Best and Marcus, “Surface Reading, 2).

However, I am not convinced that domination's being visible should abrogate critical practices.⁷ Even images that to one person seem obviously an instance of domination can to another person be interpreted as justice in action. People have held, for example, vastly different interpretations of footage of Kyle Rittenhouse murdering two people and injuring one during the Kenosha Black Lives Matter protest of 2020. While Rittenhouse's acquittal sparked anger and additional protests in cities throughout the U.S., he simultaneously became a hero-figure for the far-right, even getting an invitation to meet with Donald Trump. Therefore, what counts as immediately obvious domination being captured and replayed on screen is by no means uniformly and for everyone interpreted as such. And, for those who *did* see it as an instance of domination, the response was certainly not to jettison a critical response. Take the statement released by Black Lives Matter after the acquittal: "We are not shocked. Today's not-guilty verdict is expected when white supremacy lives and breathes within our institutions....What this verdict reminds us of is that this is a nation deeply rooted and committed to white supremacy, and we must continue to fight against it."⁸ As the Black Lives Matter statement avers, the verdict's being unsurprising deepens the commitment to critique rather than abrogates it.

As opposed to the kind of postcritical surface reading that Best and Marcus advocate, I have suggested that Sedgwick, by way of Klein, recontextualizes the work of criticism as one necessary practice along with others, and her interest, of course, is in explicating the practice of reparative reading. I drew upon some of these discussions in order to consider what kind of philosophical anthropology might fund a framework based upon a concept I called quotidian crises. My interest in the postcritical, therefore, does not reside in the claim that power works in obvious ways and no

⁷ Furthermore, promulgating a method supposedly opposed to the critical can serve to hide that method's own aggressive tendencies. See Tim Dean and Robyn Wiegman, "What Does Critique Want? A Critical Exchange," *English Language Notes* 51, no. 2 (September 1, 2013): 107–22.

⁸ For the full statement, see <https://blacklivesmatter.com/black-lives-matter-statement-on-kyle-rittenhouse-verdict/>.

longer needs explanation or exposure, but rather in the kind of anthropology and sociality assumed by the various approaches, and in turn, the kinds of ethics made possible. Again, Sedgwick's work was invested in those practices that would sustain queer communities ravaged by the AIDs pandemic and high rates of suicide. I consider repair to be, then, akin to José Muñoz's concept of disidentification, a survival strategy for minoritized subjects, along with direct resistance or even conformity.⁹ (As Muñoz makes clear, sometimes fitting in is necessary to one's survival). Put in more theological language, "Acts of resistance push back against destruction and constraint in a way that rejects the sovereignty of 'alien powers' and that expands the possibilities for personal and communal life before God. At such limits of thinking, speaking, and acting, resistance is more than negation and revolt. It is a *way* of surviving. Or better, it is a way of *living*..."¹⁰ Finding spaces for love and nourishment are necessary to sustaining critical relations to those forces that seek to diminish one's own and other's lives.¹¹

Not only will I argue that the kind of resistance made available through the reparative can encompass both relations of critique and relations of care, but I will suggest that the theological counterpart for this is what I will call resurgent grace. Resurgent grace marks the everyday inbreaking (the resurgence or swelling of already latent life) of otherwise possibilities in and in spite of lived and experienced quotidian crises. This concept of grace is not concerned with traditional

⁹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, (Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2009), 5.

¹⁰ Kristine A. Culp, *Vulnerability and Glory: A Theological Account* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 153.

¹¹ Susannah Cornwall has listed repair alongside "redemption, building and construction" as modes of queer theology. "Queer theology has done much work in critique, but it is also adept at repair, redemption, building and construction" (25). Cornwall also likens reparative practice to "nam[ing] and reclaim[ing] what is redemptive and positive in the theological tradition" (22). While I am sympathetic to much of Cornwall's broader argument in this particular essay, I do not see the reparative as redemptive, nor do I see critique as itself not a form of building and construction (as if critique is mere deconstruction and repair not in some sense critical in its own right). Cornwall, "Something There is That Doesn't Love a Wall": Queer Theologies and Reparative Reading," *Theology and Sexuality*, 21.1 (2015).

doctrinal foci, such as human and divine freedom or justification and sanctification, although it could certainly be extended to work alongside them (and at times, I will note possible connections).¹² Rather, I present resurgent grace as what makes possible those places and spaces of life amidst and, indeed, *resistant to* devastation and domination. Rooted in the imagination of queer theology, womanist theology, and black, trans, and abolitionist feminisms, resurgent grace is what arrives in the “always urgent” but slow time of abolition,¹³ in “stay[ing], awaken[ing] the dead.”¹⁴

Therefore, part II of this dissertation, comprised of the two chapters to follow, is meant to, first, provide a more explicitly theological account of the quotidian crises framework and, second, give more concrete shape to how this framework opens up additional avenues for not only surviving contemporary structural harm, but also resisting it. As I began to discuss at the end of chapter three, a reparative framework faces objections around the extent to which it provides a realistic account of human aggression. Lacking the full force of Freud’s account of the death drive, for example, some have asked if the resulting notion of the human is too optimistic and abrogates the negative potency of critique. For some, the negativity of the death drive is the condition of possibility for transgressing and breaking free of social norms, including harmful or hegemonic ones, and such transgression is the work of critique. By funding the quotidian crises framework with theological language, I aim to shed greater light on these concerns around negativity, as theologians have long

¹² “In Christian thought...we ask too quickly the question of whether something is orthodox or heterodox, whether one premise connects neatly with another, whether creeds are checked off and doctrines heeded. This hypervigilance turns thinking into a tight mathematical puzzle that can stifle the imagination rather than unleash it, silence poetry rather than set it free or ablaze.” Willemien Otten, *Thinking Nature and the Nature of Thinking: From Eriugena to Emerson* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 195-6.

¹³ Angela Y. Davis et al., *Abolition, Feminism, Now*, EBook (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2022), chapter 3.

¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, ed. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner (New York, NY: Routledge, 1989), 258.

wrestled with the relationships of norms and transgressing norms by way of concepts like sin, grace, and redemption.

Toward that end, chapter four begins to elucidate a theological account of quotidian crises by turning to the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher. The emphasis in this chapter is on developing a theological anthropology with particular attention to theological notions of sin and evil, and I focus on sin and evil because negativity has been one of the primary sites of debate regarding the postcritical turn. My wager is that attending sin and evil, and the ways that theological debates around these notions parallel similar debates in critical theory, additional light can be shed on what kind of account is needed to both do justice to contemporary forms of structural harm, but also provide responses and resistance to such harms. Schleiermacher's theology provides a deeply social account of sin, a compatibilist account of human agency amidst sin and evil, and an incarnational account of redemption that decenters the place of death. Taken together, all of these characteristics accord well with the quotidian crises account.

Putting the quotidian crisis account in conversation with liberal theology is also meant to show some of the limitations of such a theology. Just as objectors to Schleiermacher's account of evil think he does not do sufficient justice to its force and gravity, so objectors to the quotidian crises framework might worry about its potentially misrepresenting the depth of negativity. While I will argue that Schleiermacher is not fully liable to these objections, I will also argue that lacking certain insights from womanist and queer theology as well as black, trans, and abolitionist feminist theory, the theology of quotidian crises elucidated in chapter four is not sufficient. What womanist and queer projects provide is a necessary direction and shape to God's work of grace in the midst of quotidian crises. That is, these projects name Jesus as the one who dwells with those on the edges of systems of harm and domination, meaning that grace is also mediated in *making* place in environments of survival and resistance to such systems of harm.

In chapter five, I develop this notion of what I call ‘resurgent grace’ in order to solve some of the insufficiencies described in chapter four. Even as queer, feminist, and womanist theology are all generally categorized as liberation theologies, I take queer and womanist theology to mark not only the limits of Schleiermacher’s theology discussed thus far, but also the constellation of texts described as *feminist* theology in this project. I follow Tiffany Lethabo King and others who have described scholarly traditions of Black and Native women, queer, trans and others as a feminism that “mark[s] the practices of refusal and skepticism (misandry/misanthropy),” even a refusal and skepticism of the nonidentitarian and nonrepresentational impulses that have come to organize much contemporary white critical theory and feminist theorizing.¹⁵ As discussed in the Preface, I do not see race, gender, sexuality, class, and so on as value-added categories of social identity, but rather as mobile yet variously socially-constituted configurations, and this might align me with the nonidentitarian impulses of white critical theory and feminist theorizing that King names. Nevertheless, I view black feminist, womanist, queer, and trans theory and theologies, especially in thinking from their respective sites of materiality and experience, as integral to the practice of “jamming,” to quote from Jennifer Nash again, the zero-sum binaries that construct the Subject as Man.¹⁶ I see the practices of “decolonial refusal” and “abolitionist skepticism” to be akin to this jamming, which, according to King, “interrupt and flout codes of civil and collegial discursive protocol to focus on and illumine...violence....Refusal and skepticism are modes of engagement that are uncooperative and force an impasse in discursive exchange.”¹⁷ If the work of repair is not to merely become an alibi for uncritical and apolitical praxis, then it must continue to wrestle with

¹⁵ Tiffany Lethabo King, “Humans Involved: Lurking in the Lines of Posthumanist Flight,” *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 3 (1) Spring 2017, 164.

¹⁶ Jennifer C. Nash, “Re-Thinking Intersectionality,” *Feminist Review*, no. 89 (2008), 9. Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument.”

¹⁷ Tiffany Lethabo King, “Humans Involved,” 164.

refusals and skepticisms. Liberal theology, especially in Schleiermacherian form, is keen to reconcile discordant elements into the unity of the whole – the impasse induced by refusal is difficult to make sense of in a system where all is meant to be taken up into a reconciling and interconnected whole. Instead, the final chapter views the impasses and “interruptions”¹⁸ enacted by abolitionist feminism as central, and remaining, tensions, and ones that are necessary to the very reparative work of resurgent grace.

Therefore, I develop resurgent grace through the lens of abolition feminism,¹⁹ feminism rooted historically in the abolition of slavery but with continued investment in abolishing slavery’s white supremacist afterlife in all of its forms (including, for example, transphobia and homophobia). I view feminism and abolition as both historically and politically inextricable, and I view abolition feminism to be the most promising framework for opening up the otherwise possibilities to which resurgent grace refers. Theologically speaking, regardless of one’s tradition, grace denotes something that breaks in from beyond, a gift of transcendence. Resurgent grace, while a mark of transcendence, is nevertheless experienced in time and place; it is facilitated in finite spatio-temporal conditions. At the same time, resurgent grace is what makes the imagination of otherwise options possible because it works to disorient one’s very attachments, in particular, attachments of white supremacy, that as I will argue, structure theological imaginations. White supremacy operates in calculating, distinguishing, and managing lives and bodies into hierarchical binary categories (e.g. white or black, human or non-human, straight or queer). Therefore, as Ashon Crawley states, “When we want to imagine *otherwise* possibilities—*otherwise* worlds—we must abolish the very conceptual frame that produces categorical distinction and makes them desirable; we have to abolish the modality of

¹⁸ Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, Beth E. Richie, *Abolition. Feminism. Now.*, EBook (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2022), Introduction.

¹⁹ “[A]bolition is unthinkable without feminism and our feminism is unimaginable without abolition.” Davis et al., *Abolition. Feminism. Now.*, Chapter 3.

thought that *thinks* categorical distinction as maintainable."²⁰ I remain convinced that abolishing such modalities of thought, theologically, requires attention to the God who became human and dwelt on the edges of systems of domination.

Put another way, grace, as an infinite gift arriving in finitude, is facilitated by God's becoming a human who remained 'outside the gates,' which liberation theologians have called God's preferential option for the poor. That is, the incarnated Jesus lived a life among those despised and dispossessed in society, revealing a God who dwells with those who are oppressed, and leading theologians like James Cone to say, for example, that God is black. To not name God as black can leave one with an unmarked Christ that is really just the White Christ, and *this* Christ constrains one's thought, as well as one's attachments and desires, within the very conceptual frames that occlude what Crawley calls an "otherwise." To orient one's attachments to God in Jesus who is black, oppressed, poor, transgender, is a refusal to orient one's attachments to the white Christ, a refusal that would "disfigure the category of the human beyond recognition."²¹

My turn to resurgent grace as the concrete work of repair is to also force thought away from what Emilie Townes has called the "neat word games and mental masturbations" of some postmodern theories that produce concepts like 'the Other' but operate as excuses "to remain ignorant and arrogant about our illiteracy of other people." Townes goes on, "Hence, we remain the same people who want to do justice but demand safety; who want to be prophetic but fret over status and position; who search for truth but grasp at nettling shadows."²² Taking a cue from Townes, in the final chapter the notion of resurgent grace I put forth is one where grace *takes place*

²⁰ Ashon Crawley, "Stayed | Freedom | Hallelujah," in *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness*, ed. Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 28-29.

²¹ King, "Humans Involved," 165. See also Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1989).

²² Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 31.

and *makes place* in collaborative and coalitional work. Such coalitional work does not require the presumed knowability of a shared trauma (as the approach of the trauma framework of chapter one risks), but neither does it tarry in that unknowability in ways that potentially evacuate ethics (as the approach of the trauma framework of chapter two risks). Furthermore, I argue that resurgent grace can, indeed *must* in some cases, exist outside supposed sites of redemption, or so-called redeemed communities. Just as grace has traditionally been understood to come, unbidden, external to the human, so I take grace to be facilitated in those places literally outside of one's usual orientations, even the churches and redeemed communities that have shaped one.

Insofar as liberation theologies have defined grace in terms of its power to enact resistance against systemic harm, so it is in places of dispossession where resistance, and therefore, resurgent grace, takes place. As Townes writes, “counterhegemony has its birthing as the marginalized can begin to develop and enact pithy analysis and trenchant cultural critiques to dismantle the cultural production of evil.”²³ In developing grace in this way, not only am I unapologetically following womanist, black feminist, trans, and queer work, but I am also primarily concerned with how grace, conceived as a resurgent and communal encounter that enacts resistance, forms spaces of critically loving praxis that responds to the demands put forth by the quotidian crises framework.

²³ Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 52.

Chapter 4

Quotidian Crises: Sin, Evil, Incarnation

“Only that pain is good which furthers the process of its abolition...”¹

“For groups constituted by historical injury, the challenge is to engage with the past without being destroyed by it.”²

If one were to provide an explicitly theological account of quotidian crises, what would it look like? This chapter demonstrates that the quotidian crises framework can be effectively situated within, broadly-speaking, a liberal-theological tradition.³ Specifically, I will draw on the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher to illustrate this connection, the reasons for which I will discuss later. Drawing parallels with the philosophical anthropology discussed in the preceding chapter, particularly influenced by Melanie Klein, I observe shared emphases on the social and relational aspects of human beings, as well as compatibilist inflected theories of human agency. Notably, analogies emerge between the understanding of evil and suffering in liberal theology and some fundamental characteristics of the quotidian crises framework. I attribute this connection, in part, to the social and relational perspectives through which both liberal theology and the quotidian crises framework conceive of evil and negativity.

Simultaneously, my objective in incorporating liberal theology into the development of a theology of quotidian crises is to explore the potential limitations of such an approach. Just as parallels exist between a liberal theological anthropology and the philosophical anthropology underpinning the quotidian crises framework, critiques of the latter mirror critiques leveled against

¹ Dorothee Solle, *Suffering*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986), 55.

² Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, Next Wave (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 22.

³ To use the categories of “liberal theology” and, later, “liberation theology” is admittedly a risk, as these categories will always fall short in encompassing what they are meant to name. I am not committed to strict categorical boundaries, but rather draw upon these distinctions simply for the sake of expediency.

liberal theology. For critics of reparative frameworks, as discussed in the previous chapter, the absence of negativity implies an absence of critique and, consequently, a lack of potential for political resistance. Concerns have centered around a potentially unrealistic portrayal of human nature that neglects the depth of human aggression, leading to a form of political quietism. (Trauma frameworks, at least in their most extreme forms, after all, have the power to induce the kind of moral outrage that yields criticism and condemnation, and this in turn, has the force to mobilize resistance.) Similarly, liberal theology, especially in its modern form as exemplified by Schleiermacher, has faced accusations of overemphasizing human abilities while downplaying sin and evil. This critique is partly rooted in the perception that Schleiermacher offers a merely perspectival view of evil. On this view, Schleiermacher does not consider evil to be real, but merely a matter of how one sees things.

If evil is merely a matter of perspective, questions arise about whether one can fully acknowledge suffering and, further, whether one can provide sufficient motivation for moral action to resist the conditions perpetuating those very evils. Contrary to these typical interpretations, I will argue that Schleiermacher's viewpoint extends beyond a purely perspectival understanding of evil and suffering, asserting that God indeed defeats evil. However, addressing the second concern requires additional explanation of how Schleiermacher's deeply social views of sin and evil can offer the necessary tools for human resistance to the mechanisms that facilitate evil and suffering. In the end, I argue that the scope of liberal theology's contributions to a theology of quotidian crises, in terms of enabling meaningful social change, has its limits. Additional tools are deemed necessary, prompting me to turn to the resources of liberation theology in the subsequent chapter.

I will commence by more thoroughly defining the concept of negativity and elucidating why the notions of sin and evil in Christian theology are relevant for understanding the role negativity should play in the quotidian crises framework. This discussion will lay the groundwork for the

specific focus on sin and evil in this chapter, which I will elaborate through a comparison of Schleiermacher's theology and the object relations theory discussed in the previous chapter. By drawing parallels, particularly between the work of Melanie Klein and Schleiermacher's theology, I will demonstrate how the quotidian crises framework aligns with certain liberal doctrinal formulations. Yet, the chapter concludes by highlighting issues that will lead me to explore liberation theologies in the final chapter.

What is 'negativity'?

In this section, I justify an important presupposition of the argument to come, namely, that one can draw parallels in theology and critical theory among the terms of negativity, nothingness, sin, and evil. At the end of the previous chapter, I discussed a number of objections commonly raised against reparative or postcritical projects, objections of which I said this project needs to be mindful. Negativity plays a central role in two of those objections: first, that critical theory relies on negativity, usually by way of the death drive (a negative force that seeks destruction), not only to provide a realistic picture of the human person, but also as the condition of possibility for transgression of the law. Such transgression, on these accounts, is what constitutes critique. I discussed this first in terms of Axel Honneth's work. On a more concrete level, this objection has also been stated in terms of political praxis, something I discussed through Patricia Stuelke's criticism of the reparative turn. For Stuelke, postcritical or reparative projects, because they do not provide a realistic account of negativity, occlude critique in ways that substitute mere affective gestures for real political and social change.

In this section, I will suggest that theological concepts of sin and evil can shed light on these issues being raised around the 'reparative turn' in critical theory. At the same time, claiming that sin and evil occupy the space of negativity in Christian theology in ways that parallel the negativity

discussed by critics of the reparative turn will not be uncontroversial, at least to those outside the discipline of theology. For that reason, in this section, I seek to make a case for drawing such parallels.

To some, perhaps especially the theologian, it may seem immediately obvious that negativity, nothingness, sin, and evil occupy the same terrain. For example, as will be discussed later in this chapter, theologians like Karl Barth turn to negativity and nothingness to discuss sin and evil (for Barth, real evil can only be approached through the concept of nothingness rather than negativity). Sin and evil, after all, commonly have negative connotations, whereas goodness commonly has positive ones. Sin, in Christian theology, is thought to be a source of a host of negative outcomes: suffering, punishment, harm, violence, and evil. It should not be difficult, then, to see why one could easily argue that kinds of social harms key to the quotidian crises view would also be one such negative result of sin, even a kind of evil.

At the same time, there are real differences worth noting between the approach a ‘secular’ theorist might take to negativity and the approach a theologian might take. Recall again the objection considered in the previous chapter in relation to the work of Axel Honneth. According to Honneth, who turns to object relations to develop a philosophical anthropology, critical theorists who relied on orthodox psychoanalysis might worry that an anthropology drawn from object relations theory underestimates the centrality of aggression to human nature and social life. In other words, such an account may risk a realistic view of the way conflict and transgression dynamically propels political life. One can see this view carried on by certain queer theoretical accounts of politics. Take this representative statement from Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman: “Generally negativity signifies a resistance to or undoing of the stabilizing frameworks of coherence imposed on thought and lived experience. In its disturbance of such totalizations, negativity enacts the dissent without which

politics disappears.”⁴ In other words, for some, negativity represents antinormativity, without which resistance to problematic and harmful social structures would not be possible. As Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth Wilson also write, “[Q]ueer is the structural negativity that makes sociality and subjectivity possible.”⁵ Negativity therefore plays a fundamental role in aspirations for social change among critical theorists and scholars of gender and sexuality, for it signifies that which transgresses or falls outside hegemonic norms. While I already discussed how one might reply to this objection, the key point here is not about the objection itself, but about the conception of negativity at play and whether theological categories of sin and evil are analogous to such a view of negativity.

In the accounts above, the Law is associated with hegemonic norms and negativity with transgression, such that theological interpretations of these same categories might fall flat. For example, one might argue that the sort of transgression of the law (sin) discussed in theology is *not* the sort conceptualized above, and therefore, in ‘secular’ discussions of the reparative turn. If anything, transgression here would be better understood in Nietzschean terms, as a kind of revaluation of values. In this case, the doctrine of sin would be associated with the very mechanisms under which social norms are perpetuated, for the institutions of religion and law serve the aims of power. For example, for Nietzsche, our approaches to the world are driven by what we value, not by any objective good and bad that could ground a notion of sin. (I like to eat apples because their taste gives me pleasure, not because apples are objectively good in themselves. I am a cis woman who likes to date men because it provides me with social acceptance, not because dating men is objectively good in itself.) For Nietzsche, we confuse what we value with a what we call objective truth; so, because we value being treated kindly, we call not treating someone kindly sin, and this

⁴ Lauren Gail Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, Theory Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), xii.

⁵ Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson, “Introduction: Antinormativity’s Queer Conventions,” *Differences* 26, no. 1 (May 1, 2015): 1–25, 14.

disciplines people into treating others nicely. For Nietzsche, there is no deeper meaning or structuring reality behind appearances, and to view things as valuable only in relation to a God or a future as we conceive of it (neither of which exist) is the root of all nihilism. The structures of Western morality, of which sin is a part, are mechanisms to escape this finite life, rather than to accept and affirm the world as it is given to one.⁶ Christianity is one particularly powerful means of this escapism.

One can also put this in terms of evil. On Nietzsche's account, there is no possibility of moral or metaphysical evil that would ground a notion of sin. Moreover, recall Ricoeur's engagement with 'the school of suspicion' discussed in the previous chapter: like Marx and Freud after him, Nietzsche does not accept belief in a world or meaning beyond appearances, and sees belief in such a world as a way to sidestep acceptance of radical finitude. The world before one is the world one has, and that the best one can do is simply live into that fact through affirmation of radical finitude. While Nietzsche is not interested in the problem of evil in any traditional sense, he would agree with others who have argued that evil does not, in fact, exist. In denying evil's existence, one could say that Nietzsche agrees with rationalists like Leibniz and Spinoza (and, as will be clear later in this chapter, Schleiermacher). Yet, Nietzsche does not deny that evil exists in order to defend God's omnibenevolence and omnipotence, for rather, Nietzsche declares the death of God. Therefore, Nietzsche shares the view that evil is no-thing, but, he takes it a step further, arguing that the concept of evil has been wielded by moralists to suppress life.

⁶ On his account, what was once considered good (the affirmation of life, will, action, strength, and so on) and what was once self-ascribed by the noble man has gone through a revaluation throughout particular points in history. For example, a priestly class deemed the noble class evil, and made goodness passivity, meekness, and sacrifice of self. Priestly morality, and religion (Christianity being the chief exemplar) will turn this resentment inward to the self, turning man against himself. Resentment, then, affirms nothingness rather than life. See, for example, §28 of Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Rev. student ed, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Therefore, negativity, for some, is the force which makes justice possible in its very transgression of the Law rather than that which inhibits justice by breaking the law. In not dating men and dating women instead, I can transgress the valued norm that structures sexual relations, revealing the Law's lack of objective grounding. Therefore, for the critical theorist after the death of God, sin might be a concept that upholds the Law, where the Law upholds hegemony or power (prohibiting, for example, homosexual relations) and is therefore an entirely different kind of negativity than that which transgresses the Law. After all, it is religion, and especially Christianity with its concomitant notions of sin and evil, that has contributed to what Gayle Rubin long ago called "sex negativity."⁷ Evil invokes the territory of morality and religion, which, for a scholar of gender and sexuality, might presumably be the terrain of ideology, empire, and heteronormative patriarchy. By attempting to draw parallels between Christian notions of sin and evil and the place of negativity in a reparative framework, am I not misrecognizing negativity altogether?

Rather than making sin, evil, and negativity *fit*, my aim is to place them adjacent to one another. I am not trying to rehabilitate these concepts, but rather to consider how the issues around sin and evil continue to play a role in the discussions of critique and negativity, even if not explicitly. Rather than reject the concepts altogether, as if they play no part in the reparative framework, my aim is to use these concepts better. For example, many feminist theologians have agreed with Rubin's point above, illuminating to evil's association with women originating in interpretations of Eve in the Hebrew Bible. Rather than jettisoning the concepts of sin and evil, however, feminist theologians have attempted to engage them in ways that facilitate the possibility of life for a greater number of people. In other words, a concept's having been put to insidious uses need not necessarily lead to abandoning that concept altogether. That is, evil's having been wielded as a tool to harm and oppress by associating particular groups of people with evil (e.g. women, queers,

⁷ Rubin, *Deviations*.

Muslims, people of color), does not render further inquiry into that concept worthless. Rather, it can provide the occasion not only for inquiring into such misuse, but also for judgement and discernment into better use.

For example, if the negativity of critique, following Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud, presupposes that nothing can exceed bare reality and necessity (as discussed by way of Ricoeur in the previous chapter), one faces a couple of issues around the possibility of ethical life. One might ask whether and to what extent the ‘secular’ critical tradition, in following ‘the school of suspicion,’ can adequately fund a resistance oriented toward justice, lacking anything excessive to bare reality and necessity. Does the reparative itself have to, in some sense, exceed bare reality and necessity in order for justice to be possible?

Put another way, if resistance is framed entirely in terms of that which transgresses the law, one can wonder whether negativity itself then constitutes its own norm. As noted above, structural negativity, and likewise queerness, have been named by some scholars of gender and sexuality as the condition of possibility for sociality, subjectivity, and politics as such. Sociality, subjectivity, and politics, after all, require the continuity of norms, norms that can only be norms if distinguished from what is deviant (queer). However, to suture queerness to the structural negativity that upholds norms risks, as Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth Wilson have argued, merely keeping that normativity in place. Antinormativity risks, then, becoming its own Law. As Wiegman and Wilson state,

The difficulty, as we see it, is that antinormative arguments—entrenched or *en passant*—tend to immobilize the activity of norms. By transmogrifying norms into rules and imperatives, antinormative stances dislodge a politics of motility and relationality in favor of a politics of insubordination. Importantly, these lifeless norms (e.g., heteronormativity) don’t stand prior to our antinormative analyses, awaiting diagnoses; rather, they are one of our own inventions. These norms birthed by queer antinormativity are often deployed in the service of the good; in standing against the injustices they spawn, we imagine that new worlds are built, exclusions are curbed, injuries are repaired, and diversity is bled of conflict, compromise, or ill feeling.⁸

⁸ Wiegman and Wilson, “Introduction,” 14.

Insofar as antinormativity remains stagnantly sutured to ‘normativity,’ however conceived, it risks becoming its own convention assuming its own goodness. Wiegman and Wilson’s concerns reflect that of Sedgwick’s discussed in the previous chapter. Rather than thinking in terms of power/sovereign/normativity or resistance/oppressed/queer, what difference would it make to think norms as generating “overdetermined relationalities”?⁹

Returning to Sedgwick’s discussion of the paranoid-schizoid position, simply demystifying ideology, repressed wishes, or hegemony does not then automatically tell one how to live or act, for one would be faced with a variety of options of how to respond. In other words, criticism itself is not determinative of one’s response, even if may delimit a field of possible responses. Not only that, but subjects live within a field of relations, with some relations being more determinative than others. Agency and resistance can be enacted along a spectrum of responses, not just in terms of transgression of the Law.

However, it is not only from the perspective of ‘secular’ theory that one might object to my turn to sin and evil, but also from the perspective of the trauma theologian. That is, within trauma theologies there is a tendency to resist engaging the concept of evil due to its association with theodicy. Theodicy, traditionally construed, seeks to reconcile God’s benevolence and omnipotence with the existence of evil.¹⁰ Insofar as theodicy represents an enterprise concerned with the rational justification of circumstances that cannot or should not be rationally justified, scholars working in trauma studies tend to reject such an impulse. In other words, there are some harms that just cannot be explained by recourse to reasons, and these are usually the types of harms central to trauma studies. Even then, such explanations are not guaranteed to help the victims of such harms, and in

⁹ Wiegman and Wilson, “Introduction,” 17.

¹⁰ There is no logical way to solve this problem unless one rejects or reformulates one of the premises (e.g. evil has no existence).

some cases, rational justification can cheapen harm or even cause further harm. For example, vestiges of Spinozian and Leibnizian rationalist theodicies can be heard in contemporary quips like “everything happens for a reason,” which is cruel in response to cases of genocide, rape, and torture.

There is good reason, in most cases, to avoid the rationalizing tendencies of theodicy, or what Karen Kilby has described as attempts to “bring God and evil into a kind of intellectual resolution.”¹¹ Kilby is right to argue that there are some questions theology must ask but refuse to answer. When it comes to evil, then, Kilby argues that the theologian must accept a systematic dissonance, for example, accepting that God’s goodness cannot be squared with empirical evil and suffering. My concern in turning to evil, however, is not to defend God’s goodness or to explain away terrible instances of suffering. Instead, I am interested in the way evil often has important implications for how one conceives of human freedom and responsibility within given structures (especially structures of domination), and as a result, how one thinks about how to *respond* in the face of suffering. Even if evil cannot be finally explained, that still leaves us with the question of how to make a life in the midst of a suffering world.¹² As Ricoeur has suggested, trying to explain evil in terms of theodicy will always lead to an aporia, and that aporia demands not a solution but a response.¹³

Relatedly, evil does not belong solely to the realm of traditional theodicy, for, as Susan Neiman has described its ‘secular’ form, evil is simply a problem having to do with a gap between *is*

¹¹ Karen Kilby, *God, Evil and the Limits of Theology* (London New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 77.

¹² Further, I do not think the Schleiermacherian account of evil I will discuss in this chapter could fully provide the resources to do so, which is why, for example, I have suggested that there are cases where the trauma frameworks of the first two chapters are useful.

¹³ “It is to this aporia that action and the catharsis of feelings and emotions are called upon not to give a solution but a response, a response able to render the aporia productive.” Paul Ricoeur, “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology,” ed. David Pellauer, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53, no. 4 (1985): 644.

and *ought*.¹⁴ As soon as one protests that the way something is *ought* not to be that way, one has raised the problem of evil, regardless of whether one believes in a deity. After all, one could say that to reject rational explanations for circumstances that appear unjust or unjustifiable is itself to take a stance on the problem of evil. Moreover, theologians of trauma have themselves, in trying to address trauma, nevertheless turned to those theological doctrines usually used to solve matters of sin and evil. Even though theologians of trauma might avoid the language of evil, it seems fair to say that evil nevertheless remains, at least implicitly, a critical site within which trauma is addressed. Of course, I have argued for moving away from cultural trauma discourse when discussing matters of social harm. At the same time, my argument does not entail jettisoning trauma discourse altogether. Even as I write, cultural trauma discourse has again surged as images of devastation and genocide circulate the news and social media feeds. For some, the gut-punch of what feels like sudden, extraordinary violence foments moral outrage. These *are* by all accounts, traumas. But to place them within the crisis ordinary framework would be to see them as amplifications (amplifications that are nonetheless horrendous and rage-producing) of something bigger and longer. It might force one to ask not only about the history of violence that has led to this particular moment, but also to do so in service of “a normative aspiration that goes beyond momentary condemnation.”¹⁵ Therefore, by demonstrating parallels between the reparative theoretical view and theological discussions of sin, evil, negativity, and nothingness, I ultimately aim to provide a theology of quotidian crises that can not only account for contemporary social harms, but also adequately motivate resistance to such harms. To begin, I turn to a discussion of some of the basics of Friedrich Schleiermacher.

¹⁴ Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004). Both Neiman’s book and Richard Bernstein’s work on Kant’s theory of radical evil have shaped some of the work in this chapter. See Richard J. Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2002).

¹⁵ Judith Butler, “The Compass of Mourning,” *The London Review of Books* 45, no. 20 (October 19, 2023), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v45/n20/judith-butler/the-compass-of-mourning>.

Toward a Theology of Quotidian Crises

1. *Why the Father of Modern Theology?*

While there are many ways to go about providing some theological contours to the quotidian crises framework, I have chosen to focus primarily on the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Because I find the quotidian crises framework to best accord with some themes in liberal theology, broadly construed, I have chosen Schleiermacher because he has come to represent almost a caricature of modern liberal theology. Surely, Schleiermacher is influential for liberal theology, but Schleiermacher also has his own views, which, until recently, have been largely drowned out by his critics.¹⁶ Schleiermacher's representing modern liberal theology is not only due to his being considered the father of the enterprise, but also due to his being the subject of much of the criticism by theologians who have sought to distinguish themselves from liberal theology. That is, in Schleiermacher's being the representative recipient of much criticism toward liberal theology, and the figure from whom critics distinguish themselves, he has come to be the caricature *par excellence* of liberal theology.

My drawing upon Schleiermacher and claiming that quotidian crises resonates with some liberal-theological views admittedly risks recapitulating the view liberal theology is a monolith, and Schleiermacher its representative. However, my hope is that more careful engagement with Schleiermacher might free his theology from the straightjackets it has been put in by critics, such that it might be put towards constructive use. Schleiermacher is a fitting figure with which to think on the themes at hand because he presents a substantial departure from certain Augustinian ideas of sin and evil, while remaining committed to fundamentals of the Christian tradition (total depravity,

¹⁶ See, for example, Brian Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001); and Christine Helmer, *Theology and the End of Doctrine*, First edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).

original and actual sin).¹⁷ What I will describe as Schleiermacher's incarnational view of redemption, especially, can mitigate some later worries raised by liberation theologians, and especially feminist theologians, around the way that the centrality of the cross in redemption has been used to justify violence and suffering in human life.¹⁸

I am certainly not the first to suggest that Schleiermacher's views of redemption can mitigate potential concerns regarding the justification of violence in a doctrine of atonement. Others have argued that Schleiermacher's focus on Jesus' life rather than death makes his theology a rich resource for, for example, feminist theology.¹⁹ At the same time, Schleiermacher remains a controversial figure for use in such projects, as scholars have documented how his theology involves problematic

¹⁷ In suggesting he departs from the Augustinian tradition, I am primarily referring to how Schleiermacher rejects a historical interpretation of the fall as well as a view of sin as congenitally passed on. There is, of course, a nuanced relationship between Schleiermacher's view of sin and Augustine's, and Schleiermacher does not seek to do away with the Augustinian account of sin so much as to resolve some of its inconsistencies. See Daniel James Pedersen, *Schleiermacher's Theology of Sin and Nature: Agency, Value, and Modern Theology* (London New York (N.Y.): Routledge, 2020). Pederson argues that Schleiermacher sees sin's origins and the origins of humanity as coextensive, and in so doing, provides an account of sin that is Augustinian in its assumptions. When I say in this chapter that Schleiermacher departs from much of the Augustinian tradition, I do so with a recognition that the relationship between the two is far more nuanced, and for those readers interested in the intricacies of the relationship, I direct them to Pederson's work. At the same time, Pedersen provides an alternative reading of Schleiermacher's account of sin that departs from the account given in this chapter. Pederson argues sin does not arise by being born into social conditions in which sin is modeled to one, but rather, sin is "an incapacity innate in a nature *without being natural*" that was present in the very first human. Schleiermacher does not see sin as "principally, or even solely, a *product* of social ill," (it does not originate in social ill), yet it is still very much "linked to social ill" (Pedersen, *Schleiermacher's Theology of Sin and Nature*, 101). For a discussion of the Augustinian tradition regarding sin, see Ian A. MacFarland, *In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). MacFarland discusses Schleiermacher in chapter two, although I do not think MacFarland gets Schleiermacher quite right, in part due to his failure to discuss Schleiermacher's views on the relationship between actual and original sin. See also Pederson's discussions of MacFarland in the work cited above.

¹⁸ Flora Keshgegian also emphasizes the incarnation in her theology of trauma; however, like other trauma-centric approaches, her interpretation of the incarnation remains focused on witness and remembrance. See especially chapter five of Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*.

¹⁹ See especially Mary Streufert, "Reclaiming Schleiermacher for Twenty-First Century Atonement Theory: The Human and The Divine in Feminist Christology," *Feminist Theology* 15, no. 1 (2006): 98–120; and Shelli M. Poe, *The Constructive Promise of Schleiermacher's Theology*, Paperback ed, Rethinking Theologies 4 (London: T&T Clark, 2023).

racial, gendered, and colonial presuppositions.²⁰ This chapter, however, is not primarily intended to recover resources within Schleiermacher's theology for feminist aims and neither is it intended to defend Schleiermacher's theology against the work that troubles his more insidious presuppositions. In other words, my aim is not to enter debates around whether Schleiermacher's theology is in some sense liberatory for women or particularly relevant for feminist work. Rather, by placing Schleiermacher's theology alongside the quotidian crises framework described in the previous chapter, I hope to illuminate and sharpen both the benefits of the framework *and* the limitations. That is, drawing upon Schleiermacher's theology can illuminate some of the metaphysical issues that arise in the quotidian crises framework, issues directly related to the work that negativity does. At the same time, Schleiermacher's theology cannot provide all the necessary tools imagine the kind of justice demanded by the quotidian crises framework. For that, I will turn elsewhere in the final chapter.

2. *Object-Relations and Schleiermacher's Anthropology: An overview*

While I have addressed some of the issues around negativity in the previous chapter, I will now proceed to discuss the way in which a theology of quotidian crises might also shed light on these same issues. To begin, I will rehearse some of the problems that arose regarding the concept of negativity in the object relations model. I will then draw some of the theological contours of the

²⁰ For some key texts in addition to those cited in the preceding footnote, see Iain G. Nicol, ed., *Schleiermacher and Feminism: Sources, Evaluations, and Responses*, Schleiermacher Studies and Translations (Lewiston Queenston Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992); Patricia Ellen Guenther-Gleason, *On Schleiermacher and Gender Politics*, Harvard Theological Studies 43 (Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity Press International, 1997); Thandeka, "Schleiermacher, Feminism, and Liberation Theologies: A Key," Jacqueline Mariña, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Pui-lan Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); Jörg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress press, 2007); Theodore M. Vial, *Modern Religion, Modern Race* (New York , NY): Oxford university press, 2020).

quotidian crises framework by developing them in conversation with the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher.

Debates around the reparative turn mentioned in the previous chapter generally aim to develop a realistic picture of the human person, one that accounts both for the force of social norms and expectations that shape one, as well as possibilities for breaking free from those norms. This is no less the case for those who have drawn upon object-relations in developing their philosophical anthropology. In the previous chapter, I argued that the Kleinian view is both realistic about the aggression central to human life while also allowing possibilities for the transformation of individual and social life.

In so doing, I concur with Amy Allen, who has argued that Klein's psychology provides a middle way between those that are too optimistic and those that are too pessimistic.²¹ According to Allen, Klein maintains a place for human drives for mastery and omnipotence in human psychic and social life, therefore avoiding an unrealistic optimism. At the same time, Klein does so without fixing these drives as the invariable motors of that very social life, as an excessively pessimistic account might do. The excessively pessimistic view is associated with the Lacanian kind of psychology that I discussed in chapter two. As Joel Whitebook has argued, "Critics of the ego, like Adorno and Lacan, prompted by a philosophical suspicion of synthesis, tend to hypostatize pathological, rigidified forms of ego formation into the ego as such. As a result, they are left only with a choice between two poisons, namely, violent unification or no unification at all."²² This view of the subject aligns quite easily with those of trauma-centric approaches more broadly. In certain versions, the postmodern subject is, as Tamsin Jones avers, "Fragmented, disordered, without coherence or

²¹ For Allen, Axel Honneth's philosophical anthropology is representative of one that is too optimistic. Amy Allen, *Critique on the Couch: Why Critical Theory Needs Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

²² Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory*, first paperback ed, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 14.

identifiable integrity—in a word, traumatized.”²³ On such accounts, then, the best one can do is simply engage less unknowingly in the cycle of repetition compulsion in which one finds oneself stuck. As I contended in the previous chapter, on Klein’s view, this immobility is not inevitable nor eternal.

By drawing out a theological anthropology by way of Schleiermacher, with specific attention to sin and evil, I aim to show more explicitly the potential for both an anthropological realism and an ambiguous or chastened political optimism. For the Kleinian metapsychology funding the quotidian crises framework, human life is profoundly interpersonal, relational, and social. Relations, including anxieties, phantasies, hatred, defenses, and love, are central to psychic life and present from the very beginning of life. Schleiermacher’s theological anthropology as I will show, is, likewise, deeply social and relational. Furthermore, Schleiermacher presents a view where sin is facilitated by one’s being born into social and historical circumstances where sin is present, rather than passed on in procreation.

Another parallel I will draw concerns the highly ambivalent nature of relationships. On the Kleinian view, aggression and destruction are part of the ways one relates to objects. Yet, these aggressions are “relational passions—constitutive tendencies to relate to others in certain ways, modes of sociality itself rather than innate antisocial tendencies.”²⁴ As modes of sociality, people are not bound to relate to others in singly destructive ways. One could understand Klein’s position as a form of compatibilism – one’s environment and relationships shape whether one relates to objects in destructive or loving ways, but they do not straightforwardly determine such relationships. Therefore, I also aim to show that Schleiermacher’s understanding of sin as an over-againstness between what he calls the sensory self-consciousness and the God-consciousness (which I will

²³ Tamsin Jones, “Traumatized Subjects: Continental Philosophy of Religion and the Ethics of Alterity,” *Journal of Religion* 94 no. 2 (April 2014), 143.

²⁴ Amy Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 53.

define below), likewise, presents both a highly social and relational view of human life and a compatibilist understanding of human agency. Schleiermacher frames original sin in historical and social terms, but nevertheless places responsibility for actual sin upon individuals.

Relatedly, in the Kleinian framework, change is an incomplete process that is never fully achievable. For Klein, love facilitates ego-integration in the depressive position, but even this achievement is precarious and momentary. An analogous movement can be seen in Schleiermacher's understanding of the relationship between the God-consciousness and the sensory self-consciousness, as Christian piety is framed in terms of an ever-increasing synthesis of the former with the latter. This increase can only take place through the facilitation of a community that is attuned to God through Christ and will bring me to a discussion of redemption and liberation in the latter third of the chapter.

3. *Schleiermacher: The Basics*

With these broad parallels in hand, I will now turn to a closer engagement with Schleiermacher's theology in order to flesh these parallels out. To begin, I will define crucial concepts that will be necessary to understand Schleiermacher's theology, namely Schleiermacher's notions of God-consciousness, sensory self-consciousness, and species consciousness.

Schleiermacher is famously associated with defining Christian piety in terms of what he calls the feeling of absolute dependence, or the God-consciousness. In Schleiermacher's usage, feeling [*Gefühl*] in the feeling of absolute dependence [*das schlechthinnige Abhängigkeitsgefühl*] is an immediate receptivity toward the infinite, or consciousness that one's action in the world is connected to and determined by the whole causal nexus.²⁵ The God-consciousness is therefore consciousness that

²⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016), §3. Hereafter, *CF*, section.paragraph, page number. See also Julia A. Lamm, "The Early Philosophical Roots of Schleiermacher's Notion of Gefühl, 1788–1794," *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 01

everything is absolutely dependent on something that transcends it, namely, God.²⁶ Describing Christian piety in terms of the *feeling* of absolute dependence has led to all sorts of misunderstandings and debates around what Schleiermacher means by the concept. Feeling does not for Schleiermacher mean what one might today call emotions or affects. It is not, in other words, a state of being happy or joyful, and, in fact, for Schleiermacher, the feeling of absolute dependence bears no necessary relationship to such emotions. According to Schleiermacher, feeling, as opposed to knowing and doing, is purely receptive, but it is not devoid of conceptual content.²⁷ Therefore, feeling might be better thought of as a disposition or attunement that one's existence is always part of a larger whole and that any circumstances one faces in life can be set in relation to this larger whole.²⁸ Schleiermacher sees the feeling of absolute dependence as residing in what he calls the domain of reciprocity: an individual is in every instances aware that their being is codetermined by and caught up in a larger web of relationships, ultimately grounded by God, or that which transcends and guides this web of relationships.²⁹

(1994): 67-105; and Jacqueline Mariña, "Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁶ Schleiermacher remarks that the feeling of absolute dependence is the same as "being in relation with God." *CF* §4, 12.

²⁷ I would take a kind of pure receptivity devoid of conceptual content to be more what Schleiermacher means by the kind of entangled self-consciousness he ascribes to lower animals. See *CF* §4.

²⁸ Julia Lamm has argued that in Schleiermacher's earlier formulations of *Gefühl*, he used it to describe a mode of moral discernment. For Schleiermacher, one's respect for the moral law is motivated by desire, or, in other words, moral discernment is mediated by feeling. See especially pages 53-54 of Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On the Highest Good*, trans. H. Victor Froese (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1992). While the moral dimension of *Gefühl* seems to drop out in Schleiermacher's later work, Lamm suggests that there may be significance to the fact that it began as a moral concept. Perhaps the ontological dimension of feeling, as a state of immediate receptivity toward the infinite, as present in the *Speeches*, could be understood as a precondition for moral discernment even if not explicitly moral. See Lamm, "The Early Philosophical Roots of Schleiermacher's Notion of Gefühl," 103.

²⁹ See especially Schleiermacher's discussion in *CF* §5.1.

Through the use and expression of what Schleiermacher calls one's sensory self-consciousness (*sinnlich bestimmten Selbstbewußtsein*), the God-consciousness is awakened.³⁰ According to Schleiermacher, the sensory self-consciousness is first an awareness of oneself as an existing being, an awareness that leads one to realize that there must be a transcendental ground holding one up as a subject in the world.³¹ In other words, one will eventually realize that one is not absolutely free, for one cannot control every circumstance around one nor exert one's influence on others and objects unimpeded. One will feel that one is at least partially free but also at least partially dependent.

To understand this, one can follow Schleiermacher's own example of a parent-child relationship. One can imagine that while a child is dependent upon their parent for, say, food, the child nevertheless can engage in "self-initiated activity," such as choosing to eat or spit out their food, which in turn affects their parent.³² If the child spits out their food, perhaps the parent now takes the time to sit and watch the child as they eat. If the child eats their food, perhaps the parent can carry on with whatever activity they were doing before. One can see, then, that the child is dependent on the parent, but does not feel absolutely so, because the child is still able to initiate her own activity on the objects that have been given to her. She feels both partially free and partially dependent, and the parent, in turn, feels the same way.³³ In this example, the parent does not represent that which is transcendent, but only that on which one feels partially dependent. The next step, therefore, is the feeling that just as the parent is limited in their freedom, so too are their

³⁰ *CF* §59.2.

³¹ We have an immediate awareness that "our entire existence does not come into consciousness for us as having arisen from our own self-initiated activity" (*CF* §4.3, 24). The self-consciousness has two features, then: "a being positioned-as-a-self and a not-having-been-positioned-as-such, so to speak or a being and a somehow-having-come-to-be" (*CF* §4.1, 19).

³² *CF* §4.2.

³³ On the flip side, Schleiermacher also argues that even an absolute autocrat depends on his country to a certain extent. See *CF* §4.2, 23.

parents, and so too is all of human life, such that one feels something transcendent upon which all absolutely depends. Thus, it is in being temporally, spatially, and (crucially) communally located that one becomes aware of one's self as a being—a being that is held up by a transcendent ground.³⁴

The sensory self-consciousness and the God-consciousness, while two separate consciousnesses, are always posited in relation to one another. One's sensory self-consciousness gives shape to the feeling of absolute dependence, such that without the sensory self-consciousness, the God-consciousness would "be an imperfect state, for it would be lacking in the boundedness and clarity that arises from being referred to the definiteness of sensory self-consciousness."³⁵ One could think of the God-consciousness like the gravitational field that is space itself. It is a constant and sustaining background, unnoticeable unless contrasted with the objects it touches, such as the planets and the stars. The God-consciousness is therefore crucially connected to and mediated by the sensory self-consciousness. Just as Einstein theorized the gravitational field by noticing the objects around which it bends and curves, the potency of the God-consciousness is mediated alongside one's unique sensory self-consciousness in interaction with the world around one.

Because the sensory self-consciousness uniquely mediates one's individual experiences, the God-consciousness is also fundamentally tied to one's experiences in the world, for every relation and every experience should be taken up into this feeling.³⁶ Piety is a state in which one's God-consciousness is sufficiently potent so as to lead one's sensory self-consciousness. Because, for Schleiermacher, the "God-consciousness can become real only in a process of interconnectedness

³⁴ According to Schleiermacher, there are two categories, "organ" and "medium of presentation," that make up the relationships "by which the self-consciousness that accompanies human self-initiated states becomes a medium of stimulus for God-consciousness" (*CF* §59.2, 349). See also §60.1. Organ, for Schleiermacher, includes one's human body and agency.

³⁵ *CF* §5.3, 32.

³⁶ Schleiermacher states, "The more a subject would then posit oneself in every element of sensory self-consciousness to be absolutely dependent, alongside one's partial freedom and partial dependence at the same time, the more religious one would be" (*CF* §5.3, 22).

with some sensory determination of self-consciousness,” piety is one’s sensory self-consciousness being led, as it were, by the God-consciousness.³⁷ In short, one is attuned to one’s ultimate dependence upon God, seeing freedom and dependence not at odds, but as an integrated whole. Put another way, as one takes in the world around one, in spite of whether one experiences pain or joy, one still feels that one is ultimately sustained by the gravitational field that holds one’s feet on the ground.

One could also think of the sensory self-consciousness like an individual musician in a jam band, who contributes their own melody and variation to a song. This contribution is in view of a cohesive yet improvisational and spontaneous jam session, with a basic shared rhythm or chord progression. The collaboration both constitutes and is sustained by the larger cohesiveness of the song to which each musician contributes, much like the God-consciousness is a keeping-in-view of one’s ultimate dependence on the whole.

Without the feeling of absolute dependence, the sensory self-consciousness falls apart, and one comes to see an over-againstness between oneself and one’s circumstances. Without the sense of the larger cohesiveness of the song, and without keeping in view the collaboration and relatedness of other individuals playing in the band, one might begin to play a solo in a contrasting key, seeing oneself to compete with the other musicians. In the case of the jam band, the song might begin to actually fall apart without the shared collaboration of each member. It might actually no longer sound like a cohesive song, but more like two different songs being played over and against one another. In the case of the relationship between the sensory self-consciousness and the God-consciousness, one comes to *see* oneself over-against the whole interdependent network of relationships held up ultimately by God. However, one cannot actually extricate oneself from being absolutely dependent upon that causal nexus.

³⁷ *CF* §60.1, 356.

The relationship between Schleiermacher's God-consciousness and sensory self-consciousness evinces Schleiermacher's commitment to the way in which humans are shaped by their experience in the world. The two types of consciousness are always in relationship, the degree to which may change.³⁸ Neither the God-consciousness nor the sensory self-consciousness are ever at zero, for Schleiermacher says that the God-consciousness "both accompanies all of our self-initiated activity, thus also our entire existence because this self-initiated activity is never at zero."³⁹ Moreover, according to Schleiermacher, "the world offers to the human spirit an abundance of stimuli toward development of those conditions in which the consciousness of God can be realized."⁴⁰ Every relation and every experience should be taken up into the feeling of absolute dependence, and because it is through the sensory self-consciousness that the God-consciousness is awakened, the perfection of the world relates to its suitability for conditions under which a person's God-consciousness might emerge and increase.

Schleiermacher's discussion of the God-consciousness and the sensory self-consciousness ultimately culminates in his discussion of the Christian community. What Schleiermacher calls "species consciousness," the external communication of one's interior states, is crucial to the awakening and mediation of the God-consciousness.⁴¹ So, for Schleiermacher, the perfection of

³⁸ See *CF* §5.3: "A claim of perseverance for the highest self-consciousness can be set forth only on the presupposition that sensory self-consciousness would also be posited with it at the same time. Naturally, this being posited at the same time cannot, however, be thought of as a fusion of the two kinds of self-consciousness....Rather, what is meant by this being posited at the same time is a simultaneous being of the two in the same element" (32).

³⁹ *CF* §4.3, 24.

⁴⁰ *CF* §59, 345

⁴¹ For Schleiermacher, the feeling of absolute dependence is communicated through one's relationships with others in what Schleiermacher calls the species consciousness. Schleiermacher describes this consciousness as an externalization of one's internal states such as feeling. In other words, one communicates interior states, rendering them perceptible to others. Through such communication, communities are formed, including Christian communities like the church. While everyone has a God-consciousness, it is stimulated by way of its external expression by others. In other words, Schleiermacher argues that it is through communication of feeling by means of "facial

humanity lies in the ability to take up any oppositions to life (e.g. sin and evil) into the God-consciousness, but the potency of one's God-consciousness develops by way of species consciousness, as one is drawn into communication and fellowship with Christ through the Christian community. As Schleiermacher states, piety consists in "an absolute facility for the development of God-consciousness proceeding from each given stirring and in each situation, a facility that has been set forth as the point to aim at, is itself a constant communion with God."⁴² This communion with God is facilitated by communion with Christians, through whom Christ's spirit is carried on.⁴³

Christ provides the ideal picture of the Christian life, for he had a perfectly potent God-consciousness. That is not to say that the God-consciousness completely overtook the sensory self-consciousness in Christ, only that Christ's God-consciousness developed in his life as sufficiently potent so as to lead every impression he received from the sensory self-consciousness. Therefore, Christ also mediates piety to the Christian community. As one is in greater fellowship with Christ through the Christian community, one will be increasingly led by the God-consciousness. This is a point that will be crucial in my later discussion of Schleiermacher's understanding of evil.

Thus far, I have given a basic overview of a number of important terms in Schleiermacher's theology. Even with these basics, one can see, first, that Schleiermacher's anthropology, like that of the quotidian crises view, is deeply social and relational. The God-consciousness is experienced and

expression, gesture, tone of voice, and indirectly by means of the spoken word," that piety is facilitated. *CF* §6.2, 40-41.

⁴² *CF* §62.2, 261.

⁴³ "As is true of every essential feature of human nature, in the development of religious self-consciousness it necessarily becomes community as well, and indeed community that is, on the one hand, uneven and fluid, and, on the other hand, distinctly circumscribed -- that is, church" (*CF* §6, 38-39). Here I am following arguments made in Kevin W. Hector, "The Mediation of Christ's Normative Spirit: A Constructive Reading of Schleiermacher's Pneumatology," *Modern Theology* 24, no. 1 (January 2008), pp. 1-22.; and Kevin Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

increased in relationship to the sensory self-consciousness, and the God-consciousness is facilitated through the influence of Christ in community. Relationships are therefore crucial sites in which one finds one's bearings in the world and in relation to God. Second, one can see that Schleiermacher offers a compatibilist theory of freedom, which, put simply, means that humans can be free to act within the determined laws of nature (laws of nature that, for Schleiermacher, are determined by God). Similarly, adherents to Kleinian object-relations also affirm a compatibilist theory of freedom: Kleinian object-relations offers possibilities for both emphasizing the force of socialization while also recognizing that individuals can make choices conditioned by but exceeding that force. How, more specifically, Schleiermacher's theology can accord with the quotidian crises view will continue to become more apparent through a discussion of Schleiermacher's views of sin and evil.

4. Sin, Sociality, and Aggression

With an understanding of the God-consciousness, one is primed to grasp Schleiermacher's notions of sin and evil. It is crucial to note, first, that sin is highly socially-mediated and, second, that Schleiermacher's doctrine of sin is only understandable in relation to grace and redemption. I see an analogue, then, with Klein's anthropology, where aggression is a mark of human relational life, and yet, love and reparation are nevertheless possible within one's relations.

Sin, for Schleiermacher, occurs when the sensory-self consciousness is given more power than the God-consciousness to determine one's next moment of consciousness. It is the "obstruction or arrest of the vitality of the higher-consciousness [God-consciousness], so that there comes to be little or no union of it with the various determinations of the sensory self-

consciousness...”.⁴⁴ Humans need redemption from a determinative belief that the self is caused by intraworldly conditions, rather than an ultimate (God) upon which all of the world depends.⁴⁵

Moreover, Schleiermacher describes the origin of sin in thoroughly social terms, departing from much of the Augustinian tradition. Kevin Vander Schel sums up Schleiermacher’s social view of sin, stating, “The force of sin is ‘something thoroughly collective’ (*ein durchaus Gemeinschaftliches*), and it is only in its genuinely collective character that sin and guilt are properly understood. Sin is overcome, then, not first in the regeneration of single individuals but in the communal life established through the redemptive influence of Christ.”⁴⁶ Schleiermacher describes sin as a “derangement” (*Störung*) of human nature and as a kind of readiness to sin that precedes one’s actions.⁴⁷ This disposition toward sin exists because, for Schleiermacher, sin has been a part of historical human development, such that one is always born into a context in which social life is broken.⁴⁸ Because those around one will have an insufficient God-consciousness, and thereby represent to one “models of sinful being,” one will be influenced and conditioned to likewise have an insufficient God-consciousness.⁴⁹

There is, for example, an antimony between good and bad that will exist throughout all of humanity. He argues that in all of sinful humanity, “there is not a perfectly good action...nor is there one perfectly pure moment, *i.e.* one in which something does exist in secret antagonism to the God-consciousness.”⁵⁰ Moreover, he argues that sin is always attached to the good in its connection with

⁴⁴ *CF* 11.2, 55.

⁴⁵ See Jacqueline Mariña, “Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴⁶ Kevin Vander Schel, “Schleiermacher,” *T&T Clark Companion to the Doctrine of Sin*, ed. Keith L. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury 2016), p. 252.

⁴⁷ *CF* §71.4.

⁴⁸ As Walter Wyman, Jr. points out, “In this analysis, the universality of sin is tied, not to the seminal presence of human nature in Adam, but to a social and historical theory of the interconnectedness of individuals and generations.” Walter Wyman, Jr. “Rethinking the Christian Doctrine of Sin,” p. 211. See also *CF* §71.2.

⁴⁹ Wyman, “Rethinking the Christian Doctrine of Sin,” p. 211.

⁵⁰ *CF* §73.1, p. 305.

redemption. Because of this close connection, Schleiermacher sees sin and grace as existing side by side “even in the process of disappearing.”⁵¹

I take the reason for sin’s always existing alongside grace to lie, again, in a thoroughly social view of human life and redemption. For example, when Schleiermacher describes the fundamental connection between sin and grace, he points to one’s relationship to communal life. According to him, “even the weakest and most defiled God-consciousness always, nonetheless, belongs to some collective life in which, at the same time, a better life exists, one proclaimed by use of doctrine and law.”⁵² Therefore, just as the God-consciousness is always present even during sin, sin is never separate from grace and from God’s greater redemptive purposes. Thus, for Schleiermacher, God does not will sin, but ordains it only “as that which makes redemption necessary.”⁵³

This social account of sin parallels Klein’s understanding of human aggression in her reinterpretation of Freud’s concept of the death drive. For her, the death drive is not a governing principle within the psychic organism that is redirected outward onto external objects. Instead, she views it as an aggressive mode of relating one’s psyche to a primary object. As Amy Allen remarks, “[T]he distinct advantage of Kleinian drive theory is that it does not commit us to a problematic assumption of a biologically determined antisociality. Rather...aggression and destructiveness are relational passions—constitutive tendencies to relate to others in certain ways, modes of sociality itself rather than innate antisocial tendencies.”⁵⁴ Like Schleiermacher’s reformulation of the Augustinian view of sin, wherein sin is passed on through procreation, humans are almost invariably led to destruction in light of social context, but not because they are biologically determined to do

⁵¹ *CF* §80.2, p. 327.

⁵² *CF* §80.6, p. 493.

⁵³ *CF* §81.3, p. 335. While Schleiermacher’s understanding of the divine will is not crucial to my argument at this juncture, I will note that Schleiermacher ascribes to a kind of supralapsarianism. Schleiermacher thinks God is the author of sin, but not in the same sense that God is the author of redemption. Sin only exists alongside grace and is ordained by God only in relation to redemption.

⁵⁴ Amy Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 53.

so. When the biological determinism is removed from the picture, there can be movement to narrow the gap between one's internalized perceptions of external objects and the reality of said objects, such that one's relations based upon these phantasies can be reoriented. Such reorientation, through moments of reparation enacted in the depressive position as discussed in the previous chapter, is one of the goals of analysis. And furthermore, like Schleiermacher's view wherein grace is mediated by community, reparation for Klein is mediated through relations with others.

However, at least on Sedgwick's reading, the reparative position allows one to provide nourishment for one's parts-objects in a way that is not oriented toward any preconceived whole. Reparativity thus does not presume a predetermined directionality.⁵⁵ For Schleiermacher, the Whence of Absolute Dependence is the sun which can be seen through the communal sunglasses that mediate its light. There is a presumed directionality, one mediated in Christian community through the spirit of Christ. At the same time, for Schleiermacher, these communal sunglasses never guarantee full sight of the sun. His dialectical interpretation of the Christian tradition, famously associated with the hermeneutical circle, seeks knowledge as a process based in communication rather than correspondence.⁵⁶ In other words, while one might seek truth in the process of understanding, absolute truth is never fully attainable, for one must keep drawing upon a sense of the whole as one incorporates new insights. Misunderstanding is always part and parcel of the communal engagement with a tradition's truth-claims, and in fact, misunderstanding is the beginning of what Schleiermacher calls rigorous, artful interpretation.⁵⁷ A Christian community, then, could

⁵⁵ Amy Allen has also argued that Melanie Klein's object relations theory is not subject to a charge of developmentalism.

⁵⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Dialectic, or, The Art of Doing Philosophy*, ed. Terrence N. Tice, a study ed. of the 1811 notes, (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Pr, 1996). For a helpful elucidation of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, especially in relation to Gadamer's engagement with Schleiermacher, see Andrew Bowie, "The Philosophical Significance of Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics," Mariña, *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*.

⁵⁷ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, ed. Heinz Kimmerle, Texts and Translations Series/American Academy of Religion 1 (Missoula, Mont: Scholars Press, 1977).

presumably misrecognize the sun, the adjudication of which will be one of the driving questions of the next chapter.

I should also note that in drawing parallels between aggression, destruction, and power and the Christian doctrine of sin, I do not mean to suggest that sin amounts to aggression, destruction, and power, not least because sin has been conceived in a vast variety of ways throughout the history of the Christian tradition. For Schleiermacher, sin might simply be feeling that one is determined by caprice or one's own presumed free actions (as if one is absolutely free). But, parallels with aggression and power are also warranted because one could say that for Schleiermacher, in locating sin in an over-againstness between freedom and dependence, the individual and the whole, sin could manifest as an aggression of the individual over and against another who is part of the whole. Therefore, aggression, destruction, and power can reasonably fall under Schleiermacher's category of sin, even if they do not exhaust it.

As one can see, both the object-relations framework and Schleiermacher's theological anthropology present relational views of human aggression and sin. At the same time, it is important to note that Schleiermacher nevertheless maintains that one is responsible for one's sin, for one does not simply receive original sin in light of social influences. While human life is thoroughly historical and social, individuals nevertheless have freedom within the constraints of history and their social context to actualize sin. One might be born into a context where taking advantage of others is normalized, such that one likewise learns to accept such taking-advantage of others. However, as soon as one takes part in such taking-advantage oneself, in spite of its normative force, one can still be held responsible for actualizing this norm. Part of the usefulness of this approach is that one can both recognize the power of socialization for shaping one's normative commitments, but one can at the same time hope that such normative commitments can be changed, for one is not determinatively committed to these norms.

5. *Evil: The 'Typical' Reading of Schleiermacher*

It is with the above understanding of sin in mind that I can now turn to Schleiermacher's notion of evil. As I have mentioned, I have chosen to focus on evil, first of all, because evil is generally the term used to describe and potentially explain all manner of injury, harm, and suffering in human life, all of which are directly pertinent to this project's engagement with trauma and structural injury. Furthermore, in objections to the reparative turn, concerns often center around the extent to which negativity goes deep enough – that is, deep enough to consider the possibility of transgressing hegemonic social norms such that social change can occur. I am suggesting that such concerns can be approached, and perhaps even enriched, by turning to the concept of evil in theology. With this in mind, I will elucidate Schleiermacher's understanding of evil before drawing parallels with Kleinian anthropology.

While I do not see Schleiermacher's account as able to provide a description for the most horrendous phenomena within the terms of 'evil,' he does, more than he is usually credited with, recognize how suffering and pain mark human life in its depths. When he was just nine years old, Friedrich Schleiermacher's youngest child, Nathanael, contracted scarlet fever and suddenly died. Schleiermacher delivered a sermon at his son's graveside, noting the gravity of this loss, for it was a pain he had not experienced before: "Many a heavy cloud has passed over my life; yet what has come from without, faith has surmounted, and what from within, love has recompensed. But now, this one blow, the first of its kind, has shaken my life to its roots."⁵⁸ In the sermon, Schleiermacher declines the typical consolations his friends have offered him for experiencing this kind of loss, such as assurances that his son is now free from the dangers of life in this world or that he is now with a

⁵⁸ Friedrich Schleiermacher, "Sermon at Nathanael's Grave, November 1, 1829," in *Servant of the Word: Selected Sermons of Friedrich Schleiermacher*, trans. Dawn De Vries (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 209.

community of others who have gone before. Rather, Schleiermacher turns to Biblical passages that suggest his affirmation of faith in spite of the unjustifiable, at least on human terms, circumstances of his young son's death. Doing so, Schleiermacher appears to refuse a theodicy, instead affirming God's gift of Nathanael's life. For example, referencing Job 1:21, Schleiermacher expresses his gratitude that God gave him Nathanael, noting the "imperishable" mark his son leaves behind, even if Nathanael is no longer physically present.⁵⁹

Therefore, Schleiermacher's faith in God remains, not because of a rational defense of God's providence, as the consolation that Nathanael is now where he is meant to be, freed from the cares of this world, would suggest. Rather, Schleiermacher affirms faith in God through a recognition of the gift of life lived with Nathanael, as painfully short as it was. In other words, one could understand Schleiermacher's refusal of the comfort of typical consolations, and his turn to affirm faith in spite of an evil that has troubled him in his very depths, as displaying Schleiermacher's recognition of an instance where one's lived experience of suffering shatters theological projects that would attempt to make sense of such evil.⁶⁰

At the same time, those familiar with Schleiermacher's mature theology might wonder how his views on evil don't amount to an overdetermined theological optimism, underwritten by a strong view of moral progress towards God's good ends. Schleiermacher, and liberal theology more broadly, has generally been associated with this optimistic view, even considered its key exemplar. This association is not without reason, for liberal theology has faced accusations of overemphasizing human abilities while downplaying sin and evil.

In this subsection, I explore the way that Schleiermacher's understanding of evil is typically presented. This typical view spans criticisms from Hegel to Barth to more contemporary

⁵⁹ Schleiermacher, "Sermon at Nathanael's Grave," p. 212.

⁶⁰ See Sameer Yadav, "A Joban Theology of Consolation," *Harvard Theological Review* (forthcoming).

engagements with Schleiermacher's views of evil. According to this usual reading, Schleiermacher offers a merely perspectival view of evil. In other words, some have argued that Schleiermacher does not take evil seriously enough because he does not recognize evil's reality, but rather chalks it up to one's subjective interpretation of one's circumstances. If evil is merely a matter of how one sees things, then two objections can be raised: first, one might wonder if Schleiermacher's account does justice to the phenomenological gravity of suffering, and second, one might ask whether Schleiermacher's account can fund the ethical motivation necessary to confront and resist evil and suffering. I will explain these objections more fully below. In the next subsection, I will offer a slightly different interpretation of Schleiermacher than this typical one, however, and in so doing, argue that Schleiermacher is not fully liable to the charges usually leveled against him regarding the concept of evil. It is essential to delve into how Schleiermacher's profoundly social views on sin and evil can furnish the necessary tools for resisting mechanisms that contribute to evil and suffering. The discussion to follow, then, shares parallels with the potential concerns that might be raised against the quotidian crises framework. Whereas I have thus far discussed these in terms of negativity, the concept of evil in Christian theology, I wager, can shed light on some of what is at stake in these concerns. I begin, however, with discussing some of the prevailing presentations of Schleiermacher's view of evil.

Walter Wyman has argued that, for Schleiermacher, the effects of evil are merely "a problem of consciousness—how one looks at things."⁶¹ It is not difficult to see why Wyman describes Schleiermacher's understanding of evil in this way. First, Schleiermacher states that while sin is antecedent to evil, evil is defined as persistent causes of hindrances to life. Such hindrances only become a problem, for Schleiermacher, when it is the sensory self-consciousness leading one rather

⁶¹ Walter E. Wyman, "Sin and Redemption," in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Mariña (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 147.

than the God-consciousness. In this case, which Schleiermacher calls “the dominion of flesh alone,” each given element of life would be “categorized as an evil.”⁶² Even just the language of *categorizing* something as an evil (rather than stating that it *is* evil) suggests a notion that evil only is evil so long as one feels or sees something to be so.

This perspectival sense of evil is made more acute by Schleiermacher’s dialectical understanding of evil in relation to good. For Schleiermacher, evil is related to the absolute dependence of everything on God in the same way as all good is related to it. Advancements of life and restraints on life are interdependent processes, such that “one process cannot exist without the other process.”⁶³ One cannot grow and develop without having experienced restraints on life, and hindrances to life are therefore fundamental to human development.⁶⁴ Like sin, Schleiermacher clarifies that God does not cause evil, but arranges it “only as a co-condition of what is good and only in relation to what is good.”⁶⁵ Thus, evil is experienced only in relation to good, but the stronger one’s God-consciousness, the less one will experience circumstances as evil. Because the whole world is a medium for the development of the God-consciousness,⁶⁶ the God-consciousness is stirred up no more nor less by what is pleasurable than by what is not pleasurable. The God-consciousness can be obscured by the sensory self-consciousness in suffering, but only to the degree to which freedom and dependence come apart. Therefore, according to Schleiermacher, so long as one is in fellowship with Christ, one’s consciousness cannot be fully saturated by evil.

⁶² *CF* §75.1, 474.

⁶³ *CF* §48.2, 268.

⁶⁴ Schleiermacher is careful to clarify that God does not cause evil but arranges them “only as a co-condition of what is good and only in relation to what is good” (*CF* §48.3).

⁶⁵ *CF* §48.3.

⁶⁶ I do not mean development in the sense that the God-consciousness qualitatively or substantially changes in a person over time, only that one develops *how much one is led by* the God-consciousness as a matter of degree.

Schleiermacher states that the redeemed person is “never filled with the consciousness of any evil, because evil is not able obstructively to affect one’s common life with Christ.”⁶⁷

One can, then, understand this not-being-filled-with-the-consciousness-of-evil as simply an ability to change one’s perspective; that is, that being led by the God-consciousness is a human adeptness in seeing all circumstances as ultimately good.⁶⁸ In light of this, Wyman has called Schleiermacher’s understanding of evil “a subjective reduction of the reality of evil to a phenomenon of consciousness.”⁶⁹ There are at least two consequences, according to Wyman, of reducing evil to a phenomenon of consciousness. First, because evil is merely a consequence of how one perceives reality, one with a perfect God-consciousness will simply perceive the most grave of circumstances in light of an ultimate good, such that these grave circumstances do not disturb one’s consciousness. Wyman states, “Given the ideal possibility of a perfect consciousness, bodily suffering or even the death of a loved one, while real enough, would not be evils: neither would disturb one’s religious consciousness.”⁷⁰ Such a subjective reduction, in turn, prevents resistance to evil and suffering. That is, if evil is merely a function of the sensory self-consciousness not being sufficiently led by the God-consciousness, then an attempt to combat evil and suffering would have to be a function of the sensory self-consciousness. The God-consciousness, after all, would lead one to *not* experience hindrances to life as evil.

While Wyman points to phenomenological and anthropological concerns, Katherine Sonderegger has raised Christological ones as well. In order to understand these Christological concerns, however, a brief account of Schleiermacher’s view of redemption is in order. For

⁶⁷ *CF* §101.2, 630.

⁶⁸ The influence of Spinoza on Schleiermacher’s thought is relevant here, especially Spinoza’s understanding of evil and good in his *Ethics*. See Julia A. Lamm, *The Living God: Schleiermacher’s Theological Appropriation of Spinoza* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

⁶⁹ Wyman, “Sin and Redemption,” 138.

⁷⁰ Walter E. Wyman, “Sin and Redemption,” 147.

Schleiermacher, redemption is not effected in Christ's death and resurrection, but in the union of the divine and human natures in Christ.⁷¹ Schleiermacher's is a thoroughly incarnational account of redemption, as proving that the divine essence is fully combined with human nature in Christ is of supreme importance to Schleiermacher. If Christ were not God, then he could not redeem. For Schleiermacher, God is divine love, and he calls love the only attribute that can be equated with God.⁷² Considering Schleiermacher's definition of love as "the impulse to unite self with neighbor and to will to be in neighbor," Christ's act of redemption is thereby also the pure act of love, ordained in God's wisdom.⁷³ In other words, Christ unifies the divine and human natures in a pure act of love and, in so doing, reveals God in the world to humans.

One's experience of redemption in the world thus rests upon the person of Christ, who draws people to himself and the sense of grace.⁷⁴ The work of redemption, for Schleiermacher, is therefore experienced as union with Christ in Christian community. It is the process of more and more so coming to live in the world as if one is not absolutely free but depends upon an infinite God. Furthermore, this work of redemption has been carried out by divine wisdom in ordering and determining the world for God's self-communication in Christ.⁷⁵ Because redemption is effected in the union of the divine natures, Schleiermacher does not see Christ's suffering on the cross nor even Christ's resurrection as the primary mechanisms of redemption. Rather, for Schleiermacher, the crucifixion can be understood as one example of God's reconciling love, where, in Jesus' perfect

⁷¹ Hence Schleiermacher's assertion that John 1:14 "is the basic text for all dogmatics." Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 59.

⁷² *CF* §167.1.

⁷³ *CF*, §165.1; cf §166

⁷⁴ *CF*, §166.

⁷⁵ *CF*, §168 and §169.

receptivity on the cross, God's being is reproduced as the pure activity of love.⁷⁶ Therefore, Christ experiences sympathy with the pain and suffering of humanity, but never the depth of misery.

While some have found this incarnational view of redemption to be a rich resource for feminist theologies that seek to de-emphasize Christ's death, at the same time, for others, whether this depiction of Christ does justice to the depth of suffering becomes an issue. For example, Katherine Sonderegger has described Schleiermacher's Christ thusly,

The Christ of *The Christian Faith* [Glaubenslehre] does not burn with a commission to be delivered, does not struggle under temptation, does not long for the cup to pass by him, nor empty his glory for the dereliction of the lost. The synoptic Jesus -- at least until Harnack -- seems out of place in the company of this sublime Christ of the modern world. The conflict, the anguish, the wrath and judgment of the Passion do not belong to the liberal Redeemer. He does not yearn or bear or overcome, but rather moves unimpeded through the misery of the world, as light effortlessly fills a darkened room, suffused with sympathy for sin yet serene in its midst.⁷⁷

As intimated by Sonderegger's description of Schleiermacher's Christ, this depiction of redemption seems to cover over the depth and gravity of pain and suffering. This Christ seems so idealistic as to no longer even truly be human, for it is unclear that this Christ really experienced all the depths of human pain and violence.

While I will return to Schleiermacher's understanding of suffering in the next section, for now, note that just as suffering did not finally overcome Christ, neither should it overcome the Christian. For Schleiermacher, then, suffering does not add to the perfection of the corporate life but is only useful insofar as Christ gave himself up to suffering and showed that it need not be a hindrance or opposition to his life. For Sonderegger, this particular view of the atonement is, in part, a result of Schleiermacher's commitment to a moral teleology: "Christ announces the individual's victory over sin: for the faithful, suffering is no longer punishment but rather fellowship in Christ's

⁷⁶ *CF*, 108.6. See Kevin Hector, "Actualism and Incarnation: The High Christology of Friedrich Schleiermacher," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006): 307-322.

⁷⁷ Katherine Sonderegger, "Must Christ Suffer to Redeem?: The Doctrine of Vicarious Atonement in Schleiermacher and Baeck," *Zeitschrift für neuere Theologieggeschichte* (January 1, 1995), 181.

work of surmounting the world's evil and misery.”⁷⁸ It is this moral teleology illuminated by Sonderegger that I will suggest is crucial for a re-evaluation of Schleiermacher's views on suffering in the section to follow.

The phenomenological, anthropological, and Christological concerns raised by Wyman and Sonderegger have deeper historical precedence, especially in two of Schleiermacher's most famous critics' engagements with his notions of sin and evil: Hegel and Barth. A brief discussion of their respective objections to Schleiermacher's view of evil will further illuminate the typical interpretation of Schleiermacher's view of evil I have been exploring thus far. In addition, it will illuminate how evil comes to be discussed in relation to negativity, especially as Barth takes up Schleiermacher's understanding of evil. Again, my aim in the next section will be to provide an alternative understanding of Schleiermacher's view of evil, one that does not recapitulate what I am calling the typical interpretation. Before doing so, however, it is worth getting clear on what that typical interpretation is.

Hegel expressed concerns that a “religion of feeling” could not sufficiently ground a true concept of evil, nor motivate resistance to it. (Wyman's criticisms in many ways echoes that of Hegel's). For Hegel, feeling is purely subjective – the content of feeling “is *my own*, and indeed is my own as this particular individual.”⁷⁹ Therefore, according to Hegel, a religion of feeling provides no objective grounds for adjudicating right and wrong, and as a result, funding a concept of moral evil. For Hegel, “We cannot say of feeling that it is good or not good, that it is correct and genuine on the one hand, or false or spurious on the other. This indeterminateness is feeling [per se].”⁸⁰ Therefore, when feeling is taken to be justification for truth-claims, Hegel argues that “the

⁷⁸ Katherine Sonderegger, “Must Christ Suffer to Redeem?” 183.

⁷⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1988), 286.

⁸⁰ Hegel, *Lectures*, 139

distinction between good and evil comes to naught, for evil with all its shadings and qualifications is in feeling just as much as the good.”⁸¹ According to Hegel, absent an objective ground for adjudicating good and evil, one cannot draw a true distinction between good and evil.

As should be clear by my discussion of feeling earlier in this chapter, however, Schleiermacher’s notion of the feeling of absolute dependence is distinct from the way Hegel describes the religion of feeling. For Schleiermacher, the *feeling* of absolute dependence is not to be equated with *Whence* of absolute dependence. That is, God should not be confused with a human awareness of God, as if God is a function of one’s subjective feelings. Rather, God is that on which one feels one absolutely depends, and thus distinguishable from the feeling itself. Schleiermacher makes this clear early on in the *Glaubenslehre*. “[T]his ‘whence’ [God] is not the world in the sense of the totality of temporal being, and still less is it any one part of that totality.”⁸² Therefore, God remains the objective ground of truth that is distinct from humans’ subjective taking-in of that truth. At the same time, I take Schleiermacher to understand God to not be subject to the human concepts of good and evil. One’s attunement to God, a God who is redeeming love, is an attunement therefore to all circumstances – whether *felt* as good or evil – being circumscribed within God’s ultimate purposes of redemption. In that way, evil does not exist for Schleiermacher, but not because there is no objective truth. Rather, humans cannot fully attain understanding of that truth.

Similarly to Hegel, Barth argues that Schleiermacher makes a merely superficial distinction between good and evil; however, Barth’s charge is more potent for it does not rest, as Hegel’s does, on a misattribution of this superficiality to a subjective ‘religion of feeling.’ Instead, Barth attributes

⁸¹ Hegel, *Lectures*, 143.

⁸² Schleiermacher, *CF* §4.4, 25. Just before this passage, Schleiermacher clarifies that the Whence in “the whence of absolute dependence” refers to God: “In our proposition ‘absolute dependence’ and ‘being in relation with God’ are made equivalent. This affirmation is to be understood in such a way that precisely the *whence* composited in this self-consciousness, the whence of our receptive and self-initiated active existence, is to be designated by the term ‘God,’ and for us ‘whence’ holds the truly primary meaning of the term ‘God’.” (*CF* §4.4, 24).

it to Schleiermacher's priority of sin over grace. Put another way, like Hegel, Barth argues that Schleiermacher lacks a concept of *real* evil and sin. However, Barth does not attribute this lack to Schleiermacher confusing "sin with consciousness of sin," but to Schleiermacher's failure to understand "Christian self-consciousness as first a consciousness of grace."⁸³ To understand what Barth means by this, one can turn to Barth's criticism of Schleiermacher's Christology.

For Barth, Schleiermacher's Jesus is only the embodiment of a serene and potent God-consciousness which governs sensory self-consciousness. Therefore, nothingness is only real in our consciousness of God, but it is not real for God Godself. (Again, one can see how Sonderegger's description of Schleiermacher's Christ echoes Barth here). According to Barth, Schleiermacher's God "is merely the Physician who prescribes a medicine for the patient with no intention of testing or taking it himself."⁸⁴ On Barth's reading of Schleiermacher, evil is painful but has no real existence for God—it is merely an opposition operative in our consciousness. As a result, Schleiermacher lacks a real concept of nothingness, seeing evil rather as merely the negative side of the positive.

According to Barth, this leads to the deeper problem also mentioned by Wyman above: that is, if God is not concerned with sin and evil, then humans need not pay them much mind either. Further, humans need not acknowledge their own need for redemption from sin and evil. It is ultimately, according to Barth, Schleiermacher's starting point which is the limitation: Schleiermacher looks at the facts and emotions of Christian consciousness, and as a result, finds no essence of sin. Here, Barth repeats that we can only come to know nothingness if Jesus Christ is the objective ground of knowledge:

We encounter nothingness as the reality that God confronted in Jesus Christ. It is real in relation to God, and not with an absolute reality. And its nature is also revealed at this point. Nothingness is not something malign, sinister and monstrous.

⁸³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, vol. III.4, (London ; New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2004), 324. Hereafter *CD* III/4.

⁸⁴ Barth, *CD* III/4, 329.

It is not endowed with invented negative qualities, but with the specific and authentically evil character of the antithesis to the grace of God.⁸⁵

God limits nothingness because God's grace is greater than all of its forms. While nothingness is radically opposed to creation and God's covenant, it is not autonomously so. Whereas in Schleiermacher's understanding, there is almost a peaceful pact between nothingness and the good, perhaps because Schleiermacher, as I said, sees God to be beyond human concepts of good and evil, Barth argues that grace and sin are in real conflict.⁸⁶ Evil is therefore real for God but only in the sense that God has already defeated it.

Matthias D. Wüthrich has contextualized Barth's concept of *das Nichtige* by viewing Barth's oft-debated claims about nothingness [*das Nichtige*] in retrospective relation to Jesus Christ's annihilation of nothingness on the cross.⁸⁷ Here is Barth on this point: "It is in the mighty act of salvation in Jesus Christ as attested by Holy Scripture that the question of the reality, nature and function of this alien factor [*das Nichtige*] is seriously raised and seriously answered."⁸⁸ Consonant with what Wüthrich understands as Barth's priority of the actual (over the possible) and of God's self-

⁸⁵ Barth, *CD* III/4, 331.

⁸⁶ One could understand the priority of grace for Barth, in terms of what Bruce McCormack has called Barth's "critically realist dialectic." Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936*, paperback (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997). "Considered from the standpoint of God (sub specie aeterni), the dialectic of Adam and Christ, of judgement and grace, is a dialectic in which grace has already won out. It is striking that this dialectic tends more in the direction of Hegel than Kierkegaard. It is not the Kierkegaardian type of dialectic which is always to be held open, which is static in character, in which a synthesis can only be awaited. Rather, it is a dialectic in which a real synthesis has occurred" (McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realist Dialectical Theology*, 268). It is an eternal dialectic in that Christ's death and resurrection as the accomplishment of God's gracious act therein was an eternally free decision. This also distinguishes Barth from Hegel, for whom God's act is necessary rather than freely decided.

⁸⁷ Matthias D. Wüthrich, "An Entirely Different 'Theodicy'. Karl Barth's Interpretation of Human Suffering in the Context of His Doctrine of *Das Nichtige* ☆," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 23, no. 4 (October 2021): 593–616, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12515>.

⁸⁸ Barth, *CD* III/3, 366.

revelation through the Word, Wüthrich argues that evil's reality and existence can be understood only in relation to its already-defeated status in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.⁸⁹

One might hear echoes of this view in, for example, in the theology of James Cone. In *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone locates Christian hope in God's protest and defeat of suffering,⁹⁰ and this theme carries into his later work, in *The Cross and The Lynching Tree*, where the cross evinces the paradoxes of the mystery of God's word. For, as Cone writes there, "A symbol of death and defeat, God turned [the cross] into a sign of liberation and new life. The cross is the most empowering symbol of God's loving solidarity with the 'least of these,' the unwanted in society who suffer daily from great injustices."⁹¹ On this kind of account, then, the theodicy question is the wrong question. In other words, rather than asking *why* God would allow suffering, one should look to how God already defeated suffering through Jesus' death on the cross. God's defeat of death through Jesus marks God's relation to suffering as one in which suffering is always already overcome. It is only in that act that one can retrospectively address suffering, but such addressing does not involve *making sense of*, for nothingness always escapes reason's calculations. It is only in virtue of Christ's act that one can likewise make sense of Barth's claim that "Nothingness is that which God does not will. It lives only by the fact that it is that which God does not will. But it does live by this fact."⁹² God's election of human beings involves Jesus Christ's reconciling work to bring humans into covenant with God, and this election eternally precedes Jesus Christ's act in history. Nothingness has therefore been overcome eternally.⁹³

⁸⁹ For Wüthrich, it is primarily this Christocentrism that solves some of the potential problems resulting from Barth's discussion of evil.

⁹⁰ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997). See especially 101-102, and 126.

⁹¹ James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2013), 156.

⁹² Barth, *CD III/4*, p. 352.

⁹³ See *CD III/4*, p. 365-368. See also Wolf Krötke, "Barth on Evil and Nothingness," George Hunsinger and Keith L. Johnson, eds., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Karl Barth*, (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2020).

It should be clear, at this juncture, that critics of Schleiermacher's framework of sin and evil and of the reparative framework share parallel worries around the possibilities of resistance afforded by each respective framework. The reparative view and Schleiermacherian 'liberal' theology, while offering thoroughly social views of human life, at the same time seem to be vulnerable to this kind of criticism due to their recognition of both human failure and finitude as well as human possibility and abundance. Put in theological terms, it seems that to affirm possibility and abundance is at once to misrecognize the deep threat and reality of evil, the utter depravity of human capacity and action that actualizes evil in sin, and the necessary grace offered in Christ's defeat of sin and evil on the cross that would fund a true resistance to the forces of evil.

In the subsection to come, I will return to Schleiermacher's theology and argue that accounting for his thoroughly social view of sin and evil can mitigate some of the objections raised above. I contend that Schleiermacher goes beyond a purely perspectival understanding of evil and suffering, and God indeed triumphs over evil. Not only that, but his account is very much concerned with resisting those conditions that perpetuate further harm. At the same time, the issue of resistance cannot be fully solved by Schleiermacher's theology alone. Therefore, while Schleiermacher's view that evil is a concept humans use to name hindrances to life that are experienced in real pain and suffering puts him close to the kind of view of evil that would best accord with the reparative framework, a question remains regarding the extent to which this view will fund real resistance, or, at least, resistance *in the right direction*. This concern, as intimated by my brief discussion of Cone, is one fundamental to liberation accounts. Therefore, does a theology of quotidian crises merely cover over real evils? Does it prevent real resistance and movement toward a more just world? The questions of the extent to which God fully takes on the human condition, defeats evil and destruction, and provides resources and hope to resist suffering today are ones that run deep into liberation theologies and will return me to discussions that preceded this chapter.

6. *Schleiermacher Revisited*

As discussed above, Schleiermacher's views of sin and evil have been criticized for, among other things, failing to offer an account of real evil that would in turn ground resistance to the causes of evil. Furthermore, critics object that Schleiermacher's concept of evil cannot do justice to pain and suffering caused by evil. Contrary to this typical and pervasive interpretation, I will argue that Schleiermacher's account extends beyond a *merely* perspectival understanding of evil and suffering, such that humans can and do experience the full depth of pain associated with evil, and that God indeed defeats evil. I suggest that for Schleiermacher, this defeat can be understood through his account of redemption, rooted in the incarnation and the life Jesus lived, and mediated to the Christian community through the Spirit. Furthermore, I contend that a closer look at Schleiermacher's deeply social views of sin and evil reveal that his account can offer some of the necessary tools for motivating human resistance to evil. What Schleiermacher offers, then, is less a theodicy and more an affirmation of the gravity of suffering one faces in life, while opening up a theological ethics that would allow one to make a way in and in spite of such suffering.

Schleiermacher offers a theory of empirical evil wherein evil is grounded in real hindrances to one's life. While it is fair to say that, for Schleiermacher, evil is the concept that names the absence of conditions under which one's God-consciousness sufficiently leads the sensory self-consciousness, this does not entail the second step – that Schleiermacher's understanding of evil cannot fund resistance to evil. As I will show, Schleiermacher's concern, here, is precisely the possibility of resistance to that which would hinder the increase of one's God-consciousness. Moreover, Schleiermacher distinguishes evil from pain and suffering, such that both humans and Christ experience the depth of pain and suffering. For Schleiermacher, circumstances that cause one

to suffer do not necessarily cut one off from the condition of blessedness; that is, they do not necessarily need to be experienced as *evil*, even if they indeed cause *pain*.

My intent in providing this account of Schleiermacher's theology is not to fully solve the problems that have been raised. As mentioned in my discussion of theodicy earlier, there are questions around evil that cannot and should not be answered. Rather, my intent in re-reading Schleiermacher is to *mitigate the force* of typical objections so as to open up further possibilities for constructive use of some of the better points Schleiermacher's theology offers. Schleiermacher's notions of sin and evil are tied to his account of redemption, which is not centered around Jesus' death and resurrection, but rather around the incarnation. In that, Schleiermacher opens up compelling possibilities for ethical responses to suffering by decentralizing death in his account of redemption. This move, away from death toward incarnation, aligns better with the drawn-out and extended forms of suffering described by the quotidian crises framework. If death and resurrection suggest an extraordinary triumph over immense suffering, incarnation suggests a more processual, ongoing accompaniment alongside individuals as they navigate quotidian crises.

For Schleiermacher, sin precedes evil, and because sin's actualization is only possible in communal life, evil is only present in virtue of communal life as well. As he states, "Given that sin is present in human beings, one also finds in the world, as the locus of one's existence, causes that hinder one's life to be persistently at work—that is, one finds evil."⁹⁴ Furthermore, Schleiermacher defines evil as "hindrances to life," distinguishing natural evil, which is independent of human activity, from social (or moral) evil, which is a result of human activity. Because sin is fundamentally social, even if an individual freely actualizes sin and is therefore responsible for it, one should understand Schleiermacher's view of evil as fundamentally social as well, as again, evil is "the derived

⁹⁴ *CF* §75.

and secondary feature” of sin.⁹⁵ According to Schleiermacher, sin causes one to consider something to be evil that would otherwise simply be considered that which hinders one’s sensory performance. Remember that, for Schleiermacher, Christ’s redemptive work is to move humanity toward attunement to God, and whatever inhibits that attunement results from human bondage to sin. Moreover, because sin is ontologically prior to evil, evil can only be understood in light of sin. Therefore, as Schleiermacher reminds the reader, because he conceives sin in social terms, one can only understand evil’s dependence upon sin if “life held in common is kept in view.”⁹⁶ Insofar as one’s attunement to God is facilitated through Christ, and insofar as Christ’s attunement to God is likewise mediated through the community of faith, the constitution of that community becomes crucial to one’s interpretation of evil and resistance, a point I will return to in the next chapter.

Due to its thoroughly social nature, one can say that evil is, for Schleiermacher, empirically real, for there are actual conditions that might hinder one’s receptivity to the community of Christ and, by extension, Christ’s mediating and reconciling work.⁹⁷ Furthermore, one continues to empirically feel pain and suffering, regardless of whether one considers an experience evil or not. Here, Schleiermacher makes an important distinction between evil and suffering. According to Schleiermacher, the redeemed person will always retain their connection to Christ through the redeemed community, such that no evil could “obstructively affect one’s common life with Christ.”⁹⁸ Evil’s not being able to obstruct one’s life with Christ *does not* amount to a lack of pain and suffering, however. As he states, “Restraints in life will not be removed, as if one who is redeemed ought to be or could be without pain and free of suffering. For the same reason, even Christ had pain and suffered pain. Rather, lack of blessedness simply has no part in pain and suffering, because

⁹⁵ *CF* §76.1, 479.

⁹⁶ *CF* §77.

⁹⁷ *CF* §101.

⁹⁸ *CF* §101.2, p. 630.

as such they do not suffuse one's innermost life."⁹⁹ Insofar as one lives in this finite world, one inevitably will experience pain and suffering, even a depth of pain and suffering that shakes one to one's roots, as in the death of Schleiermacher's son.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, it is *not* that one feels no pain and suffering if one is led by the God-consciousness, but it is that even pain and suffering do not cut one off from blessedness, that is, communion with Christ and communion with the community of faith.¹⁰¹ This is in part why Schleiermacher states that evil is always connected to what is good – it is a good facilitated by one's relationship to communities of redemption. And, further, as Schleiermacher states, suffering enters the redeemed person's life "as an indicator of what is to be done," for, as I will discuss below, entering the new life of the community, one takes part in the task of diminishing the power of sin, and by extension, evil. In other words, while suffering does not finally cut one off from one's life with Christ, it does prompt one to work against the conditions under which such suffering occurs.¹⁰² Hence, Schleiermacher states that morally, sin and evil are "related solely to the task of the new life."¹⁰³

In the case of evil's always being connected to the good, one can see a parallel here with the quotidian crises framework. Recall that in the object-relations view, when one is inhabiting the paranoid position, one experiences an inability to tolerate ambivalence. In other words, one can only experience a circumstance as entirely bad or entirely good. In contrast, in the depressive position that is the threshold to repair, one can hold together the ambivalence of one's experience. One can

⁹⁹ *CF* §101.2, p. 630.

¹⁰⁰ This could conceivably include cases of feeling abandoned by God. One might *feel* abandoned by God, but for Schleiermacher, objectively that does not remove one from the community of Christ.

¹⁰¹ See also Schleiermacher's 1823 sermon at the memorial service for those who died in the Napoleonic Wars, "Our Comfort in Bereavement." Schleiermacher opens by saying that the aims of the memorial service are for sorrow to be shared in community and for the community to support and console one another with the promises of Scripture. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Servant of the Word: Selected Sermons of Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

¹⁰² *CF* §101.2, p. 630.

¹⁰³ *CF* §101.2, p. 630.

come to see one's relationships to others and to one's experiences in terms of complexity and ambiguity – pain and pleasure, hindrance and help, good and bad.

In a similar way, one could say that viewing a circumstance as evil, on Schleiermacher's terms, would be akin to seeing a circumstance as *all* bad. Instead, Schleiermacher suggests that the one being led by the God-consciousness will see hindrances to life as hindrances, and hindrances that can cause real pain and suffering, but are not ultimately what has the final word. To see them as having the final word would be to misrecognize them as evil, as *all* bad, and therefore circumstances that could finally cut one off from the redemption available in the community of Christ. However, for Schleiermacher, such pure badness is not possible, for the good and the bad are inseparable in human life. Both for Klein and for Schleiermacher, then, there are possibilities for moving from these kinds of zero-sum interpretations of one's life.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, for Schleiermacher, being able to hold to the redemption facilitated in community is fundamental to one's being able to take part in the very redemptive activity that would seek to address sin and evil in the world. Even in the most deeply painful experiences of suffering, one is still held up through Christ in the Christian community, and, to return to Sonderegger's point above, rather than take evil to be ultimately defeating, hindrances to life motivate one's participation in the work of God to overcome the evil and misery in the world. Therefore, one could take Schleiermacher to see real motivation in changing those circumstances under which individuals' God-consciousness would be obscured. As Schleiermacher writes, evil and sin come to consciousness only in connection to actual sin because of two conditions in collective human life:

First, in that social evil does exist there--for in individuals, as such, there are only certain distinct sinful tendencies which develop into unyielding causes of hindrances to that collective life--and, second, various natural imperfections are also conceived to be evils. Hence, in the same measure as sin is overcome, not only would the latter natural condition

¹⁰⁴ Admittedly, then, one would have to turn elsewhere for a theological account that makes sense of forms of evil and suffering that seem to refuse *any* relation to a concept of the good, although such an account might necessarily border on a kind of nihilism.

not be present anymore, but even sins that had actually come into being within human collective life would also operate only as stimuli toward improving that life and no longer as hindrances to it.¹⁰⁵

There is, then, a moral teleology that assumes motivation for human action to resist what would hinder God's redeeming work in the world. What becomes crucial, then, seems to be no longer *whether* resistance can be motivated, but of *what* God's redeeming work consists. Furthermore, the thoroughly ecclesially-centered facilitation of redemption entailed by Schleiermacher's theology leads to crucial questions around the extent to which particular communities can or should be conflated with that redemptive work.

As I have suggested, redemption for Schleiermacher is enacted in God's becoming human, and, therefore, I have called Schleiermacher's an incarnational view of redemption. Such an incarnational view, in turning from an emphasis on one event in which death and sin are defeated, also aligns with a quotidian crises view wherein systemic violence is understood to be enacted slowly, akin to a wearing-away or a "slow death."¹⁰⁶ Trauma-centric approaches tend to figure suffering in terms of extraordinary, unknowable experiences. The solution for such suffering, in some ways, aligns well with traditional doctrines of atonement and resurrection, as evidenced by these doctrine's centrality to the work of trauma theologians. The incarnational view, instead, attends to the ways resources for survival are provided in the midst of protracted harms that structure everyday life, harms I have called quotidian crises. At the same time, redemption, and especially the place of death in one's view of redemption, returns me once again to the issues around resistance, which I would now like to approach through the lens of liberation theology.

Incarnation and/or Liberation?

¹⁰⁵ *CF*, §84.2, 525.

¹⁰⁶ For the concept of slow death, see Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.

There is a tension that runs throughout liberation theologies, one that can be put in terms of a question: How can one both recognize the ongoing struggle in human life to overcome systemic violence and injustice, a recognition often theologically funded by hope in the victory of the cross for those who are oppressed, while not affirming death or wounds in the life of God in ways that would justify that very violence in human life? An incarnational view of redemption, like Schleiermacher's, can more easily answer the concern expressed in the latter half of the question.

For some liberation theologians, it is not only in Jesus' life among the poor, but especially in his death that defeated death, that God identifies with the poor and the oppressed. In addition, it is those who are materially poor and oppressed that should appropriate Jesus' victory over death on the cross.¹⁰⁷ After all, the cross has been central to the religious experience of a great number of communities experiencing domination, operating as a symbol of hope and liberation. One could maintain the centrality of the cross, then, by seeing Jesus' sacrifice as chosen rather than passively accepted. Therefore, Jesus' death on the cross does not sanction violence and suffering in human life, but instead once and for all ends that very sanction.¹⁰⁸ However, as Marit Trelstad has explained, and as I discussed in chapter one, feminist and womanist theologians have critiqued theological uses of the cross for reinforcing oppression and abuse by those in power, in part by demanding self-sacrifice or passivity of victims.¹⁰⁹ These theologians have raised concerns not only around who

¹⁰⁷ Jacquelyne Grant would be a representative of this view. For her, Jesus is the "divine co-sufferer" with black women. Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*. James Cone and Gustavo Gutierrez would also more or less be proponents of this view.

¹⁰⁸ See Joanne Marie Terrell, *Power in the Blood? The Cross in the African American Experience* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005).

¹⁰⁹ Marit Trelstad, ed., *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). For example, feminist theologians Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker argue that the centrality of the cross in Christianity has sanctioned violence and trauma. "At the center of western Christianity is the story of the cross, which claims God the Father required the death of his Son to save the world. We believe this theological claim sanctions violence." Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us*, (Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 2002), 8. See also Kathryn Tanner's discussion of

comes to bear the weight of redemption in such a case (Delores Williams has famously suggested it is black women),¹¹⁰ but also around how the model of Christ's death can be imported into the life of God in a way that follows a problematic heterosexual logic.¹¹¹ Due to some of these concerns, some feminist theologians reformulate or even reject the centrality of the cross in Christian theology.

One of the upshots of Schleiermacher's approach is that it accords with such reformulations in the emphasis on the incarnation. God chose to take on human nature and all its pains and complications, but God nevertheless does not authorize its pains and complications because suffering does not constitute the relations in the life of God. For Schleiermacher, the cross is not central to God's redemption of the world, rather, God's becoming human is. In addition, according to Schleiermacher, redeeming love is the unification of self in other, actualized by God in God's becoming human. It is in God's becoming human, then, that redemption is likewise mediated to human beings, who, in turn, carry Christ's redeeming love into the world. For Schleiermacher, Christ's death is one instance of this redeeming love, but it is not particularly central to that redemption. It is in taking on human flesh in this way that Christ transforms human nature and humans are offered the grace of the divine. As Katherine Tanner writes,

"One must say, instead, that humanity suffering under the weight of sin is reworked in a process of salvation over time, from Jesus' birth up to and through his death. The incarnation remains a constant, but its effects are not. Salvation, what the incarnation brings about, takes time, in short; salvation is a form of temporal, historical process, involving struggle with the forces of sin and death, and the sort of changes that typify any human life, sinful or not."¹¹²

atonement theologies in Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹¹⁰ Williams declares instead that God did not require the death of Jesus, but instead offers redemption in Jesus' ministerial vision. God's offer of life is therefore an offer of survival, and not always liberation. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013).

¹¹¹ See Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (New York London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).

¹¹² Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 260-261.

Like Tanner's temporalized, historical description of salvation, Schleiermacher's incarnational view of redemption sees the incarnation as enacting redemption, but not in a once-and-for all sort of way as usually suggested by accounts centered upon Jesus' death and resurrection.

However, it becomes all the more important to clarify the shape of human life in the process of redemption, especially as it concerns the concept of grace, work that I will do in the chapter to come. For now, if Schleiermacher's theology has thus far funded the quotidian crises account, it is worth noting what life might look like in the midst of quotidian crises. Delores Williams, for example, offers a way to understand bare survival in itself as sustained by Christ's ministry and life, while turning away from accounts centered in redemption and the cross.¹¹³ Williams draws upon the story of Hagar in the Hebrew Bible, Abraham and Sarah's slave who was cast out into the wilderness, to develop what she calls a 'survival/quality-of-life ethics' based upon black women's experiences. As Williams argues, God does not liberate Hagar, for part of her survival was predicated upon returning to her enslavement so that she could birth her son, Ishmael. Furthermore, Hagar's survival was enacted through her own initiative, for, according to Williams, God merely agrees with the choices Hagar makes (for example, to run away and liberate herself). God Godself does not enact Hagar's liberation, and, in fact, the Hebrew Bible story does not at all suggest that Hagar and Ishmael's situation was going to lead to improved future circumstances. In other words, gathering resources just to simply make it day by day is a feat of life for those living under the conditions of death, and it does not guarantee a positive future. Life need not be understood as fullness or abundance, for the reality is that some people may be barely hanging on. But as Williams argues, it is that hanging on that is made possible in Christ's ministerial vision rather than in his death and resurrection.

¹¹³ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*.

However, one must ask at this juncture whether merely hanging on is enough, and furthermore, whether the worries around resistance explored throughout this chapter don't become all the more acute. Especially given the very social nature of the incarnational redemption view offered thus far, one must ask about the possibilities of breaking free, or developing resources to resist, harmful social circumstances or social sins enacted in the community of which one is a part (especially considering the ways Christian communities have historically been complicit in and even drivers of social harm). Furthermore, if repair is the bare minimum of survival, and if that is in turn a type of grace available to all, is that bare minimum enough to fund the kind of resistance necessary to overturn the very conditions under which such bare survival is made a reality for disproportionate number of people?

Returning to what has been argued in this chapter, let me try to frame this in terms of Schleiermacher's theology. One could understand Schleiermacher to suggest that experiences of suffering can be mediated by one's community such that they are not recognized as ultimately defeating. On this reading, it is not that evils are only a matter of perspective, for one's relationship to a community of redemption is key to how one interprets a circumstance to be evil. Evils are not named, furthermore, apart from real hindrances to life that come to consciousness in light of conditions of human collective life.¹¹⁴ In other words, these evils could be understood as culturally produced through "the systematic construction of truncated narratives designed to support and perpetuate structural inequities and forms of social oppression,"¹¹⁵ the kinds of evils analogous to the quotidian crises described in the previous chapter. Such evils, while socially or culturally produced, nevertheless shape one's life in very real, material ways. It is in collective life, after all, that sinful tendencies become taken up and actualized by individuals. Hence, one could say that for

¹¹⁴ *CF*, §84.2.

¹¹⁵ Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 4.

Schleiermacher, one's social and material circumstances matter fundamentally, but not determinately, for how one manages what could otherwise be called an evil.

The challenge, then, is not whether God identifies with and defeats evil (God does, for Christ does), nor whether Schleiermacher's concept of evil is merely perspectival (for in a sense, it is not *merely* so, as it nevertheless is presupposed by real social sin and is conceived as instances of hindrances to the development of the God-consciousness), nor even whether Schleiermacher's theology does justice to suffering (for both Christ and humans suffer, regardless of the status of evil). Rather, the challenge becomes whether the moral teleology presupposed by Schleiermacher and the historically, socially-mediated view of the potency of the God-consciousness can, in fact, enact real justice, and in this case, the kind of justice aimed for in the quotidian crises framework. It is here, I think, that Schleiermacher's 'liberal' theology hits its limit, and needs to be supplemented by liberation theology. Put another way, and to echo a question that was raised in regards to the postcritical turn in the last chapter, does Schleiermacher offer a vision of love without justice? Is the only grace that is offered the grace to hang on, but not to be free of those circumstances that make it so hanging on is all one can do?

Even if good and evil are understood to be embedded in social relations, and in that sense ontologically real, and even if redemption is incarnational, the question of resistance remains. It is here that queer and womanist theologies will provide key supplements to an account which can both recognize extended forms of historical harms and their aftereffects *and* motivate effective resistance to these same forms of harm. To take a cue from Barth, the notion of grace and how grace orients communal life is crucial to adjudicating the extent to which a community can and does inhabit God's spirit. Therefore, the task of the next chapter will be to provide an account of that grace.

Chapter 5

Resurgent Grace: Criticism, Collaboration, Resistance

*Ordinary people, in changing diversity, figure out how to stretch or diminish social and spatial forms to create room for their lives. Signs and traces of abolition geographies abound, even in their fragility.*¹

*Goodness especially, when it exists in a factory, is something real; because the least act of kindness, from a mere smile to some little service, calls for a victory over fatigue and the obsession with pay and all the overwhelming influences which drive a man in upon himself.*²

“Mud Flower believes that feminism, to be worth anything at all good, must be rooted even more deeply in the soils of abolition.”³ This statement comes from the work of a group of theologians who met together in the early 1980s and published a book out of their collective conversations, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*. While the group sought to discuss the state of theological education, the book they produced was also itself a theology, and it was a theology that situates the projects of feminist, womanist, and *mujerista* theology within the framework of abolition.⁴ Abolition is usually not remarked upon as a legacy of feminist theological projects, yet, I will take up the insight of abolition’s centrality to feminist theology in developing a concept I will call ‘resurgent grace’ in this chapter. Furthermore, while abolitionist thinking and praxis has taken on forms today (namely, the abolition of prisons and policing) that exceed what the Mud Flower Collective had in mind at the time, I nevertheless see Mud Flower’s work as situated within the trajectory of abolition, which is historically rooted in resistance to white supremacy (beginning with chattel slavery but

¹ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Abolition Geography: Essays towards Liberation* (New York: Verso, 2022), 357.

² Simone Weil, “To a Pupil 1935,” *Seventy Letters: Personal and Intellectual Windows on a Thinker*, trans. Richard Rees, (Wipf and Stock: Eugene, OR 1965) 11-12.

³ Katie G. Cannon and Mud Flower Collective, eds., *God’s Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological Education* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985), 11.

⁴ The collective uses the language of feminism rather than womanist or *mujerista*, although later, group members (e.g. Delores Williams, Katie Cannon, and Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz) distinguish their work from feminist theology. Hence, my use of all three terms.

extending beyond it) and committed to the imagination of alternative possibilities beyond a white supremacist world.

Departing from traditional concerns of grace, I prioritize grace's role in communal and everyday encounter, enlivening critically loving praxis in response to experiences of quotidian crises. Resurgent grace follows a resurgent temporality, in that it arrives in the slow work of making a life in devastating circumstances. Resurgence, as I use it, is akin to the swelling of the tide, for it does not come from nothing, but it can arise from life that seems to barely be hanging on. Therefore, I argue that resurgent grace arrives in the everyday emergence of alternative possibilities in and in spite of the drawn-out, repetitive experience of crises, and abolitionist place-making can exemplify the reparative work of resurgent grace. I am not aiming to fully ascertain the content of resurgent grace, but rather to sketch its form. Like the infinite becoming finite in the incarnation, resurgent grace arrives from outside, and yet, is always experienced in place and time. It is the critical edge of the reparative, arriving from outside systems of domination and drawing one to become an accomplice in transforming those structures that inhibit planetary flourishing – it demands more livable worlds *now*. Yet, because resurgent grace draws one into such transformative work, it is both critical and loving, unmasking idols *and* making places where people have room to breathe. Like the critically loving hermeneutics of repair, then, grace is both the other side of and co-constitutive of negativity, whether sin or evil. In other words, grace is negativity's excess, that which goes beyond the dialectics of finitude, yet enters into the finite conditions of planetary life and transforms them.

While I develop a notion of resurgent grace as the counterpart to the notion of quotidian crises, I also seek to move beyond some of the limits of Schleiermacher's system by turning to a constellation of texts variously associated with liberatory traditions: especially womanist and queer theologies and black feminist, trans, and abolitionist theories. Schleiermacher's view of grace as the supernatural becoming natural is helpful insofar as it draws attention to grace's materiality, its

becoming finite, and the centrality of the incarnation rather than death to God's work in the world. At the same time, if God offers humans grace by becoming human, then what kind of human God becomes, and what kind of life Jesus lives, matters for how one understands the operation of grace. Going beyond Schleiermacher, then, womanist and queer theologies point out that Jesus' life reveals a God who dwells with those whom larger society despises.

Moreover, my notion of resurgent grace departs from that of typical trauma frameworks. When trauma theologians have addressed grace, they have usually done so in terms of how the one who has experienced trauma receives grace. Trauma theologies have explored how a traumatized person, whose agency and ability to make choices has ostensibly been destroyed, could possibly accept God's free offer of grace,⁵ and how Christian communities and churches can be facilitators of grace through nonviolence, witness, prayer, ritual, and the mediation of God's presence to those who have experienced trauma.⁶ In most cases, then, the one traumatized is conceived as the one in need of grace and the church is the community that gives it. Furthermore, Schleiermacher's understanding of grace can accord rather nicely with the emphasis on the traumatized person's need for grace and the Christian community's facilitation of that grace. As discussed in the previous chapter, just as Schleiermacher understands sin to be collective, a social rather than purely individual phenomenon, so the redemption offered through the work of Christ is the establishment of a new communal life – the redeemed community of the church – that works against sin and draws the individual into redemption.⁷

⁵ Jennifer Erin Beste, *God and the Victim: Traumatic Intrusions on Grace and Freedom*, AAR Academy Series (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 25.

⁶ Cynthia Hess, *Sites of Violence, Sites of Grace: Christian Nonviolence and the Traumatized Self* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009); Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

⁷CF §87-88.

Rather than locating grace outside the victim of trauma and strictly within the redeemed community, a move I will argue risks what Willie Jennings has described as an inverted hospitality,⁸ I suggest that grace makes place with those, as Ruth Gilmore notes, who are already “creat[ing] room for their lives” in and in spite of actual quotidian crises.⁹ In locating grace solely in the redeemed community, one risks presupposing that, in inviting and including the one broken and traumatized, such a community is merely a space of refuge rather than a potential source or actor implicated in the conditions under which the harms that produce trauma might take place. Linn Tonstad has highlighted how such a logic misconstrues New Testament parables of the kingdom, effectively weaponizing one’s own insider status. “The logic of the kingdom in many of Jesus’ parables...is less about who I (the presumptive insider) get to include than about the dangers I run in seeking to weed out others (Gentiles, those of lesser faith, the tares, the least of these) from ‘my’ righteous, holy community, thereby using my own presumed piety as a weapon against them.”¹⁰ Making places for resurgent grace’s arrival requires more than being a witness of harm, removing bad actors, being a space of refuge, or making apologies. It is a commitment to dwell in place with “those relegated to the pile of tares left to rot outside the church door,”¹¹ where such dwelling entails taking part in the work to imagine and enact more livable worlds particularly for those so relegated.¹²

⁸ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2010), 8.

⁹ To be clear, I am not suggesting that resurgent grace does not or cannot exist within churches. Rather, I am arguing that it is not limited to such places.

¹⁰ Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude*, (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 256.

¹¹ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 5.

¹² When I use “world” in this chapter, I am generally referring to world in the sense that María Lugones has defined it. However, I would emphasize, more than Lugones does, that the material dimensions of worlds (e.g., the environments and relationships that make worlds up) provide real shape to the possibilities of life therein. According to Lugones, a world is distinct from the philosophical sense of possible world as well as distinct from world-view, although it may involve a world-view. Worlds are presently inhabited by real people, although they may include imaginary people or people who have inhabited the world in the past. A world can be a whole society or a small portion of a society. A world can be a traditional or a non-traditional construction of a life, a

Therefore, if for Schleiermacher, grace is confined to its facilitation by the redeemed community, I contend that grace extends beyond supposed sites of redemption, taking place and making place outside familiar orientations. Resurgent grace operates within finite spatio-temporal conditions, challenging (human) attachments and facilitating the imagination of alternative possibilities. Thinking along with abolition is helpful, then, because abolition both seeks a world free of policing and imprisonment (a seemingly impossible world to imagine), yet works, concretely, on the level of everyday communal care and resistance to harm in view of building such a world. Abolition draws upon the banal yet powerful resources of communities already existing in the midst of harm. That is, abolition works toward harm reduction by addressing the safety and health of communities, rather than turning to policing, courts, and imprisonment (the Prison Industrial Complex).¹³ Abolition is, therefore, attuned to how a neighborhood is doing just as much as it is attuned to the flows of global capital that make prisons profitable. In the words of Marquis Bey, “Abolition is not one spectacularized event but a quotidian working toward eradicating carceral logics as predicates for sociality and relationality.”¹⁴ Resurgent grace, as an infinite gift within finitude, is given in spaces of resisting systemic harm, and it is located particularly in places of dispossession where counterhegemonic practices of abolition can and do emerge.

dominant or marginal construction, a complete or incomplete construction. Inhabitants of a world may or may not recognize themselves in the constructions that construct them in that world, but the inhabitants will nevertheless, in some way, animate the worlds’ constructions. Importantly, one can travel between worlds and inhabit more than one world at the same time. María Lugones, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Travelling, and Loving Perception,” *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 3–19.

¹³ See, for example, the work of Critical Resistance, and their brochure on “What is Abolition?”: <https://criticalresistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/What-is-Abolition.pdf>

¹⁴ Marquis Bey, *Black Trans Feminism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 22. See also Sarah Lamble’s notion of “everyday abolition.” Sarah Lamble, “Everyday Abolition,” in *Abolishing the Police: An Illustrated Introduction*, ed. Koshka Duff (S.l.: Dog Section Press, 2021).

I do not, in this chapter, seek to give a full account of abolition nor offer a robust notion of grace.¹⁵ Rather, I am contending that resurgent grace, as the twin concept to quotidian crises, can be usefully imagined in terms of abolitionist theory and praxis, and that such imagination has theological precedence. In the first part of the chapter, I will provide a more theological discussion of resurgent grace, in the second part of the chapter I will provide two examples of the kinds of places in which resurgent grace might arrive. It is in the examples that resurgent grace will come further into view.

Thus, in the penultimate section, I turn to the classic though under-studied text, *God's Fierce Whimsy*, written by the Mud Flower Collective in 1985, as exemplifying the critically loving movement of resurgent grace. I argue that the collective works to develop their theology through spiritual friendships, which encounter failure, difficulty, and violence, yet in this difficult agonism remain open to resurgent grace's critical edge. In so doing, the collective seeks genuine intimacy that resurgent grace's loving hold facilitates. In addition, I have chosen this nearly four-decades old text because doing so displays the way in which academic feminist theology has long had resources for grappling with the problems that have occupied this dissertation. I do not intend to romanticize the collective. Not only did the collective fizzle out after grant funding was up and the book was published,¹⁶ the collective itself states at the outset that "the forces of male gender superiority, homophobia, white supremacy, and economic injustice in this society are so powerful that we could not produce this book without serious cost to several of us and to the project."¹⁷ This cost included at least one of the members leaving. Lateral collaboration is difficult, and loss, refusal, and

¹⁵ The notion of 'resurgent grace' I am developing could conceivably work alongside more traditional doctrines of grace. In other words, I am not attempting to exhaust all of the work that grace could do in the concept I am developing.

¹⁶ Katie Cannon recounts this point in an interview with Stina Busman Jost, saying that many of the members have not kept up with one another. See Stina Busman Jost, *Walking with the Mud Flower Collective: God's Fierce Whimsy and Dialogic Theological Method* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Mud Flower Collective, "God's Fierce Whimsy," x.

disagreement have long been the legacy of collective action.¹⁸ At the same time, resurgent grace can be part of the very work of academic theology, but it requires more than sitting down and writing. Theology takes place in conversation, and I would add, with whom and where these conversations take place matter fundamentally for the shape of one's theology.

The second site to which I turn in order to develop the notion of resurgent grace is “We Shall Not be Moved,” a march and vigil held in Chicago on July 27, 2020, to honor black women and black trans people who have been murdered. The march was the result of the long and continuing work of a number of community-based organizations in Chicago, and it is one of many demonstrations that has occurred in the contemporary Black Lives Matter Movement. I will contend that this particular demonstration, however, is exemplary of resurgent grace, in part because it brought into being an otherwise world where black (trans) lives matter. To enact a world where black trans lives are cared for entails that a world of whiteness recede, which requires certain refusals, expressions of anger and grief, and critical boundaries of accountability. Again, such refusals are part of the critical work of resurgent grace, and yet such critical work is in service of making a world with enhanced possibilities for life. Put another way, resurgent grace operates in the work of making a world where black trans lives matter, both by resisting “the bondage of systemic evil” and in providing a place of “divine empowering.”¹⁹

I will present this demonstration in glimpses and fragments. This particular demonstration was not widely advertised outside of the social media communities of which the organizers were a part. Not only that, but the organizers discouraged participants generally and prohibited white participants from documenting the demonstration. I was present at this demonstration as a

¹⁸ See, for example, Wini Breines, “What’s Love Got to Do with It? White Women, Black Women, and Feminism in the Movement Years,” *Signs* 27, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 1095–1133.

¹⁹ Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, eds., *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1998), 165.

volunteer marshal and a participant, and I did not attend as a participant-observer or with the intention of drawing upon this demonstration directly in scholarly work. It was simply one of many Black Lives Matter actions in which I have participated since 2014. Yet, it has stood out to me as unique in its facilitation of a particular space of collective mourning and joy, resistance and rest. For these reasons, I will be piecing together glimpses of We Shall Not Be Moved through my own memory and through its scant footprint on social media, while choosing not to share from where these citations come. In other words, I choose to offer uncited fragments, in part, because it is not something that can or should be presented as a full object for analytical purchase.²⁰ And yet, it remains central in my thinking of the kind of place that facilitates the very notion of resurgent grace I will describe.

Resurgent grace: A Sketch

In this section, I provide an initial sketch of resurgent grace, the kind of grace that arrives in the midst of actually experienced quotidian crises. I argue that resurgent grace arrives in the slow temporality of resurgence. There is no getting back what has been lost, no possibility of returning to what once was, and yet, life makes its way in devastated ecologies. Resurgent grace takes place in blighted places and arrives in relationships and places that both cultivate care-work *and* critique the conditions that make such care-work necessary. In other words, grace arrives in the disorientation that criticism can provoke, but grace seeks to make something more.²¹

²⁰ While I did not attend this action with the intent to use it in scholarly work, nor am I aiming to provide anything resembling an ethnographic account, Audra Simpson's work on 'ethnographic refusal' may nevertheless be helpful here. See, for example, Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

²¹ One could see the latter movement of grace as aligning with the first use of the law and the former with the second use of the law in traditional discussions of grace.

Drawing upon Hanna Reichel's notion of 'queer grace' I will argue that resurgent grace, like God incarnate, arrives 'outside the gates' of the Law – where the law represents practices of human mastery or domination.²² More, as previously discussed, even antinormativity could become its own project of human mastery in destroying the Law and asserting its own of law antinormativity, a kind of law against the Law. Jesus' arrival outside the gates of human mastery opens another relationship to the law. Therefore, laws, rituals, and norms are not to be jettisoned or escaped altogether, for, as discussed in the previous two chapters, the norms given to one are not entirely determinative of how one will take them up. People can act within what is given to them in creative ways, creative ways opened up by the resurgent grace mediated in the incarnation. This will bring me to Katie Cannon's notion of 'quiet grace,' by which I contend that resurgent grace is already taking place among those forcibly placed 'outside' the Law of domination, in claiming one's 'beingness,' regardless. Cannon describes quiet grace as one of the ways black women have resisted, fought, and made a way through structures of domination, a virtue illegible to traditional white, bourgeois notions of womanhood. Through Reichel and Canon, ultimately, the notion of resurgent grace will bring me to contemporary abolitionist theory. I will then be set up to explore the way resurgent grace shows up in two particular examples to be discussed in the final sections.

1. A Resurgent Temporality

Much of the Western Christian tradition generally has discussed grace in terms of reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins. Protestant theologians, particularly, have conceived grace as something God freely gives to the sinful individual, a transcendent gift offered apart from anything an individual does. Liberation theologians, however, (and, as discussed in the previous chapter, Schleiermacher) have tended to focus less on the sins of individual people and emphasize

²² I am not using Law here to refer to the Old Testament law.

instead “the systemic evils of societies.”²³ Liberation theologians “speak of grace as the divine empowering that heals the external and internal wounds inflicted on individuals and peoples by structures of oppression and as the divine empowering that liberates peoples from the bondage of systemic evil.”²⁴ In a similar way, Katie Cannon has described grace as a “life-transforming power” for those living under forces of domination, a gift that “enables us to resist the forces of death and degradation arrayed against us and to affirm our dignity as beloved persons created in the image of God.”²⁵ The focus of this notion of grace (and of mine) is on the relationships and practices that enable concrete and material survival of creaturely life, which includes addressing and transforming that which prohibits such survival. Resurgent grace, as I will call it, has a kind of staying power that allows one to show up in spaces and communities resisting systemic evil. For example, Latin American liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, has described grace as an encounter between the finite human and the infinite God with worldly consequences, for it shows up in history through “political peace, social well-being, [and] liberation.”²⁶ Such a grace, therefore, invites consideration of the deep, everyday practices that can promote such social well-being.

Attending to such practices means entering into a resurgent temporality. While grace in the Western Protestant tradition has sometimes been discussed in terms of conversion, a radical transformation or rebirth from a state of sin to a state of grace, the kind of grace I am developing here does not have such temporality. Rebirth can signal a return to what was lost or what was always meant to be, an entirely new creature. Resurgence, on the other hand, is slow but transformative work with worldly consequences. (For the theologically-sensitive, Protestant reader, due to this

²³ Thistlethwaite and Engel, *Lift Every Voice*, 165

²⁴ Thistlethwaite and Engel, *Lift Every Voice*, 165.

²⁵ Katie G. Cannon, “Transformative Grace,” in *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serene Jones, Paperback ed, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 139.

²⁶ Leonardo Boff, *Liberating Grace* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1979), 24.

temporality, resurgent grace would likely work better alongside a traditional doctrine of sanctification than a doctrine of justification).

Here, I am getting the concept of resurgence from anthropologist Anna Tsing's work on the Matsutake mushroom. As Tsing explains, "Resurgence is the force of the life of the forest, its ability to spread its seeds and roots and runners to reclaim places that have been deforested. Glaciers, volcanoes, and fires have been some of the challenges forests have answered with resurgence."²⁷ The matsutake mushroom is exemplary of this resurgence, growing and thriving in the blighted landscapes of environmental disturbance, developing intra-species relationships through what Tsing calls "collaborative survival."²⁸ For example, matsutake's most common host, the red pine, tends to grow in landscapes marked by human deforestation, as these landscapes facilitate the conditions (sunlight, mineral soils) in which red pine seeds germinate. Similarly, resurgent grace arrives through ubiquitous relationships of mutual entanglement, even if these relationships are at times barely noticeable.²⁹ Furthermore, as Tsing points out, these places are not good for everyone (lions eat lambs, collaborations threaten some species and not others). Put theologically, resurgent grace does not *solve* violence or sin, but it does enhance livability, even if in small ways, amidst a world where harm exists. Resurgent grace, then, moves one toward good-enough, for now, in and in spite of ecological alienation, antagonism, and confusion. Aiming for good-enough worlds, then, is not simply a matter of individual behavior, but requires changing the features of the system that allow harm and devastation to occur in the first place.

The temporality of changing features of the system that allow harm and devastation, the temporality of resurgence, is also the temporality of black feminist futurity and abolition. In other

²⁷ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 179.

²⁸ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 4.

²⁹ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 255.

words, resurgent grace opens up the “imagination of liberation in the future anterior sense of the NOW.”³⁰ Whatever conditions are necessary to make that liberation present, now, is precisely what one lives into, such that the grammar here can also be understood in terms of the conditional (what should or must be). Tina Campt provides a helpful elaboration of the grammar of black feminist futurity thusly:

It strives for the tense of...*that which will have **had to happen***. The grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn’t yet happened but must. It is an attachment to a belief in what should be true, which impels us to realize that aspiration...It’s a politics of prefiguration that involves living the future *now*—as imperative rather than subjunctive—as striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present.³¹

As the performance of an aspiration, it also means ordering one’s life in such a way that this aspiration will take place – developing the habits, putting oneself in the places, making the relationships that strive, even in small ways, to, returning to Campt’s work, “see possibility in the tiny, often minuscule chinks and crevices of what appears to be the inescapable web of capture for black women and men alike.”³²

Resurgent temporality is therefore, in a sense, an already-but-not-yet, to draw upon the oft-used Christian turn of phrase. But that already is located precisely in the interstices that exceed capture, through black feminism’s jamming or “hacking” of the human, such that resurgent grace gives an excessive world to the world as given.³³ Resurgent grace is the life that arrives in the cracks, the spaces made in between ‘webs of capture.’ As Katherine McKittrick has argued, “If space and place *appear* to be safely secure and unwavering, then what space and place make possible, outside

³⁰ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University press, 2014), 39. Here, Weheliye is commenting on Hortense Spillers’ work.

³¹ Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham London: Duke University Press, 2017), 17.

³² Campt, *Listening to Images*, 16.

³³ Denise Ferreira Da Silva, “Hacking the Subject: Black Feminism and Refusal beyond the Limits of Critique,” *philoSOPHIA* 8, no. 1 (2018): 19–41.

and beyond tangible stabilities, and from the perspective of struggle, can potentially fade away.”³⁴

Places are not fixed, and while they can seem fixed by violent and terrible relations of domination, to see them as *merely* that risks overlooking how geographies are produced and therefore can be changed.

In this analogy, grace is already happening, and like the resurgent forest, grace dwells in blighted landscapes. More, resurgent grace demands a future of planetary livability be present now, orienting one’s very life around making places of care and resistance to harm.³⁵ How does one dwell with resurgent grace, too?

2. *A Disorienting Experience*

Hanna Reichel’s notion of ‘queer grace’ is helpful for working toward an answer. Reichel has suggested that queer grace is constituted by realities that cannot be captured and accommodated to systems. I draw on this notion in order to suggest that resurgent grace also arrives from outside systems, especially systems of exclusion, and, additionally, it empowers one to live in and against that which values that very exclusion. In other words, resurgent grace takes place through a way of life, disoriented from systems of domination. The onset of this disorientation is facilitated through what I will call resurgent grace’s critical edge (and this critical edge might parallel what is known in traditional accounts as the first use of the law).³⁶

³⁴ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xi.

³⁵ “We move, we find joy, we continue to live, we are ‘still fucking here,’ as Miss Major would say. And that is all life. We are ‘won’t die things,’ we refuse death.” Marquis Bey, *Black Trans Feminism*, 32.

³⁶ In making this connection, I also hope it clarifies potential worries around whether resurgent grace, if carried over into more traditional doctrinal territory, is based upon a view that gospel supplants law. “In this view, the gospel is imaged...as the gentle mercy that is revealed to us in Jesus Christ who, despite our failure to live up to the law, offers us everlasting forgiveness and in doing so, trumps (or better, supersedes) the power of the law to condemn.” Serene Jones, “Glorious Creation, Beautiful Law,” in *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Amy Plantinga

Queer grace is also helpful for addressing a problem left open by Schleiermacher's view of grace, discussed in the previous chapter, regarding the mediation of communities. Like queer grace, resurgent grace can occur outside presumably 'redeemed' communities, and it resists any community's exclusive claims to redemption. According to Schleiermacher, grace is not only constitutive of God's one divine decree for redemption,³⁷ but it is also facilitated by the historical Christian community. Justification (one of the primary Protestant doctrines wherein grace and sin are typically worked out) is "being taken up into community of life with Christ," a being-taken-up that occurs through Christ's presence in the Word proclaimed by the Christian community.³⁸ Elsewhere, Schleiermacher calls grace "the mighty power of God-consciousness in our souls," a divine communication that comes entirely from without the one who receives it – and that external source, the Word, is mediated solely by the church.³⁹ As Kevin Vander Schel states, "[Schleiermacher's] theology describes, in other words, the historically conditioned unfolding of redemption in human living—that is, the historically conditioned unfolding of grace."⁴⁰ Therefore, the community of redemption is the integral place where grace is given to any individual experiencing the effects of evil and sin. Insofar as the church is the place of redemption, it would be the site that offers grace, or the continued power of the God-consciousness, to the one beset by traumas that might threaten to overtake one's connection to that community.

Pauw and Serene Jones, Paperback ed, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 37. The critical edge of grace that arrives as a disorienting experience (outside human grasp or knowledge to pin down the Law), orients or inspires one to living a life toward God's ordering of the world. However, queer theology is helpful for thinking through the ways humans, and theologies – including feminist theology, have almost invariably confused God's law with human Law.

³⁷ For more on this point, see Dawn DeVries and Brian Gerrish, "Providence and Grace," *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Mariña (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³⁸ *CF* §107; cf §106.2.

³⁹ *CF* §80.1, 491.

⁴⁰ Kevin Vander Schel, *Embedded Grace: Christ, History, and the Reign of God in Schleiermacher's Dogmatics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 11.

However, because Schleiermacher's theology suggests that community plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals respond to suffering and perceive evil, and that redeemed communities in particular are the site of God's redemption, one can wonder how it is that redeemed communities could nevertheless continue to perpetuate systemic harm.⁴¹ After all, according to Willie Jennings, whiteness is the "landscape with all its facilitating realities"⁴² of the Christian imagination, and in being its landscape, much of our theology risks justifying the domination, exploitation, and literal theft of people and their lands.

This risk exists because landscapes can be powerful determinants of what materials are available for building or what objects are in reach for our use.⁴³ Landscapes are marked by different weather patterns, natural resources, and species precarities. The forms of life, labor, and risk can vary. (On one landscape I might have access to fresh water, higher ground when it floods, green pastures on which a source of food could graze or marked paths that lead to a city where I can barter and trade. On another landscape I might face the risk of drought or natural disaster or violence.) The landscape upon which one builds makes a difference for how one orients one's movements and can even determine what kind of building makes sense to build. Even historically nomadic communities have close relationships with land and weather patterns that influence where they move and stop to make their tents. If one's landscape is bordered, blighted, or uninhabitable, one may have a responsibility to cultivate the land, reassemble its devastated remains, break apart walls, or move landscapes altogether.

⁴¹ To be fair, there has been quite a bit of helpful scholarship showing how Schleiermacher's theology can indeed be a resource for addressing rather than perpetuating systemic harm, especially the work of Thandeka and Shelli Poe, some of which is cited at the beginning of chapter four. Schleiermacher's early work especially, (e.g. *The Speeches*) certainly lends itself to thinking grace outside strict bounds of redeemed communities.

⁴² Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2010), 59.

⁴³ In considering space, orientation, and landscape, I am indebted to Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

To call whiteness a landscape is not merely to use an analogy. When one considers the history of landscapes, space has been a way to maintain and enforce racial segregation. (In the post-white flight 1970s, the wealthy suburb bordering my own neighborhood in Chicago built a series of cul-de-sacs and dead ends to prevent the movement across city and suburb lines, starkly divided by race and class.) Further, buildings have for centuries been produced through the exploited labor of migrant bodies. In short, modern architecture and landscape design have been integral to the erection of racial epistemology and the development of European colonialism and capitalism.⁴⁴ Even more to the point, for Jennings, the landscape of whiteness is tied especially to Christian ways of being. In such a landscape, then, when landscapes have the power to orient one's attachments, habits, and co-habitors, is there any possibility for grace?

James Cone makes this question even more acute, as Cone suggests that white people cannot even come to *see* the whiteness of the landscape around them. Cone writes, "The basic error of white comments about their own oppression is the assumption that they know the nature of their enslavement. This cannot be so, because if they really knew, they would liberate themselves by joining the revolution of the black community. They would destroy themselves and be born again as beautiful black persons."⁴⁵ While I do not aim to fully solve this problem, I do not read Cone's claim here pessimistically, nor do I see his claim as requiring the presupposition that whiteness attaches to phenotypically white bodies.⁴⁶ Rather, I see working through the slow time of resurgence toward good-enough worlds that one, even if always failing, reaches for the conversion to blackness for which Cone calls, a conversion that, for Cone, nevertheless cannot be enacted through human work.

⁴⁴ See Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis, and Mabel O. Wilson, eds., *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*, Culture Politics and the Built Environment (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).

⁴⁵ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 20th anniversary ed (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1990), 103.

⁴⁶ See also my discussion of intersectionality in the preface to this dissertation.

Reichel's notion of 'queer grace' provides a way to think about this always-failure and the reach toward good-enough worlds, or what they call 'better' worlds. It is in being disoriented from the system, or being oriented on the edge of systems through resurgent grace's critical edge, that grace arrives. Furthermore, this is the crucial move necessary to supplement Schleiermacher's account of sin and grace, explicated in the last chapter. According to Reichel, queer grace arrives from outside any system because it points to realities that cannot be captured and accommodated to systems. They write,

The appropriate theological term for these glimpses of reality that cannot be explained and yet are undeniably *real* might be 'grace.' They surprise us at the margins of any system... They interrupt both our optimism and our pessimism, unsettle and reorient us. They are signs of an external reality, which comes to us and keeps giving itself to us despite our inability to do them justice. Both in divine queerness and in the queerness we encounter in the real lives of real people, and in the resistance to our constructions that both of these offer, we find 'parables' and 'sign-posts' of revelation...⁴⁷

While grace acts as a "sign of an external reality," it is encountered in real lives and real people, particularly those realities that interrupt both our epistemological and ontological frameworks. In other words, such grace is facilitated and experienced concretely in our bodily orientations and in concrete places.⁴⁸

It might be useful, for a moment, to explain the importance of resurgent grace's worldly mediation yet disorienting directionalities in more traditionally doctrinal language. In suggesting that resurgent grace is mediated, one might liken this to Serene Jones's description of grace as revealing "the rules of faith that regulate our lives" by coming "in concrete human forms that are mediated

⁴⁷ Hanna Reichel, *After Method: Queer Grace, Conceptual Design, and the Possibility of Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2023), 109.

⁴⁸ As Mary McClintock Fulkerson has stated, "[I]t is the body, with its corporeal bifurcation, that provides orientation in the world (left-right, up-down, front-back) and thus the basic ingredients of place. The world *takes shape* through our bodies." Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 25.

socially and formed in the space of everyday human interactions.”⁴⁹ At the same time, this grace is entirely without human powers and abilities (hence, I have described it as a disorienting experience). Discussing the grace imparted to humans through justification, Kathryn Tanner observes, “Christ retains his righteousness for his own even as that righteousness exists within us, if it becomes ours simply through attachment to him....Christ is foreign to us even when imparted to us.”⁵⁰ Grace arrives entirely outside of human powers, yet attaches one to Christ in whom the divine and the human are one. Yet, divinity is never proper to nor possible to attain by the human as such, even as it is given to humans through attachment to Christ. Because grace mediates an unearned and non-possessable divinity beyond human power, one’s attachment to Christ would always be an attachment that would exceed one’s grasp, and is an attachment that would, I would say, be disorienting to one’s usual orientations, shaped and conditioned by social and structural power, mastery, and domination.

Part and parcel of this arrival of grace from the outside, and its disorienting effects, is what I would call grace’s critical edge. As Reichel makes clear, unmasking falsehood constitutes grace’s revelations: “Queer grace is found in God’s *revelatory unmasking* of the falsehood of idealities that render reality indecent....God’s honesty in subverting and unmasking is thus as indecent as it is revelatory—indecent *because* it reveals things for what they really are.”⁵¹ Here, Reichel is drawing upon Marcella Althaus-Reid’s ‘indecent’ theology, and her insistence on attending to the messiness and ambiguity of real people’s lives. Grace is an experience that happens in and through practice:

⁴⁹ Serene Jones, “Glorious Creation, Beautiful Law,” in *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serene Jones, Paperback ed, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 34.

⁵⁰ Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 104.

⁵¹ Reichel, *After Method*, 122.

practices of solidarity and honesty, which can only happen through the critical, sometimes suspicious refusal that is part of the work of grace.

To understand this critical edge, and what I call the critically loving practice of grace, Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood's understanding of the work of queer theology is illuminating here. As Althaus-Reid and Isherwood state, all theology is "love-talk," but queer theology is "a radical form of the 'love-talk' of theology."⁵² The negativity of critique consists in its unmasking of "beloved sexual ideologies...and ideological abusive loves, such as racism, sexism, indifference towards the poor (if not active cooperation towards their oppression) and colonialism."⁵³ According to Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, this love is "a commitment to social justice" and "an agent for transformation."⁵⁴ Honest in its desire for transformation, in breaking up with theology's beloved binaries, Queer Theology aims toward liberating people from oppressive (sexual) ideologies. Put in these terms, Queer Theology might radicalize Feminist Theology by revealing its attachments to a heterosexual imaginary that is, at base, sutured to "equality (liberal) feminism,"⁵⁵ a feminism that does not transform the world.

One strategy, with long precedence in liberative theological traditions, to enact the transformation of one's attachments by revealing idols has been to subvert the idolization of dominant norms by envisioning God's becoming human as a *particular* human. James Cone famously contended that God is Black because "God freely chooses to be known as the One who liberates victims from their oppression,"⁵⁶ and, more recently, Kelly Brown Douglas has argued that knowing

⁵² Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, "Thinking Theology and Queer Theory," *Feminist Theology* 15, no. 3 (May 2007): 303.

⁵³ Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, "Thinking Theology and Queer Theory," 305.

⁵⁴ Althaus-Reid and Isherwood, "Thinking Theology and Queer Theory," 308.

⁵⁵ Marcella Althaus-Reid, "From the Goddess to Queer Theology: The State We Are in Now," *Feminist Theology* 13, no. 2 (January 2005), 270.

⁵⁶ James Cone, "God is Black," in Thistlethwaite and Engel, *Lift Every Voice*, 82. Cone is reflecting in this essay on his original chapter, "God is Black," in *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990).

God's love requires that "one must recognize the face of Jesus in the face of Trayvon [Martin]." ⁵⁷

Part of the intention behind describing God concretely in these ways is to underscore that lacking such identification effectively perpetuates a surreptitious manifestation of white hegemony (if God is not black, God is white). ⁵⁸ Recognizing that God became human and dwelt with those who are dispossessed is the first step in breaking up with one's beloved ideologies, a form of critically loving praxis on Althaus-Reid's terms.

One can see a parallel here to Melanie Klein's understanding of the paranoid and depressive positions discussed in chapter three. The possibility for offering care to the object of one's attachment and the possibility for even *shifting* one's attachment, is a movement from the paranoid to the depressive position. Recall, further, that Eve Sedgwick likened the paranoid position to suspicious and critical hermeneutics and likened the depressive position to a reparative hermeneutics. The work of criticism reveals one's attachments (in the above case, to the White God), which allows one to reorient one's relationship to the object of that attachment in different and potentially unprecedented ways. This reorientation is the ever-incomplete work of love or repair, which, to return to Reichel's notion of queer grace, is an ever-incomplete reach for 'good-enough.'

As Reichel makes clear, the queer grace that allows the reach for good-enough takes place in Christ's dwelling at the edge of any system. To understand Reichel's point here, it is helpful to contextualize it within their explication of the relationship between queer grace and law. For Reichel, queer grace is not about orientation toward a determinative Law ⁵⁹ (as if one could master and attain

⁵⁷ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 105.

⁵⁸ See also Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996).

⁵⁹ Here, I am capitalizing Law to refer to a Law associated with human attempts of mastery. I use lower case law when referring, more or less, to what would be considered God's law, attainable only through grace's (dis)orientations.

goodness) but is rather constituted by iterative practices that grasp toward the good. Norms are not inflexible laws that could be straightforwardly followed or against which antinormativity works. Instead, “norms engender powerful and complex performativities whose imperfect and aspirational repetition is precisely what keeps the norm in place....Norms are much more capacious, flexible, and generative than a common understanding suggests, are inclusive rather than exclusive, flexible rather than brittle.”⁶⁰ Reichel’s understanding of norms accords rather nicely with the object-relations view I discussed in previous chapters: people are constrained by the conditions given to them, but are not thereby fully determined by these conditions. People can respond to their environments in a number of ways. In the same way, Reichel seeks to rethink the relationship of grace and the Law not in terms of a straightforward anti-normativity (as if the Law has been overturned and needs to be rejected), but rather in the way grace is glimpsed and lived outside the Law. Here, the law’s very function is to reorient one’s desires outside the logic of human fulfillment of the Law, in faithfulness and persistence of living outside the search for mastering and possessing the right orthodoxy or orthopraxy. In failing to fulfill the Law, and receiving grace outside of it, one is reoriented toward collaboration and kinship with others who have been denied access to the Law. Therefore, one becomes accountable to those dwelling outside the Law, rather than to a determinative Law itself.

Because Reichel understands the relationship of grace and the law in this way, Reichel also calls for a reinterpretation of the relationship between Christ and the law. They explain:

The law would then *function*, not by finding a worthy fulfillment in Christ, but by Christ’s sacrifice of its fulfillment. The law, then, would not be about ‘getting in’ or ‘keeping out,’ *nor* about ‘staying in.’ Instead, in its own enigmatic way, the law would be what ensures that everything happens ‘in the

⁶⁰ Hanna Reichel, *After Method*, 139.

outside': self-emptying and self-*un*fulfilling, depriving the dividing line between inside and outside of significance and freely pouring out its grace.⁶¹

On this account of queer grace, one is (dis)oriented outside the system – going outside the gates with Christ, sacrificing legibility and recognition, and remaining, as Karen Bray has described it “willfully unredeemed.”⁶² Such a view of the role of Christ accords well with the incarnational view of redemption presented in the previous chapter, but with further *direction*: Christ’s work of grace and redemption is not centered in his death which fulfills the law and therefore lets people in, but rather in the life Jesus lived to go out and be present with those *living in the face of systems of domination*.

Jesus in this case, to use Marquis Bey’s retooling of the transfiguration in Mark 9:2, is the “trans/figured Christ.”⁶³ This kind of trans/figuration follows the Romans 12:2 injunction not to be conformed to this world, which would mean “to refuse normative frameworks of legibility, to transform and transfigure them,” requiring a “becoming otherwise and other than what one was.”⁶⁴ However, the becoming otherwise that Christ’s trans/figuration offers is not one that escapes the world as it is given or one that postpones the possibility of life to a time after death. Rather, the transfiguration in this case names that which “in every body (without exception), crosses over, exceeds itself, and thereby intensifies—instead of relinquishing—what it has been....[T]he transfigured body [is] *more* intensely what it has been all along...”⁶⁵ What Jesus offers in becoming human is the possibility of *becoming* even more human or trans/figuring the human beyond (which is also to say, within) the given facticity of an antiblack and transantagonistic world. To draw on

⁶¹ Hanna Reichel, *After Method*, 155.

⁶² “[Grave attending] does not and cannot rush toward redemption out of the gravity of such damage, because it is attendant to the damage of those who, in the wake of our resurrective impulse we have let drown. To not resurrect might be to fail to overcome our damage. And yet a theo-ethic of grave attending affirms that in resistance to such a successful raising up, we are brought down to be together with all the others who have failed to be redeemed.” Karen Bray, *Grave Attending: A Political Theology for the Unredeemed* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 27.

⁶³ Bey, *Black Trans Feminism*, 92.

⁶⁴ Bey, *Black Trans Feminism*, 92.

⁶⁵ Cary Howie, “On Transfiguration,” *L’Esprit Créateur*, Transgender France, 53, no. 1 (Spring 2013).

Kathryn Tanner's more doctrinal discussion of how grace works, "Nothing of our nature is subtracted or replaced in the process; instead, something properly divine is added to a human nature that remains complete in its created character."⁶⁶ On Bey's understanding, trans/figuration, when put together with blackness, is a space for living a life that, in its refusal of "prescribed and inscribed embodiment,"⁶⁷ is irre recognizable to the normativity that seeks to invalidate such a life. In Bey's words, "trans/figurative blackness forces us to create the perpetual and unceasing attempt for a nonplace where we might, finally, live."⁶⁸

To dwell in this work of trans/figurative blackness requires the disorienting 'queer grace' that Reichel contends happens 'in the outside,' in the levity of refusing to attach and orient oneself to Lawful acceptance (which is to say, a mastery of goodness). Such disorientation, for some, is required for developing a kind of double-consciousness attentive to what dwells on the edges of a system.⁶⁹ As Reichel asks,

What if instead of seeking fulfillment and redemption for ourselves or policing the boundaries of inclusion or exclusion for others, we learned to live 'before the law' but 'outside its gates,' to dwell in, play in, and explore the landscape outside of it, making our transitory existence one committed to hospitality and care as much as to levity and solidarity with those who also find themselves inhabiting this space of marginality?⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 137.

⁶⁷ Bey, *Black Trans Feminism*, 93.

⁶⁸ Bey, *Black Trans Feminism*, 94.

⁶⁹ George Yancy, ed., *White Self-Criticality beyond Anti-Racism: How Does It Feel to Be a White Problem?*, Philosophy of Race (Lanham Boulder New York London: Lexington Books, 2015). I would argue that there is certainly an epistemological and ontological limit to experiencing another's world. Rachel McKinnon has explained this in terms of her experience of gender transition: "One might be relatively aware of the concept of misogyny and its effects on women. However, actually inhabiting the world as a woman and having patriarchal forces operate on oneself is a different matter. In short, it's the difference between knowing the rules of a sport and actually playing. Some things just have to be experienced." Rachel McKinnon, "Trans*formative Experiences," *Res Philosophica* 92 (2) 2015, 435.

⁷⁰ Hanna Reichel, *After Method*, 157.

To be clear, to live outside the gates of the Law is not to thereby command that space as one's own. This would of course contradict Reichel's characterization of the commitment to the outside as one of hospitality, care, levity, and solidarity. Yet, in choosing to dwell on the outside, can one not risk *usurping* places in insidious, even if well-intentioned, ways?

The issue of whether dwelling on the outside risks usurping space is particularly relevant in light of Jennings' work, mentioned above, to illuminate how the Christian imagination has been tied to the logic of colonial dominance. This logic is rooted in historical Christian practices of missionizing, taking, and settling lands, an imagination structured by a claim "to be the host, the owner of the spaces it entered, and [that] demanded native peoples enter its cultural logics, its ways of being in the world, and its conceptualities."⁷¹ Jennings has connected this colonial logic to whiteness, for Europeans placed interdependence "on a trajectory toward an endless becoming organized around white bodies."⁷² If one were to consider how such a logic might subtend a notion of grace, the grace of the Christian gospel might become partial justification for bringing others in, where bringing in can translate to practices of taking over by the Christian host. Linn Tonstad has discussed this in another key, pointing out the ways in which churched Christians have often imagined themselves as those in the position of recognizing and welcoming the 'other,' offering goods and a presumed faithfulness to the Good that secures one's *own* goodness in ways that fly in the face of Protestantism's best impulses, including a "refusal of goodness and insistence on total depravity."⁷³

This is also a temptation that Cone recognized when asserting that to know God one must know black persons, which presupposes that one has already become black. Becoming black is

⁷¹ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2010), 8.

⁷² Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 61.

⁷³ Linn Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 270.

impossible for white persons, and we are tempted to simply engage in “sin offerings that represent a white way of assuring [ourselves] that [we] are basically ‘good’ persons” such as “lending a helping hand to the poor and unfortunate blacks of society.”⁷⁴ I read Cone’s tongue-in-cheek tone in stating that blacks are “poor and unfortunate” as revealing the same trajectory Jennings talks about above, where white bodies are still the organizing principle of the structure. The white imaginary puts one in the space of the gift-giver, and in so doing, one cannot join in the struggle of liberation because one cannot give up a vision of the human predicated on white becoming (in this case, being and becoming ‘good,’ and using the so-called poor and unfortunate to obtain that goodness). Therefore, the white imaginary might frame dwelling on the outside as itself a way of instrumentalizing others for the sake of one’s own gain, a move that remains squarely within the logic of dominance.

I would suggest that these risks become particularly acute when certain subjects become attached to victimhood as they sometimes do in trauma frameworks. That is, insofar as traumatized subjects are imagined to lack agency, ability to imagine a future, remember their past, and so on, and insofar as such a view of subjectivity attaches in particular to entire groups of people, such people become victims ripe for saving. Oftentimes, then, so-called redeemed communities are assumed to be those places that are to save such subjects, rather than attend to and transform the very logics, places, and structures – including churches of which these redeemed communities are a part – that result in dispossession. The (white) Christian imagination tempts one to think that one is always the one who has something to give (e.g., good news, redemption, the offer of life) rather than the one who themselves is in continual need of the critical love of grace. “To claim that the church is a positive (albeit imperfect) sign of the arrival of the kingdom allows the church to claim an ideal

⁷⁴ Cone, “God is Black,” Thistlethwaite and Engel eds., *Lift Every Voice*, 86.

rather than actual identity. In so doing, it pretends to recognize Jesus and control the distribution of his body, and it risks encountering a Christ who does not recognize the church.”⁷⁵

There is always a risk in suggesting resurgent grace dwells with God on the edges of a system, in and in spite of experienced quotidian crises, that one could be tempted to also dwell in ways that take over land, claim to possess the body of Christ, and reproduce the logic of domination. This is why the critical edge of grace remains necessary, something I hope to show through the two examples to come at the end of this chapter.

3. *A Place-Making Potency*

There is an additional question that needs to be addressed: In suggesting, by way of ‘queer grace,’ that resurgent grace occurs ‘in the outside,’ does one not also justify, then, the very suffering that occurs for those *forcibly* placed ‘outside’? In other words, it is important to recognize that there can be real consequences for those who remain supposedly ‘unredeemed’ because the system is predicated on their never having access to so-called redemption in the first place. Here, Katie Cannon’s notion of ‘quiet grace’ becomes crucial.

Cannon argues that black women display ‘quiet grace,’ a virtue cultivated in living with others and in living amidst their illegibility to white notions of womanhood. Reading the work of Zora Neale Hurston, Cannon discerns and develops the moral wisdom of the black community, marked by a unique set of values that requires “mastering, radicalizing and sometimes destroying pervasive, negative *orientations*.”⁷⁶ It is this mastery, radicalization, and destruction of negative orientations that constitutes, for Cannon by way of Hurston, quiet grace. If resurgent grace is disorienting for some, in being oriented away from the mastery of systems, for others, resurgent

⁷⁵ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 275.

⁷⁶ Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, American Academy of Religion Academy Series, no. 60 (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1988), 126, emphasis mine.

grace is already arriving in *mastering* negative orientations on the way to radicalizing or destroying them. According to Cannon,

The Black woman's very life depends upon her being able to decipher the various sounds in the larger world, to hold in check the nightmare figures of terror, to fight for basic freedoms against the sadistic law enforcement agencies in her community, to resist temptation to capitulate to the demands of the status quo, to find meaning in the most despotic circumstances and to create something where nothing was before.⁷⁷

Therefore, resurgent grace, to be clear, is always what arrives against systems oriented to perpetuating actual experiences of quotidian crises. It is tied to the ever restless and incomplete work of reaching for the possibility of escaping that which would deny one's 'beingness,' which must be contextualized within the varying crises one faces. As Cannon explains, "[Grace and truth] are not fixed, eternal structures but dynamic and evolving qualities that force consideration of new possibilities."⁷⁸ According to Cannon, grace is what allows one to make a way in and beyond even the direst of circumstances, and these circumstances are not proportionately dispersed. Nevertheless, Canon goes on, even as grace reaches for truth, it is not "the element that rescues Black people from the bewildering pressures and perplexities of institutionalized social evils, but rather, it serves to designate images of options that are possible, to illuminate choices in human interaction."⁷⁹ Resurgent grace, like Canon's 'quiet grace,' arises where people make a life amidst structures of domination.

Therefore, resurgent grace allows a way of living that is (dis)oriented to taking part in the work of overcoming evil, something exemplified well in abolitionist practices. That is, resurgent grace makes possible the use of "sensibilities, dependencies, talents, and indeed a complement of consciousness and capacity...to make where [we] are into places [we wish] to be."⁸⁰ Resurgent grace,

⁷⁷ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 125-126.

⁷⁸ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 128.

⁷⁹ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 128.

⁸⁰ Gilmore, *Abolition Geography*, 356.

again, opens possibilities within crises, and yet these possibilities can always be concretized in practices of making place. For example, Ruth Gilmore describes how, for those in the black radical tradition, abolition has meant “the undoing of bondage...quite literally to change places: to destroy the geography of slavery by mixing their labor with the external world to change the world and thereby themselves—as it were, habitation as nature—even if geometrically speaking they hadn’t moved far at all.”⁸¹ Resurgent grace is such changing of places, making everyday spaces of mutual support that prefigure the world in which one wants to live.

Furthermore, resurgent grace’s critically loving work can be put in terms of abolitionist theory. Criticism, or what Reichel and Althaus-Reid call the unmasking of idolatry and Cannon calls the search for truth, can also be understood as what Gilmore describes as the illumination of “how relationships of un-freedom consolidate and stretch.”⁸² But, as Gilmore also points out, this critical edge is not “for the purpose of documenting misery. Rather, the point is not only to identify central contradictions—inherent vices—in regimes of dispossession, but also, urgently, to show how racial consciousness in action resolves into liberated life-ways, however provisional, present and past.”⁸³ Taking cues, then, from black radical, liberation, womanist, and queer theological traditions, grace requires criticism that identifies those “processes of hierarchy, dispossession, and exclusion that congeal in and as group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death,”⁸⁴ understood theologically as the epistemological search for truth. At the same time, resurgent grace engages in the reparative work of love that pays attention to how to make places that resist, survive, and transform in and in spite of processes of dispossession and exclusion.

⁸¹ Gilmore, *Abolition Geography*, 356.

⁸² Gilmore, *Abolition Geography*, 351.

⁸³ Gilmore, *Abolition Geography*, 351.

⁸⁴ Gilmore, *Abolition Geography*, 352.

I have thus far contended that grace is both critical and loving, that it dwells outside the system and is experienced in making one's place on the edges. Following liberation, womanist, and queer theology and their counterparts in black feminist, trans, and abolitionist theory, grace is not a metaphor, but takes place and makes place. It is quotidian because it arrives in simple work (or it can arrive in radical work), but it is part of an everyday orientation of one's life. As Nat Raha states, "If at times healing may neither be possible nor desirable, we instead work at the cultivation of care and mutual support that inaugurates a more livable world and calls for the transformation of the material conditions that fracture and break us, conditions structured against the sustenance of poor, transfeminine people/of color and of poor, feminized people/of color more generally."⁸⁵ Raha goes on to list a number of simple, yet powerful habits for cultivating such care, such as "checking in, comparing notes, collectivizing lunch and dinner, bringing bodies back into conversations and spaces," all with the eye to "work[ing] ourselves out of the liberal myths of enfranchisement and the exceptionalization of struggles."⁸⁶ As Raha's list illuminates, much of the work of being a part of resurgent grace's arrival, insofar as resurgent grace arrives in abolitionist place-making, is relational. There is, of course, a long tradition within feminism, and feminist theology, that has considered how the cultivation of relationships is a primary site of grace, a tradition I will turn to shortly.

Resurgent grace calls one to commit to making place and making kin, through co-collaboration, not because one has something to offer or because one wants to be good, but because one is committed to making livable worlds for all of planetary life. How this is done, more concretely, is always contextual and never complete. However, in the next sections, I aim to develop a more tangible picture of resurgent grace through two examples.

⁸⁵ Nat Raha, "Transfeminine Brokenness, Radical Transfeminism," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no. 3 (2017): 642.

⁸⁶ Raha, "Transfeminine Brokenness, Radical Transfeminism," 642.

Resurgent Grace in Collaboration and Collegueship: The Mud Flower Collective

Over a span of five weekends and from 1982-1984, a group of seven theologians met to discuss what feminist theology was in the academy and the state of theological education in seminaries, calling themselves the Mud Flower Collective. The Mud Flower Collective brought together a number of scholars, some still finishing their dissertations, and some of whom would later become household names in contemporary constructive theology, including Katie Cannon, Beverly Harrison, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Bess Johnson (Delores Williams), Mary Pellauer, Nancy Richardson, and Carter Heyward. They published their work together, supported by two different grants, in a book called *God's Fierce Whimsy*.⁸⁷ Despite minimal critical attention following its publication, Katie Cannon has recounted numerous instances where individuals approached her to express how much the book had impacted them.⁸⁸ Thus, while the book has perhaps been relegated to the annals of feminist theological history, I turn to it now as a site to think through ways in which academic theology might take part in the facilitation of resurgent grace.

I argue that the work of the Mud Flower Collective, in being intentional about with whom one does theology and in allowing both agonism and care to drive their conversations and work together, exemplifies the kind of place-making in which resurgent grace reveals itself. Not only that, but as noted in the opening to this chapter, the Collective names abolition to be the soil in which feminist work should be rooted. I turn to the collective's work together to think about how this 'soil' informs their book.

Moreover, in turning to the relationships developed in the Mud Flower Collective, and the work produced by that collective, I aim to show that resources already exist within the tradition of

⁸⁷ Mud Flower Collective, eds., *God's Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological Education* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985).

⁸⁸ Gary Dorrien, "Cannon, Williams, and Womanist Survival," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Fall/Winter 2022.

feminist theology to develop a theology of resurgent grace. I am not trying to romanticize the Mud Flower Collective, as if they had discovered ‘real’ feminism that we should now return to. But at the same time, I do not see the trajectory of feminist theology or feminist activism as one of progress. It is a tradition that has held dear both love and suspicion, not only in engagement with texts, but in the working groups and relationships in which it has been nurtured. In fact, the members all define feminism differently in a dialogue displayed in the early exchanges of the book, with Katie Cannon stating explicitly that “For [her], [feminism] doesn’t have anything to do with women; it’s the commitment to end white supremacy, male domination, and economic exploitation.”⁸⁹ Such an understanding of feminism is exemplified by the work of the book itself, for the book explores how racial imaginations have structured the affective lives of members of the collective and theological education more broadly; how institutional funding and resources shape access not only who gets in to higher education, but what gets published; and how queerness and sexual desire pose an acute threat to patriarchal and traditional Christian theologies. The work of the collective made a space in which to think theologically about how to live lives in ‘the cracks,’ that is, amidst the aforementioned constraints and problems.

Finally, I find the work of the collective instructive because, as I said, relationships make up landscapes that orient one’s affections and attachments. These, in turn, matter for how one does theology and how one’s theology in turn informs one’s life. Relationships therefore are part of what shapes the places in which resurgent grace might arrive. Moreover, I see relationships, including friendship and collegiality, as sites in which religious subjectivity is shaped and produced in ways that are not apolitical or antipolitical. Here, I am indebted to insights from Constance Furey and Brenna Moore. Whereas trends in religious studies over recent decades have turned attention away

⁸⁹ Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 14.

from intimate relationships and toward 'body and society,'⁹⁰ both Furey and Moore have illuminated how attention to relationships remain central to religious subjectivity and can in fact deepen analyses of power. According to Furey, scholars of religion "are well positioned to appreciate that there is no subjectivity without intersubjectivity and no religious subject without socially defined and subjectively meaningful relationships. Relationships enact meaning."⁹¹ For Furey, one can attend to relationships, intimacy, desire, and love without having a naïve view about the power of love to transform society.

As should be clear by now, I also see relationships to be central to subject formation, even as broader structures constrain the ways these relationships take shape and the trajectories they follow. Thus, while intimacy can be a site of reiterative convention, "it can also be the space for imagining or enacting alternatives" – the kind of alternatives, I would add, enlivened by resurgent grace.⁹² Following up on Furey's intervention, Brenna Moore provides an account of spiritual friendship among a mid-twentieth-century global network of Catholic scholars, artists, and activists, including Claude McKay, Simone Weil, Jacques Maritain, and Dorothy Day. According to Moore, for this international community, friendship provided a site of belonging and a place of encounter with the sacred. Beyond that, it was a place for cultivating political action not only in opening up new modes of thought through dialogic engagement, but also through enacting alternative modes of belonging

⁹⁰ Constance Furey describes a shift in religious studies happening in the last few decades of the twentieth century: a movement from attention to religious subjects' relationships with others, both human and divine, to attention to body and society, or external signifying practices that constrain and discipline subjects. "[S]tudies about what bodies do and why practices matter made questions about intimate relationships--about interpersonal commitments and conflicts--seem like the preoccupations of a bygone era. In other words, attention to practice, performance, authorizing discourse, and subjectifying power has focused attention on the subject in relation to society but not on the relational subject, formed and enacted through sustained affiliations and intense encounters." Constance Furey, "Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (March 2012): 9.

⁹¹ Furey, "Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies," 10.

⁹² Furey, "Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies," 23.

to those based upon traditional notions of kinship and nation.⁹³ Spiritual friendship, for Moore, is then both a place of experiencing the divine and a place of calling forth, even enacting, political action.

My turn to sites of relationship in the framework of quotidian crises is, in part, in an effort to join the work above to see formation as happening both at the level of ‘body and society’ but also intimacy and affect. The Mud Flower Collective certainly saw the development of their own friendships as a spiritual practice.⁹⁴ “Spirituality is fundamentally a communal commitment, a

⁹³ “[F]or these men and women, spiritual friendship was hardly inoculated from the major political crises of the twentieth century. It was at once both a corridor to the sacred and inseparable from their political and humanitarian efforts in the midcentury...In particular, spiritual friendship was deliberately cultivated as an alternative to genealogical modes of belonging based on the inherited ties of family, tradition, and nation.” Brenna Moore, *Kindred Spirits: Friendship and Resistance at the Edges of Modern Catholicism* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2021), 4.

⁹⁴ My framing the relationships among members of the collective as sites of spiritual friendship, where developing relationships through both criticism and care is a kind of spiritual practice, is distinct from the interpretation Sarah Coakley has offered. Coakley has described *God’s Fierce Whimsy* as a “ploy” exemplary of “a particular North American association of ‘feminism’ with a socially conscious justice-seeking version of ‘religious education’.” (Sarah Coakley, “Shaping the Field: A Transatlantic Perspective,” in *Fields of Faith: Theology and Religious Studies for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. David F. Ford, Ben Quash, and Janet Martin Soskice, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 42). According to Coakley, The Mud Flower Collective, and the feminism and womanism represented therein, provides merely an “a-historical notion of ‘justice’” as the aim of religious education and ostensibly rejects the study of religion in ways that ignores “the sophisticated ‘gender studies’ so illuminatingly being developed.” Coakley goes on: “This feminist/womanist movement in ‘Religious Education’ has, in contrast to the concomitant developments in ‘gender studies’ in ‘religion’, tended to favour the ‘practical/political’, and to deride the aridly ‘intellectual’; it has also shown a marked resistance to ‘spiritual practices’ other than those with obvious and immediate political impact” (Coakley, “Shaping the Field,” 50).

Absent an explanation of what ‘high’ intellectual research is and precisely what it would add to the research produced by the Collective, it seems Coakley assumes that ‘high’ research is limited to high-falutin discussions of doctrine, that a theory of praxis cannot be ‘high’ theory, or that an entire legacy of thinking around critical pedagogy and liberative education is too ‘simple’ or ‘engaged’ to count as rigorous theoretical or theological work in its own right. Coakley’s inattentive criticisms extend to her citation of a single point from the book to evidence the claim that the Collective makes “a curiously sneering rejection of spiritual practices as a-political, narcissistic, and propelled merely by a desire to ‘feel good about myself’” (Coakley, “Shaping the Field,” 50). The passage that Coakley cites, when put in context, reveals that the collective is not worried about spiritual practices per se, nor does it deride all such practices as a-political and narcissistic. Rather, the collective makes clear that they are worried by a tendency in seminary education to promote

bonding between and among us, a relational pilgrimage—with God precisely as God is engaged and accepted in our love of neighbor as self.”⁹⁵ As Stina Busmann Jost, in her study of the collective, has pointed out, “A key dimension of spirituality...for the collective was the pursuit of right relationship with others.”⁹⁶ Therefore, one can understand the collective’s cultivation of friendships as fundamental to the pursuit of justice, which for them, ultimately constitutes the pursuit of God. As Cannon, quoting Heyward, relates, “I wholeheartedly believe that ‘goddling is relating.’ I only know the essential nature of God when I as an individual, and my people as a race, are not permitted—but commanded by the respect of our very being—space to engage in the most rigorously honest confrontation.”⁹⁷ In other words, relating to God is constituted by pursuing right relationships with others, a pursuit that is opened up by commitment to honest encounter with others, an honest encounter that requires the critical yet loving edge of what I have called resurgent grace.⁹⁸

Such honest encounters, however, are not without the risks of disagreement, refusal, and failure. For example, in Moore’s account of spiritual friendship, she points out the more pernicious

(especially white/Anglo) seminarians who seek ‘true’ spirituality, “not because we reject the expressed need and desire to know God, but rather because so many seem to accept the nonreflective, nondialogic, nonrelational interiority of the experience of God” (Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 162). The collective is worried about a particularly Euroamerican emphasis on privatized relationships between an individual and God, one that eschews accountability to those from other cultures, classes, and races. *This* kind of spirituality, the collective states “sounds to us like a code word for” the feeling good about oneself Coakley cites, along with a rejection of involvement in political movements, a response to lack of community, attempting to be holy, and a way to avoid conflict, among other things (Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 162).

⁹⁵ Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 164.

⁹⁶ Stina Busman Jost, *Walking with the Mud Flower Collective: God’s Fierce Whimsy and Dialogic Theological Method* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 69.

⁹⁷ Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 40.

⁹⁸ As David Kelsey, commenting on the collective, explains, “If relationship with God (love of God; faith’s insightfulness) is experienced in personal relationships, then care of the former mandates care of the latter. And if personal relationships are relationships between persons with different social power, then care for the former mandates concern about the justice of the latter. Therefore care for people’s experience of God mandates above all attention to justice issues.” David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 143.

potentials of seeing friendship as a site of political activism and of romanticizing bonds that are not based upon traditional models of kinship. As Moore illuminates, some members of the community she studied neglected their own biological children or scorned their spouses, and moreover, these friendships themselves were not without scuffles and tensions. In no sense are relationships exempt from violence or inequity, and they are one site in which one can experience change, but that is certainly not the end of the story.

This is no less the case for the Mud Flower Collective. From the beginning, the collective writes of the difficulty and bitterness that accompanied their collective attempt. While members experienced space to play, which they call “a spirit of whimsy,” they also note the costs of trying to produce the project, including losing several members of the collective along the way. Drawing upon a poem written by Delores Williams for the collective, they chose the name Mud Flower Collective:

Flowers do not grow easily in mud. In the midst of the hope and solidarity, which the very publication of this book affirms, stand our alienation and pain....We have tried in this project to name as our responsibility the points of bitter continuity between ourselves—our attitudes and actions—and the lives of those who have gone before us in a racist, sexist, classist world. Our words reflect the fierce intensity of broken lives and promises.⁹⁹

Developing lateral relationships in the collective, as I will show, cannot and does not solve all tensions and animosities. There are ontological and epistemological limits to caring for another, which is in part where the work of grace’s critical edge, in revealing attachments to the pursuit of mastery and domination, comes in. At the same time, experiences of alienation and pain can justify the refusal to remain engaged in a particular community, and the goal is not always unbroken unity.

The stated goal for the Mud Flower Collective is, rather, liberation – which entails wrestling with the potential problems that arise in the collective while also engaging in work to combat those problems. The collective points to feminism’s historical ambiguity, having roots both in the

⁹⁹ Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, xi.

“Euroamerican Enlightenment” and in abolition, but feminism remains morally utopic, as it aims toward liberation. Because it is rooted in abolition, one might say that feminism challenges how one lives one life. The collective notes the importance of participation “in a variety of tasks relating to women’s ordination; procreative choice; political campaigns; battered and abused women; denominational and ecumenical projects...civil rights, peace, and liberation movements for people in Latin America, Asia, Africa...lesbian/gay projects; seminary teaching and counseling...”¹⁰⁰ – all of which have shaped the work and theology of the collective. Just as resurgent grace is an inextricable from place, so the Mud Flower Collective displays the importance of the abolitionist roots of its work to transform concrete places.

Furthermore, I understand the collective to exemplify how both criticism and love, the very work of resurgent grace, are central to the development of relationships among members. The collective names solidarity as part of their task, a solidarity that is aligned with love, where love is “distinct from a patronizing charity or affections of conciliation and goodwill. In solidarity, love means acting, putting ourselves on the line, with (not for) others. On behalf of the well-being—rights, dignity, needs—of all of us.”¹⁰¹ This love, a genuine intimacy beyond charity, toleration, or mere goodwill, required critical vigilance and tension among members of the collective. Thus, while the group centers diversity, a term that today has become associated with a kind of passé neoliberal multiculturalism,¹⁰² diversity in this case was meant to lead to productive challenge and even disagreement. As Isasi-Díaz states in the book, “I want [my diversity] to challenge you, to rub

¹⁰⁰ Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*. 6.

¹⁰¹ Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 96.

¹⁰² These terms have since been come under critique and suspicion as tools wielded by neoliberalism and decentralized, global capitalism, which together value the commodification of difference, fluidity, and boundlessness. While such critiques have arisen in a variety of disciplines, for a discussion in theology, see the introduction to Fulkerson and Briggs, *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology*.

against you.”¹⁰³ The work of the collective, then, included confrontation with one another – a critical and painful practice necessary to nurture loving relations.

In other words, honest confrontation among members facilitates a kind of critical vigilance necessary to unveil idols, which is, again, part of the work of resurgent grace in making places on the edge. As the collective states, “We confess to you, as we do to ourselves, that we must be on the alert every waking moment of our lives not to....perpetuat[e] with our lives the worship of the color white, the elevation of men above us all, and the adoration of material gain as it represents our moving up, having value, being able to feel and act like we are worth something.”¹⁰⁴ Such critical vigilance was sometimes facilitated by conflict among members of the collective and, especially, the willingness to enter into conflict, whether it be “refusing to compromise the well-being of a sister in order to keep the peace,” “colliding and joining in conflict with each other,” “refusing to ignore and be silent about the effects of racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia...that inhibit the movement of the Spirit among us.”¹⁰⁵ These tensions, which often had a disorienting effect for some members, even led one member to leave the collective altogether.

White liberal members of the collective, as Carter Heyward notes, were especially conflict-averse, but learned through the work of the collective how necessary such tensions were to come to terms with their own complicity in social sins.¹⁰⁶ This attitude prevalent among white liberal women mirrors what Susan Thistlethwaite attributes to liberal theology more broadly, and something Thistlethwaite contends the collective works against. Due to the collective’s embrace of conflict,

¹⁰³ Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 26.

¹⁰⁴ Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 75.

¹⁰⁵ As Heyward admits in a letter to Cannon, “[B]eing candid is more difficult for white liberal women than for just about anyone else, because (1) liberals don’t like conflict; (2) whites don’t like to get in touch with the difference our race makes; and (3) women, white women at least, have been cultivated to be reconcilers—although I should add that such attitudes are also class related.” Mud flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 164.

¹⁰⁶ Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 52.

Susan Thistlethwaite described *God's Fierce Whimsy* as a departure from much liberal theology, which tends to shun anything that “disturbs harmony.”¹⁰⁷ Here, Thistlethwaite refers explicitly to Schleiermacher as the source of this liberal tradition, which expresses a distaste for contradiction, preferring instead to see “the world as an arena of reasonably smooth progress toward an ideal society” and “setbacks [as] where sin is located.”¹⁰⁸ The love cultivated by the collective is one that does not merely tolerate other members of the group, but is willing to be threatened, challenged, and disturbed by the ways that racial, sexual, and socio-economic difference structure group relations. In an interview, Katie Cannon noted that the collective committed to brutal honesty, and chose to enter into the “touchy spots.” Cannon states, “When people say: what’s the elephant in the room? We got on the elephant. We rode the elephant. We cleaned up elephant droppings. You know, it’s like we got to look around each other with the elephant there. And that was the gift of the Mud Flower Collective.”¹⁰⁹ In the willingness to “ride the elephant,” members of the collective cultivated connection beyond toleration, connection that is God’s participation in human life and disturbs hierarchical relations. Cannon describes this connection as “intense, soul-to-soul work” where “genuine intimacy does occur.”¹¹⁰

Early on, the collective admits that friendship alone is limited in its potential for the enactment of social change but nevertheless necessary to a kind of epistemological orientation toward such enactment. The collective is clear, for example, that “personal affection does not negate the grotesque effects of white supremacy....Contrary to what we would wish, friendship between members of dominant and subordinate races does nothing in and of itself to eliminate racism.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, “Together in Difference,” *Christianity and Crisis*, August 11, 1986, 278.

¹⁰⁸ Thistlethwaite, “Together in Difference,” 278.

¹⁰⁹ Jost, *Walking with the Mud Flower Collective*, 138.

¹¹⁰ Jost, *Walking with the Mud Flower Collective*, 161.

¹¹¹ Mud Flower Collective, *God's Fierce Whimsy*, 4.

Racism is, as the collective clarifies, an organized and institutionalized social phenomenon. Therefore, friendships cannot deconstruct such powerful social edifices, but they can “enable us, however, to risk seeing and naming the barriers that divide us and our people so that, in facing the reality of the social order we have inherited, we can participate more effectively in its transformation.”¹¹² Friendship and colleagueship can be understood here as a key step in revealing the social order for what it is (in encountering an other, the critical edge of grace can arrive) and also, therefore, a first step in effective participation to transform it (the decision to take part in resurgent grace’s work of care). Thus, the commitment to justice is at once constituted by collective action and attention to one’s own life: “Justice, of course, can’t happen until the connections are really being made, until others call you forth, connect with you, make you take yourself seriously.”¹¹³ Resurgent grace arrives in these connections, in striving for honesty about harmful attachments, and in working toward a love that reorients one toward different attachments.

So far, I have described the work of the Mud Flower collective as place of resurgent grace. In being a site of spiritual friendship, where both criticism and love engaged members in relational and affective work towards liberation, the collective made a place for resurgent grace to arrive. The collective’s intentional work to make this place included mundane and administrative work to facilitate co-collaborative, meaningful relationships, such as meeting together over a sustained period of time, writing letters to think through remaining issues, organizing meetings and conferences with wider communities, and talking on the phone. At the same time, the collective worked to incorporate both honesty and confrontation among members, which I have suggested opened members up to the critical edge of grace, and support and care for one another’s struggles, which I

¹¹² Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 4.

¹¹³ Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 156.

have suggested opened members up to the loving intimacy of grace. The latter could not occur without the former.

The Mud Flower Collective is a group of academic theologians, and I have suggested that resurgent grace indeed can arrive outside so-called redeemed communities. Furthermore, while the Mud Flower Collective sees abolition as the soil in which their feminist theological work was rooted, I would like to extend that precedent to think more carefully about abolitionist work today. To do so, I turn to a demonstration that took place in the summer of 2020 and to black transfeminist thought and praxis. I see black feminism and womanism as marking the limits of feminist work (something the Mudflower Collective was wrestling through), but I also want to consider how transgender studies can mark the limits of such work. As Kai Green and Treva Ellison have remarked, “Both transgender studies and black feminism enter the white feminist/women’s studies terrain by marking its conceptual limits, its inability to account for those who are disappeared, who are only taken up as marginalized tokens of diversity.”¹¹⁴ I extend the contention that transgender studies and black feminism mark the limit of white feminist/women’s studies terrain to religious studies and (white) feminist theology. As Max Strassfeld has argued, religious studies, in order to be feminist, must be transfeminist. This requires investigating the ways that religion has been cisgendered, which would allow for the discovery of “new contours of religion” beyond “what we even consider to *be* religion.”¹¹⁵ In that vein, I would like to consider the importance of abolitionist

¹¹⁴ Kai Green and Treva Ellison, “Tranifesting,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (May 2014): 223. For the necessity of feminism’s being transfeminist see also, for example, Emi Koyama, “The Transfeminist Manifesto, in *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier (Northeastern University Press: 2003); Laura Horak, “Trans Studies,” *Feminist Media Histories* 4, no. 2 (April 1, 2018): 201–6; and Jack Halberstam, “Toward a Trans* Feminism,” *The Boston Review*, January 18, 2018, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/jack-halberstam-towards-trans-feminism/>.

¹¹⁵ Max Strassfeld, “Transing Religious Studies,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Transing and Queering Feminist Studies and Practices of Religion, 34, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 44.

praxis, as a movement of resurgent grace, in making present a world where black trans lives matter, a world that may extend beyond typical feminist theological understandings of what religion could be.

Resurgent Grace as Black Trans Lives Mattering: The Grief-Work and Care-Work of Abolitionist Ritual

On July 31, 2020, Kopanoart, The Aura House, Molasses Chicago, and the Black and Brown Sex Workers Chicagoland Mutual Aid Fund by Lynzo the Heartthrob organized a march and vigil to honor black trans people and black women murdered. Nestled in the middle of fervent activism around the world and in the midst of the global Covid-19 pandemic, this action exemplified some of what Angela Davis has noted was distinct about this particular instantiation of the Black liberation movement (protracted long before the murder of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown): the collective leadership and labor of predominantly female and nonbinary activists, as well trans women, and explicit attention to policing's racist structures.¹¹⁶

At the same time, what makes this particular demonstration unique is the way, I will suggest, that it called into being a place where black trans lives mattered. That is, the action was a pursuit of the restless work of concretizing, to draw upon the Katie Cannon's language of quiet grace again, a place where black 'beingness' could be. In that, I place it along the lineage of the work of abolition, where "Abolition is a dream toward futurity vested in insurgent, counter-Civilizational histories – genealogies of collective genius that perform liberation under conditions of duress."¹¹⁷ The march and vigil was a ritual of commemoration¹¹⁸ but also a performance of liberation, in that it made a

¹¹⁶ See Angela Davis's foreword to Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Updated edition (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2021).

¹¹⁷ Dylan Rodríguez, "Abolition as Praxis of Human Being: A Foreword," *Harvard Law Review* 132, no. 6 (April 2019), 1575.

¹¹⁸ "[I]f there is such a thing as social memory, we are likely to find it in commemorative ceremonies. Commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative in so far as they are

place where resurgent grace – as that which arrives on the edges of systems in resurgent time – was made manifest. “[C]ollective actions collect the space itself, gather the pavement, and animate and organize the architecture,”¹¹⁹ such that this collective action reconfigured the place-making protocols of imaginaries, theological and otherwise, of whiteness. Therefore, I see this demonstration as calling into being a world where people could live, in the edge, the conditions of possibility for which involved mourning, drawing boundaries and setting limits, holding people accountable, facilitating mutual aid, engaging in collective meditation, singing, dancing, and marching.

In the social media fliers, shared only among the communities and followers of the small group of organizers, the organizers explicitly framed the march through Christina Sharpe’s, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*.¹²⁰ Written in the description below pictures of the flyer on Instagram was a passage from Sharpe’s book: “What does it mean to defend the dead? To tend to the black dead and dying: to tend to the Black person, to Black people, always living in the push toward our death? It means work. It is work: hard emotional, physical, and intellectual work that demands vigilant attendance to the needs of the dying, to ease their way, and also to the needs of the living.”¹²¹ In the invocation of Sharpe, I take the organizers to have named the intent of the march and vigil as the wake work, which is also care work, that Sharpe develops in her book.

In her book, Sharpe is interested in how to attend to the ongoing event of “chattel slavery and its afterlives,” through what she characterizes as wake work. Such wake work is a demand called forth by “seeing and imagining responses to terror in the varied and various ways that our Black lives are lived under occupation; ways that attest to the modalities of Black life lived in, as, under,

performative....Performative memory is bodily.” Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, Themes in the Social Sciences (Cambridge, England, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 71.

¹¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 71.

¹²⁰ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

¹²¹ This passage, posted on Instagram in the description of the march and the vigil, comes from Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 10.

and despite Black death.”¹²² Sharpe also wants to think about care along with the wake, but a care that is distinct from “state-imposed regimes of surveillance,” and is rather enacted in lateral relations “in the register of the intramural, in a different relation than that of the violence of the state.”¹²³ Wake work and lateral care have already been and already are taking place, attesting to the way that black lives are lived and therefore livable, even “under occupation.”¹²⁴ I see the organizers as taking up Sharpe’s call to imagine wake work and lateral care in drawing upon the resources of community organizations already engaging in such work, and bringing together this community in order to not only mourn, but honor the dead through *actually making a place* where black trans people and black women were free to be. This did not entail forgetting the very real terror of policing, anti-black, or anti-trans violence, sustained by structures of dispossession, for this was not only named, but explicitly resisted in the enactment of wake work and lateral care that took place and *made* place in the hours of the march and vigil held in Washington Park. Not only that, but in order for such a place to *take place*, certain refusals and modes of accountability were required, particularly around the protocols of engagement for white and cisgender participants. In making a place where critical accountability shaped the work of care, with the aim of making it so lives under domination could better *live*, this was also a place imbued with the potential of resurgent grace.

The organizers were clear that the work of remembering, in the wake, not only cannot restore the lives lost, but it also does not come without demands to make a more livable world for black trans people and black women. Participants were asked to dress in white and march for three quarters of a mile, sometimes with moments of silence, sometimes ‘say[ing] their names’ – Kiwi Herring, Bubba Walker, Nina Pop, Sandra Bland, Chynal Lindsey, Brian ‘Egypt’ Powers, Paris Cameron – to honor memories of those who were never and could never be given back their lives.

¹²² Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 20.

¹²³ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 20.

¹²⁴ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 22.

A poem written by one of the organizers, reflecting on the passage from Sharpe's book, conveys a dual sentiment of the inability to provide the dead the life they should have had, while also asserting the demand to ensure that life be given to those still among the living:

This is our time to bare sight to the voyages and
Departures of so many forced to embark upon the
Crossroads, yet never given what they are owed.
What do we owe Black Trans People?
What do we owe Black Women?
Those so often and forgotten after sailing into waters in
Where we may not follow.
We Demand Justice
We Demand Vigilance
We Demand Retribution
We Demand Reverence
WE DEMAND LIFE.
Life given to the memories of those who've been taken
From, and the life owed to we who still stand ashore.

Naming the dead and creating a shrine that led marchers along the streets, built from fresh flowers and painted with the statement "Black Trans Power," worked not only to expose the violence perpetuating the premature death of the black women and black trans people being remembered, but also demanded the creation of structures under which black (trans) life would matter. In other words, I understand the work of both naming and remembering the dead *and* demanding life as what C. Riley Snorton has called "rhetorical enactments": "Black (Trans) Lives Matter provides a conceptual framework to understand the ongoing struggle in the present by way of a future (aspiration) in which black lives *will have mattered* to everyone."¹²⁵ To remember and name those disproportionately dying under the "intolerable yet quotidian violence,"¹²⁶ what I have called quotidian crises, is not just to look to a past that cannot be restored, but is also "to gesture toward the temporality of sociogenesis, in the form of a plea (or, better yet, a prayer) for a different future

¹²⁵ C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 198.

¹²⁶ Kara Keeling, "Looking For M—," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15, no. 4 (October 1, 2009): 565–82.

to begin now.”¹²⁷ The future that could arrive comes through the hoped for breaking-in of resurgent grace. As the poem above notes, we cannot follow those who have departed into death, yet we can demand life – a life that was deserved but never can be given to those lost, yet a life that is *still* needed in making it so that black trans lives will have mattered to everyone. This includes making places, making a world, where black trans lives do matter here and now.

In understanding *We Shall Not Be Moved* as enacting a place where black trans lives matter, and therefore a place where resurgent grace could arrive, I am also understanding this particular action differently from the way social movement scholars have sometimes interpreted political demonstrations. Demonstrations like the ritual enactment of a vigil and mourning processual are often understood as aiming to influence those in power, the community around one, and/or the participants in the demonstration. In his work on religious practice, Emile Durkheim long ago saw rituals to play a key social role in forming meanings, emotional ties, and a sense of solidarity among a collective.¹²⁸ As Jesus Casquete has argued, demonstrations can be both external and internal forms of communication, providing “participants with the sense of being engaged in a common cause with a large number of like-minded people who share similar feelings about an issue” and “work as opportunities to cement a given social group.”¹²⁹ Similarly, Chandra Russo has interpreted ritual vigils as witnesses to state violence but also “planned social performances” that aim to appeal to the public – a “form of political theater” – and to build group solidarity.¹³⁰ In other words, in the ritual enactment of a vigil, according to Russo, one of the aims is to upend power by bringing those people who consider themselves external to the movement in, as new participants. Part of the

¹²⁷ Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, x.

¹²⁸ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹²⁹ Jesus Casquete, “The Power of Demonstrations,” *Social Movement Studies* 5, no. 1 (May 2006): 48.

¹³⁰ Chandra Russo, *Solidarity in Practice: Moral Protest and the US Security State* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

strategy of the vigil is to evoke relevant emotions that would make outsiders identify with the struggle and in turn, join in resistance to injustice.

What is unique about this particular demonstration, however, is that while it arguably did work to cement solidarity among those present, I would argue that solidarity was not its primary aim, nor was it primarily aiming to influence authorities or particular communities. Rather, the ritual of commemoration and mourning illustrated by We Shall Not Be Moved enacted an agonistic moral imagination and practice that sought grammar outside the itinerary of anti-black and transantagonistic state violence. It is in these very rituals that black trans lives *will have mattered* because they do matter – not only in remembering the dead, but in celebration and centering of those whose lives are most impacted by the war on black life. I see, then, rituals (like the saying of names, burning of sage, singing, reciting spoken word, meditation, dancing) used in the We Shall Not Be Moved Demonstration as constitutive of everyday possibilities for relating to the history of anti-black and anti-trans violence in alternative ways.¹³¹

In other words, in recognition that the grammar of the state and even that of many liberal and progressive communities and demonstrations could not and do not recognize black trans lives, the primary aim of the march and the vigil was to call into being the very place where black trans lives come to matter, the kind of place, I suggest, enlivened by resurgent grace. In the words of one of the organizers:

We walked through a Black neighborhood to express our community that ALL Black Lives Matter. Black Trans People, Black Women, & Black Sex Workers deserve to be

¹³¹ I am influenced here by the work of Heonik Kwon on ritual commemoration in Vietnam. Through popular rituals of commemoration and consolation, Vietnamese citizens were able to grieve and honor the dead in ways that challenged the national commemoration of the Vietnam war, which usually honored heroes and obliterated the memories of many people's ancestors who had died in the war. "The key aspect of contemporary Vietnamese memory politics is the fact that the emerging local social forms have redefined the bond between the past generations and the present, thereby challenging the hegemony of the state hierarchy in this crucial domain of political culture." Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 178.

able to feel Comfortable and Free of Fears -- & sit in their neighborhood parks to watch the sun set, to walk without harassment, to laugh without violence, to hold space for each other during this Covid-19 Pandemic. Since 2001, 72 Women have been Murdered in both Garfield and Washington Park(s). 42 of them had a history of Sex Work.

Marching through these very neighborhoods and spreading out on blankets in the space of Washington Park, a cotton candy sky illuminated the makeshift stage as a performer sang Lauren Hill's "Black Rage." As the sun set, organizers asked those present to Cashapp or Venmo money for pizza and a dance party was to begin as the sun went down. Just as "Black Trans People, Black Women, & Black Sex Workers deserve to be able to feel Comfortable and Free of Fears" so those present did sit in the neighborhood park and watch the sunset, walk without harassment, laugh without violence, and hold space for each other to rage, grieve, and celebrate, social distanced and masked outside in the park, during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Therefore, I also view this vigil as a site of transformative manifesting, or as Kai M. Green and Treva Ellison have described, "tranifesting." Tranifesting is a mode of resistance rooted in black feminism and Third World solidarity and liberation, which "calls attention to the epistemologies, sites of struggle, rituals, and modes of consciousness, representation, and embodiment that summon into being flexible collectivities."¹³² These flexible collectivities are those that can work across "normativizing and violative configurations of race, gender, class, sex, and sexuality."¹³³ Because resurgent grace arrives on the edges of any system, but may mean disorientation for some (from mastery and domination) and orientation for others (over mastery and domination), it also takes place in the work of developing such flexible collectivities. These collectivities are therefore not developed through a sense of shared trauma or violation, which might assume such traumas could be calculated and automatically attached to certain bodies. (For example, women supporting women

¹³² Kai Green and Treva Ellison, "Tranifesting," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (May 2014): 222.

¹³³ Green and Ellison, "Tranifesting," 222.

trumping all other politics because they have an assumed shared experience of sexual violence). As Marquis Bey avers, “[A] substantive solidarity rests not on how one has been treated—which almost exclusively gets tied to historical terror and trauma as opposed to, for example, racialized instances of joy—but with how one approaches world-changing, politically, and thus radical politics to beget a more habitable world.”¹³⁴ To show up to the space of the vigil required being willing to take part in the performance of a world that does not yet exist: a world where black trans lives matter and a world I have suggested resurgent grace makes possible. ‘Race,’ ‘class,’ ‘gender,’ ‘sex,’ and ‘sexuality,’ in their normativizing configurations, did not exclude anyone from participation, rather, the protocols of whiteness under which these categories get configured were. In other words, flexible collectivities are non-exclusionary, but they are not inclusive of those who do not act according to a world that would celebrate black trans life.

In that vein, whereas scholars of social movements, such as Casquete, see demonstrations, and especially ritual demonstrations, as catalyzing “cohesion and value commitment” and building and conveying “a sense of ‘we’,”¹³⁵ what this vigil displayed was the way in which ‘we’ can only be built by the decentering and even, at times, exclusion of people and mechanisms by which black and trans lives do not matter. Criticism, disagreement, and discomfort were all a part of the work necessary to enact a safe environment for black women and trans people. As the organizers of the demonstration made clear from the beginning, “We implore you to remember that today’s ritual and ceremony is exclusively for the participation and centering of Black Trans People, Black Women, & Black Sex Workers. Know this. And act in accordance to the intentions and purpose of this march, or you will be dealt with swiftly and accordingly.” That is, to call into being a communal place of black trans lives mattering is to enact it, an enactment that is predicated upon an active refusal of

¹³⁴ Bey, *Black Trans Feminism*, 48.

¹³⁵ Casquete, “The Power of Demonstrations,” 46.

whiteness and its operations. The only participants who were allowed to approach the shrine were black women and black trans people, encouraged to place offerings at its foot – photos, letters, flowers. Furthermore, requests for mutual aid were made throughout the demonstration, and these demands were directed towards those participants who were specifically not centered in the demonstration. Pooling resources from those of us with social capital and generational wealth is a way of building futures and kin-ship networks that materially enact the mattering of black trans lives.

In *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, Kelly Brown Douglas starts with the murder of Trayvon Martin, a black child, to ask *what* killed Trayvon – which includes but is not limited to his killer, who received no conviction. Douglas traces this *what* to the Stand Your Ground Law, codified not only by law, but also by social, cultural, and theological assumptions creating what she calls a stand-your-ground culture. Among these assumptions are “God’s presumed ‘preferential option’ for Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism.”¹³⁶ In contrast to God’s preferential option for white exceptionalism, Douglas argues that God identifies with “the lynched/crucified class”: “the Trayvons, the Jordans, the Renishas, the Jonathans, and all other victims of the stand-your-ground-culture war.”¹³⁷ Douglas indicts white churches in particular for refusing to step outside of themselves and be with the lynched/crucified class, something that would require leaving “cherished white property,” a release of privilege that was never ours to own.¹³⁸ Instead, Douglas avers, white churches since the Civil Rights Movement have excused their refusal to enter the black freedom struggle by saying such issues are too controversial.

Sometimes it takes the sting of critique and refusal – that which disorients one, arriving from outside, a gift of the incarnation – to receive the resurgent grace taking place on the edges of

¹³⁶ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), xiv.

¹³⁷ Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*, 174.

¹³⁸ Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*, 201.

systems. The resistant work, the paranoid and suspicious work of criticism, can open up the care, the repair, necessary to hold a world for vulnerable lives. In order, in the words of one of the organizations that facilitated the march, to “hold sacred and work to protect the most marginalized in our communities, Black women, Black trans people, and Black Sex workers” it is necessary to “hold space and witness the divinity found in Black women and Black trans people.” A world where God is found among black trans people would no doubt be disorienting for those who cannot and do not “travel in trans worlds.”¹³⁹ Yet, by directing one to God’s preferential option for the lynched and crucified class, those whose lives are under threat, and yet who *live* in and in spite of conditions of unlivability, Douglas calls one to places where resurgent grace meets quotidian crises.

Conclusion

If trauma discourses are attuned to extraordinary events and unknowable experiences, quotidian crises, as I have argued in this dissertation, attends to those calamities that are ordinary, normalized, drawn-out, and that wear-away rather than suddenly reorient a person. When a catastrophe is extraordinary, one might respond by trying to fully overcome and master the effects of harm, envisioning those who have experienced catastrophe as victims to be saved. Or, one might respond by witnessing to what cannot know, effacing oneself in recognition of human epistemological limits shared by everyone. When coupled together with feminist theological attachments and applied to cases of structural harm, I have tried to illuminate the perils of both frameworks, especially risks of overlooking or misconstruing the ways gender (in its always-configuration with race, sexuality, class, and so on) operates or takes form. As an alternative, I have

¹³⁹ Jacob Hale et al., “Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans____,” *SandyStone.com* (blog), February 25, 2024, <https://sandystone.com/hale.rules.html>.

offered a theological concept of resurgent grace, which makes places of livability in edges and cracks, the blighted landscapes in ecologies of quotidian crises.

At the outset of this dissertation, I stated that it was theological all the way through, and I hope that this claim has been substantiated as the work now comes to a close. Theology, in its most basic definition, is God-talk. However, God is infinite and talk is finite, so there is no guarantee that such finite talk can grasp its transcendent subject. And yet, at least in its Christian mode, the mystery of the infinite becoming finite in Jesus, also known as the incarnation, suggests the possibility of transcendence dwelling in finitude, in the world, and offering something exceeding the crises through which humans muddle and do violence to that world. I have called what is offered in excess resurgent grace. That excess, furthermore, does not arrive in finding the right words to capture the infinite; rather, I have argued, it arrives in animating a way of life that makes place on the edges of systems of domination, systems of domination represented in this chapter particularly through anti-blackness and transantagonism. To see theology in such a light is also to resist what Pamela Lightsey has called a ‘dead theology,’ which is for her a theology that fails to respect the context of queer black women:

We have found the academy and Church to be reservoirs of dead theology that refused to drink from the liberating theological perspectives of any source that was not derived by the status quo. And so they died of dehydration, unable to survive in our oasis of critical reflection, and are dead to us not because they failed to become experts of other theological particularities but because they failed at least to dip into our pools of thought.¹⁴⁰

In many ways, I have simply been following the lead of womanist, *mujerista*, feminist, liberation, and queer theologians and the arguments they have made all along – to do theology that respects, as Lightsey says, the lives of queer black women, which is to say it orients lives to a world in which

¹⁴⁰ Pamela R. Lightsey, *Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

queer black women, black women, black trans people, and black lives will have mattered because they *do* matter, now.

Such theology shapes a life not within the extraordinary temporality of trauma, but in the ordinary, attentive, yet urgent temporality of resurgence. Theology, on this account, is therefore not simply reflection on Scripture, tradition, and/or experience, but indeed, bears upon the habits, relationships, and places that orient one's attachments. Theologies like Douglas's and Lightsey's have sought to point to the world God makes possible, a world outside anti-blackness and transantagonism, and it is a world that we urgently need now.

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