

**BECOMING TRANS TRANS BECOMING:
TOWARDS A TRANSCHRISTOLOGY**

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ABSTRACT

BECOMING TRANS; TRANS BECOMING: TOWARDS CONTRUCTING TRANS CHRISTOLOGY

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This project traces lived experience, story and narrative, and materialist philosophies and theories to imagine a new fold in Christian Theology, particularly a TransChristology. While I depart from traditional conceptions of theology, my intentional turn in becoming Trans, I hold on to parts of Orthodoxies and Traditions to conceive of a TransChristology. We are facing a theological crisis globally, and we need new methodological tools and animated orientations to respond to the global theological crisis. We need to see and advocate for the Trans-Humation of all things. In order to accomplish this task, I look to new materialism and the theorists who produce a generative materiality as it relates to bodies, which are dynamic and in flow with processes of becoming. Christology, as a doctrine of the Church solidifies the person and work of Jesus, but what of counter-hegemonic bodies? What of bodies that are readily disposed of in our current times? What might a TransChristology look like, feel like, taste like when we reconsider bodies as generative materiality and not only inactive matter or failed matter? We see Jesus in a new light when we rethink bodies along the lines of a generative materiality. We see what is possible in theology when we incorporate the lived Trans experience; and we reframe the person and work of Jesus along mythopoetic lines when we encourage a bodily becoming. A TransChristology is the emergence of God

becoming human and perhaps more deeply human. We see the fullness of God in a TransChristology that helps to frame the Transhumation (this word is a word that I borrow from Nancy Bedford; it points to Transhumanism) of all things.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this Doctor of Ministry project to all Trans beings who are attempting to live another possible life through their own becoming and otherworldliness. This project is a project of hope in the frame of José Muñoz—stretching toward the never receding horizon. We are not yet queer! And, we are not yet Trans. We are still becoming.

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This project has been in incubation for several years. This project started as a conversation between my teacher, Dr. Nancy Elizabeth Bedford, and me while I was in the Palestinian territories. This project has been epistolary for several years prior to me sitting down to write. So, I acknowledge what Nancy has contributed to my thinking and what Dr. Catherine Keller has offered me through conversation in times past and in her writing. I have taken both of these conversation partners and attempted to construct something otherworldly, something that still is becoming, a piece of writing that can be lived out in community somehow.

I also want to acknowledge my current place of teaching: a rural church in New York. I have become a teaching theologian in a church where I explore these ideas in the sermon in one way or another. The congregation has fully accepted me as their pastor, and I am honored to be serving.

Finally, I want to thank my beloved partner, companion, and wife: Erin Christian Law. Erin has showed me how to make sense of my theories through art and movement. While this work is still in process (as always!), Erin has contributed to it at times without knowing!

And, I would be remiss to forget to mention the more than human world that has guided me. Frida, Diego, and the many beings and Orishas that create conditions for my imagination to continue to be on the way. I am indebted to the Transhumation of all things. The chair on which I sit becomes part of me; the food I eat becomes part of me, and all of these shapes my thinking on becoming and transness. I am grateful for it all!

INTRODUCTION, DEFINITIONS, AND SOURCES

In a season of accelerated violence against Transgender people and the rise of anti-Trans legislation, there is need for a Trans analytic and schematic that can speak to the Christological nature of Christianity. To date, there is no TransChristology, and I propose to envision a pastoral intervention in the form of a TransChristology, one that is constructive in nature and points to discipleship as a matter of practice.¹ Looking to Christologies of Liberation and Christologies of the underside, I will weave together thought and theory, with pastoral impulses to help create conditions for a TransChristology.²

At the writing of this paper, thirteen states have become sanctuary states for Transgender people. Religion is being used as a weapon, particularly Christianity in the form of ChristoFacism,³ and there needs to be an urgent response to the weaponization of Christianity against Trans persons, including the ways in which Christianity has been weaponized against me in the public square.

Here in this project, I am using Trans as both an identifier of a specific gendered human and as an analytic. This proposal is constructive in nature, utilizing the history of Christianity in its entirety to help construct such an analytic and also looking beyond normative realms to consider what a TransChristology might be and become. This project also is grounded in the work and philosophy of becoming, which I will explore in three

¹ I am also holding the word praxis in my mind as I write about practice. Both practice and praxis are important for a Trans Christology to emerge!

² I also hope to work with an artist to commission a piece of art that speaks to the Transness of Christology.

³ This term was coined by Liberation Theologian Dorothee Sölle and I used it here in the vein in which she used it so brilliantly.

ways: incarnation; ethics; and, hope. They may not appear as normatively as one might imagine, but they are there. These coordinate with three areas that I would like to explore in the making and constructing of a TransChristology: Trans-Plantation as Incarnation; Trans-Formation as Ethics; Trans-Figuration as Hope; and, by way of concluding, I add a fourth, Trans-Humation as Another Possible World.

By uniting Trans as an analytic and Trans as an identifier, we come close to the fleshly reality of what Christology is and has become. I hope you will see these elements come together in the conclusion after I have carefully explained all the theories and philosophies and theologies that go into my thinking.

This project requires my attention in Trans Studies of Religion and also to survey the entirety of the Christian Tradition mining for gemstones that might have been disregarded or undervalued in the name of Orthodoxy. So, there will be an inherent power analysis in the emergence of a TransChristology. Lived experience of *lo cotidiano* will be of importance in this analysis as I endeavor to reframe the work and person of Jesus for the twenty-first century.

By way of formation, I consider my own travels to the Palestinian Territories in the fall of 2022 where I encountered enormous gender euphoria in being accepted as a common brother among Muslim men to being the catalyst for me thinking through a TransChristology. In an epistolary fashion, my teacher and I exchanged text messages and voice memos as I traveled in the Holy Land. By becoming in a foreign land, I found that the person and work of Jesus Christ was more profound and there is a Trans element to the work and witness of Jesus. What about being a foreigner is part of a TransChristology? Here I will investigate Karl Barth's Dogmatics, particularly his work

on The Son and more broadly his Christology in relation to Queer and Trans his work as he works on the “Son as a foreigner”.

What might emerge when I reconsider classic theologies that have shaped the Tradition? How might rereading these theologies help give credence to the Trans experience, especially when paired with the centralizing themes that emerge from Christology. How might the Doctrine of Reconciliation, as Barth puts it, be reframed and Trans’d in an effort to point toward another possible human located in a Trans body? These are the questions I have in my mind as I work toward this constructive project.

What scriptures can support a TransChristology? How can Christology be rendered outside of and beyond a heteronormative framework? These are further questions that I will discuss in this constructive project. I will pull disparate threads of the tradition together and reread them with an orientation to Transing theology. Doing this will expand our analysis and thereby create conditions for another possible world to emerge within a Christological framework.

As of now, there are only two trans-oriented scholars engaging with the Christian Tradition: Dr. Linn Marie Tonstad and Dr. Hanna Reichel. I plan to utilize Tonstad’s and Reichel’s work and extend it into Transing Theology, so that there is an analytic science to Christology that is rendered intelligible for Transgender persons and other people who are across or beyond normative orientations, along with broadening the tradition to match the evolution of peoplehood throughout time and place. In a later section on pastoral intervention, I will include some of the translated components of a TransChristology to be shared with the public in a pastoral fashion. I also engage a range of materialisms, new and old, as another fold of the theory. While lived experience is taken to be a primary

theoretical commitment, I look to a range of philosophies and cultural studies to piece together a theoretical framework that entangles high theory and continental philosophies with my lived experience and the existential threat to Transgender people right now. This is an attempt to be wide and deep at the same time and to be able to root into the Christological and Pneumatological dimensions of a TransChristology.

This project will also look to social movements, particularly the Trans Rights movement to glean wisdom on how humanity is constructed in various global Trans Rights movements. How might our anthropology and our theological anthropology shape and shift to fit today's context and need for a TransChristology to emerge? How might imagining humanity beyond heteronormative norms and values create conditions for a TransChristology to have space and place. What are the promises and limitations of how we understand the *imago dei*?

What is unique about this project is that it is undergirded as a pastoral response to the overwhelming anti-Trans violence that is on display in this country and globally. This project will also include some of the incidents that I have endured that have resulted in my desire to reimagine Christology for the end of empire.

After six years of targeted harassment episodes, I began thinking more seriously why Christology is something that needs to be reconsidered for today's theological climate—for today's theological crisis. How might a Trans Christ be a symbol for us in these moments and how might that create conditions for deep care for the underside of history? For the care of the earth? For deep care of the ecology of all things that exist? For the network of relations that depend on us? It is my hope to show the need and trace the currents for this to materialize.

Definitions

Important here is defining my terms. The key terms that need to be both contextualized and defined are Transgender and Christology. These two terms have been pitted against one another in an effort to undermine the Transhumation of all living things. I want to mention that Transness is an ecology, a network of relations, that might begin with self, but always is in relationship to the broader world.⁴ The first act of seeking to eradicate a people group from society is to use the force of dehumanization. Look, for example, at how immigrants and refugees are treated in the United States. So, the definitions of these two terms need to both speak to one another and reflect the wisdom of the materiality of each inherent thing. A thing is still material; words are material; language is material.

An autobiographical note: I am transgender and I am also a public theologian who pastors outside the walls of the traditional church, though beginning on January 1, 2024, I will be the settled minister of a small church in rural New York. I am also a public scholar who has established a wide network of activist related work that seeks to create conditions for the politics of radical difference. I will continue the public work as a teaching theologian in the local church and continue to steward community in innovative ways while also responding to the pressing social needs of my local community and the community on social media. I am interested in the intersection of both Trans and Christology because not only does this intersection impact me, but it also impacts the people with whom I am connecting. So, it is important to imagine how Transgender and Christology can be woven together to continue to steward the logic of liberation in all

⁴ Here I'm thinking about posthumanist thought and the reworlding of ecology.

things and support the cultivation of Transhumation of all things. I will also say that Pneumatology has been a part of this thinking, as well. I am deeply influenced by my teacher, Dr. Nancy Elizabeth Bedford, and the seeds she planted when I was her student. I see the emergence of a TransChristology as part of the pneumatological work that is emerging. So, in the spirit of all living things and the manner in which the Spirit enlivens each of us, I am following the Spirit as I work to develop something that is rooted in both lived experience of Trans beings and also letting my heart, mind, and soul be moved by the mysterious becomings of all that is.

Trans / Transgender / Trans Analytic:

Trans and Transgender are related to one another in that they both opt out of a singular analytic framework and require difference and multiplicity as theoretical anchors. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, “Trans” as prefix is first of all defined as: “on or to the other side of: across: beyond.”⁵ Starting with this definition, I wish to articulate how Trans and transing⁶ is important to theological and ethical work, which is grounded in the pastoral work of becoming. Transness is also found in proclamation or the act of preaching, but I am focused primarily on the pastoral work of becoming and what kind of theology shapes our Christologies and Pneumatologies.

⁵ Merriam Webster Dictionary Accessed on June 17, 2023. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trans>

⁶ Max Strassfeld develop Transing Religion several years ago, and I look forward to implementing his work into this current work, but also diverging from Max’s initial work to help create this constructive work around a Trans Christology. Max writes from a Jewish perspective, so naturally, there will be a divergence of ideas.

Trans also refers to the T in the acronym LGBTQIA+, which refers to transgender people, a population of gender diverse people who disidentify with their assigned gender, which happens at birth and stabilizes the gender binary.⁷

To further contextualize Trans as an analytic, it is important to look at people like Max Strassfeld and Kai M. Green who are developing this work in the present time.⁸

Trans is more than an identity. It is an all-encompassing theory and method of understanding the Transgender human experience as a socio-analytic paradigm that helps us understand our present moment. I will pull from these authors and decontextualize their thought as praxis to help buoy my own work in developing a TransChristology.

Christology:

Christology often refers to the person and work of Jesus. I look to Liberationist as well as neo-orthodox and Reformed thinkers as I endeavor to rethink Christology and to discover new folds of Christological awareness for the work of a TransChristology. Particularly, I am looking at Jon Sobrino and Karl Barth and reading them together and against one another. This might appear to be counter intuitive, but there is resonance with a Jesus of the underside and for Barth, The Son as a foreigner.

Reflecting on my own travels to Palestine, I combine Sobrino and Barth together to initiate a new fold in the thought of Christology for the purpose of generating a TransChristology. This weaving together of thought and theory and the mixing of thinking helps to re-situate the person and work of Jesus for the underside of history. Foreignness plays an important role. For Barth, the Son becomes a foreigner; for me, I

⁷ Here I borrow the term disidentify from José Muñoz. The Trans process takes Trans beings from disidentification to an otherworldly place of becoming!

⁸ Transing is a term that Max Strassfeld coined and Kai M. Green is developing Transness as something more broad than just an identity. I follow these threads into the wilds.

became a foreigner in New York; for Trans people who are constantly on the move due to safety concerns, job changes (oftentimes forced job changes) and flight from harassment and violence, Trans folks are always in motion. Movement is part of a TransChristology; a kind of deterritorialization, if you will.⁹

A recent trip to El Salvador enlivened my reading of the “underside of history”, a phrase that is often used by Liberationist thinkers. I was led by the people in El Salvador, which is to say that I encountered a theology from below, from the underside of history. When we are led by the underside of history, by the experiences of these communities, it shapes and shifts our thinking, or it should.

While I did not have the chance to meet Jon Sobrino while I was in El Salvador due to his declining health, I was able to meet with other leaders who showed me the Christological way through the language of “orgasmic fold.” This phrase “orgasmic fold” was offered by Sister Peggy, a Catholic Nun who is the Executive Director of an arts program outside the capital city of San Salvador in Suchitoto. As we were talking with Sister Peggy, it occurred to me that she was speaking a TransChristology into existence by inviting me to become a co-partner in the search. The mysteriousness of this language invites me to become otherwise; this language invites me to become Trans through “the fold” that will be discussed later.

It was inspiring to be with leaders in El Salvador and to be with the first and only LGBTQ+ community of faith, Magadala, was truly a remarkable and inspiring experience. It was a weaving together of Christological and Pneumatological theological nodes, entanglements that create conditions for another possible world. The “concrete

⁹ This is a nod to Gilles Deleuze who wrote extensively on deterritorialization.

particular”¹⁰ is the way to the universal. And, as we are speaking of Christology, it must be from the concrete particular, from below, from the underside of history, from the ones that find society intolerable to survive. Right now, that is the poor, women, differently abled persons, and Trans people, among others.

Sources

Sources guide the thinking and the application, so I will be identifying the primary sources that I am using to construct a TransChristology. The sources are varied and are a point of departure for implementing a pastoral approach that embodies the person and work of Jesus in a TransChristology.

Secondly, sources are not necessarily academic. You will see that it is experience that guides this work, along with a robust understanding of bodies. Along with experience, relationality also guides this work. Without these two important things, it will be hard to develop a TransChristology. We need sources that are of the people; from below; and pointing to the underside of history, which points to Trans people globally.

lo cotidiano:

Lived experience or the daily life is important to consider and make a primary component of the sources which I will consider. As a Latine philosopher theologian ethicist, I ground my work in the lived experience and the daily quotidian as a primary source for understanding methodologically how meaning is created and also the stories that are shaped as a result of living in today’s world. The quotidian is what is important in understanding the lived, daily experience of Trans people and Trans theories.

¹⁰ Leonardo Boff uses this language.

Particularly, I am moved by the first and only LGBTQIA ecclesial setting in El Salvador where being Trans is not exactly criminalized, but where it is not easy to be Trans. This community that I encountered in El Salvador follows Jesus through and by experience. When I met with this church, I asked if there was any theological training, and the answer was an emphatic ‘no.’ While I know my question came from an elitist position, I was curious about the disconnect from the academy. This ecclesial setting is seeking to nurture Trans and queer people in the image of God. An episcopal priest started this ecclesial community but shortly after starting this community, he was diagnosed with cancer and passed away. So, the people continue this ministry. This ecclesial community is a church from below, being led by the people and for the people. This ecclesial setting is the best example of lo cotidiano that I have seen. No clergy dictate what they should do and no overt traditions guide them. Their experiences guide them, and this is a primary example of the kind of courageous leadership at the end of imperialism that speaks the loudest to me.

Tradition:

There is a richness in gender identifications that we must mine throughout history and rediscover in these precarious times where identitarian logics conscript us all into the polarizing vortex of neofascist agendas and ChristoFascist politics. Prior to modernity and before the blockchain of stable identities was manufactured, gender was much more fluid and less categorical. We say ‘blockchain of identities,’ because intelligibility of identity is what has emerged since the Enlightenment generated categories. There was freedom in gender, for example in attire, before the Enlightenment's rules regarding gender became legalistic mandates for hospitals and birthing centers. This fluidity in

identification creates conditions for Trans to emerge not only as an identification but also as an analytic and to reimagine premodern gender fluidity as part of a larger Trans project and analytic. I do not use the * to denote Trans or to qualify or quantify Trans. Trans does not need to be justified with an asterisk when the writing itself is a Trans analytic and also embodied by a Transgender scholar and offered from the body of a Transgender person.

Premodern conceptions of gender are important for us to embody a centrality for us to reimagine gender today, because the time of premodernity remained open to imagining otherness and imagining possibility. A primary example is Wilgefortis who is a possible Trans icon or saint that shows us that transing existed before our stable gender categories; before modernity stabilized us in gender categories that are fixed.

As will be discussed, Wilgefortis is just one example of the fluidity of gender and the materiality of gender being much more destabilized and Transing than the conceptions of gender after the Enlightenment. It is important to note that, in post-Enlightenment thought, gender, sex, sexuality, and ability become the most contested sites of imagination and, as a result, have fueled many of the contemporary arguments regarding differently abled persons and the Transgender community. While the Enlightenment offered us some gifts, it also dis-ables us into categories that are framed by binaries, which then cut off the visionary fiction of gender and left us barricaded by the norms and values of the binaries where no freedom can be found.

Premodern conceptions of gender are fruitful to imagine and reimagine the varying examples of transness relative to gender. One need only to look to Premodern Christianities to see the multiplicity of transplantations and transfigurations relative to

gender and body transitions. These elements help us to transfix a new imagination where Transgender is actually an ancient category that was stabilized during the Enlightenment and then at the same moment forcibly erased by the gender binary.

One example from premodern Christianity is Wilgefortis, a medieval saint whose legend dates from around the fourteenth century. She was a Christian Portuguese princess who prayed to God to avoid an arranged marriage. Her prayers were answered when she grew a beard, and her father, who had arranged the marriage, crucified her. The cult of Wilgefortis was extremely popular throughout Europe—at times rivaling that of the Virgin Mary.¹¹ She was known under different names in different regions, such as Saint Onkommer in Holland and Saint Uncumber in England. In Germany, particularly in Bavaria and Tyrol, she was known as Saint Wilgefortis or Kümmeris. Images of Wilgefortis, some dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, can still be seen today in the Alte Wallfahrtskirche Hl. Kreuz/Sankt Wilgefortis in Neufahrn bei Freising.¹² Moreover, the eleventh- or twelfth-century crucified image at the high altar of this church, while predating the legend, has been seen as Wilgefortis since the seventeenth century.¹³

These images blur the distinction between Wilgefortis and Christ, thereby disrupting the binaries of female/male and human/divine, opening up a fluid space of both/neither. In “The Jesus Hermaphrodite: Science and Sex Difference in Premodern Europe,” Leah DeVun describes how not only images of Wilgefortis but also as well as

¹¹ Ilse E. Friesen, *The Female Crucifix: Images of St. Wilgefortis Since the Middle Ages*, (Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2001), 1.

¹² Ibid, 2-8. I plan to visit this church when my wife and I are in Germany this summer!

¹³ Ilse E. Friesen, 15. for more on the relationship between Wilgefortis and the Volto Santo, see Friesen 9–17 and Stephanie A. Budwey, “Saint Wilgefortis: A Queer Image for Today.” *Religions*, vol. 13, no. 7, 2022, p. 616. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13070616>

those depictions of Christ in certain fifteenth-century manuscripts can be seen as both female and male, and neither female nor male. Indeed, fluidity of sex/gender in religious imagery was common during this period.^{14,15}

Although Robert Mills offers some reasons why Wilgefortis might not resonate with all Trans people today (including Wilgefortis’s lack of agency in the miraculous growth of her beard), he does ask “what if Wilgefortis also fulfilled a desire on the part of beholders for nonbinary or gender-expansive imagery?”¹⁶ Images of Wilgefortis can be meaningful to Trans individuals today, as “the isolated trans and/or genderqueer reader finds that they are no longer alone; communities of readers assemble around saints, though separated by space and time”¹⁷ Furthermore, in her article “Saint Wilgefortis: A Queer Image for Today,” Stephanie Budwey offers Wilgefortis as “an emancipatory image—in both its historical and contemporary instances—that can help deconstruct, and unencumber people from, the bonds of the sex/gender binary by making space for all expressions of identity,” including those who identify as Trans people.¹⁸

We must begin to reimagine gender throughout time, and we can turn to premodern scholarship to help us in this endeavor. This is not without complications when we do this. Becoming Trans is not ahistorical. We need to consider the ways that gender variant persons adapted to their context and then learn to play with that animated adaptation. However, will we be free from the confines of post-Enlightenment thought if

¹⁴ Lewis Wallace, “Bearded Woman, Female Christ: Gendered Transformations in the Legends and Cult of Saint Wilgefortis.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 30, 2014, pp. 43–63.

¹⁵ Leah DeVun, “The Jesus Hermaphrodite: Science and Sex Difference in Premodern Europe.” *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 69, 2008.

¹⁶ Robert Mills, “Recognizing Wilgefortis.” *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality before the Modern*, edited by Greta LaFleur, Masha Raskolnikov, and Anna Kłosowska, (Cornell UP), 2021, 133–59 .

¹⁷ Alicia Spencer-Hall, and Blake Gutt. “Introduction.” *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography*, edited by Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Gutt, (Amsterdam UP), 2021, pp. 11–40

¹⁸ Stephanie A. Budwey, 10-11.

we forget the history that has given birth to us? We must allow the cloud of the unknowing and the shadows of becoming to continue to guide us into ethical futures regarding Trans individuals and the communities that are born from Transing. This premodern example of the tradition can currently point toward a TransChristology that moves beyond normative constraints of gender and into the divine possibility of being transfigured. It incorporates a both/and, and also a neither/nor paradigm when thinking about the divinely inspired more than human life/body. What I mean is that if God is in all things and if gender transcends and eradicates modern gender binaries, then Transness is in all things just as God is in all things. If we take seriously the Transhumation of all things, then we arrive at a version of animism or panenthism. This should certainly shape our perspectives concerning Christology and Pneumatology. We know from the animal world that different species change and adapt and become. What do human animals share with the more than human world? How might we flock together and become another possible animal in the face of imperial devastation? The Spirit of becoming, since God is found in the becoming, must be a part of a TransChristology.

A TransChristology takes seriously the more than human body that is resurrected from the deathtrap of the pernicious logics of the Enlightenment relative to gender. When we recover Trans from the buried history of post-Enlightenment work and replace this analytic into its rightful place in of scholarship, we break through the hegemonic Enlightenment blockchain and are then able to imagine ethical futures with Transgender communities central to the imagining.

Network / Rhizome / Relationality:

These three terms and frameworks helps to constitute the kind of Christology I am envisioning and constructing through writing. Creating Networks of trust; Networks of care; and, Networks of solidarity, we discover a new relationality that emerges in rhizomatic ways. These terms and their subsequent frameworks will buoy my constructive approach in advancing a TransChristology.

By network, I mean the entanglements that create conditions for radical interconnection, as elucidated by Gloria Anzaldúa, the New Materialists, and others. By rhizome, I look to Gilles Deleuze and others, like Rosi Braidotti to give an account of a feminist rhizome. And, finally, by relationality, I look to both Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating to forward a non-oppositional relationality. We need new frameworks to help support a new ontology that is buoyed by Transness. These three terms and frameworks will support this work. I look at “the fold” in Gilles Deleuze to consider the emergence of a TransChristology. Folds are important for Transgender people. We are folded and enfolding, surgically, at times, and always becoming.

The fold (*pli*) in Deleuze’s work can be seen throughout his writing and should be considered central to his vitalism that is also his materialism; it is illustrated in his image of thought, becoming, nomadic war machine, plane of immanence, and rhizome. The fold is a particular type of force of becoming that is developed later in Deleuze’s *The Fold*. The fold is as much an unfolding as it is an enfolding. The fold creates pleats and doubles or multiplies; it becomes by and through the material force of the infinite streams of matter and material becomings.

It comes down to folds. Wave folding into particle, breath into body, hand into hand, melody into ear, seed into dirt, earth into human, violence into trauma, carbon into atmosphere, climate into climatology. Word into world, world into word. Outside in, inside out, the edge turns to layer, to tissue, complicating, pleating. The folding shapes, it limits, it may pleat sharply. We select, decided, make some cut between possible, *decisare*; or else we dissolve into the manifold that we already are and “I” don’t happen. But the cut is never clean. It only exposes more folds. All the way down and out. And the vertical axis is itself twisting, bending, into spirals diffractive by everything they transverse. The complication extends, explicates. Each one of its folds does the world of the world. In word or body.¹⁹

Keller reads Deleuze with Whitehead to *explicate* the eternal material fold that is also in process, always pleating and always becoming, always becoming different in its repetitious folds. Keller’s cloud becomes an infinite piece of integrated material for her planetary entanglement, one that is rooted in the relational ontology of her process-oriented theology and a material reality that is always intra-acting, to utilize Karen Barad’s language.²⁰

Folds are also cuts, which create new pleats, new folds, multiplying doublings, as Deleuze theorizes. The material entanglement that is the fold and the enfolding helps further illustrate the reality of the force of becoming in Deleuze’s work. Maintaining the plumb line of becoming, even in the fold (*pli*) of Deleuze’s work, continues to push contemporary materialism into a conceptual register that destabilizes the linearity of

¹⁹ Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 158.

²⁰ I should note that Karen Barad has heavily influenced me in her tome *Meeting the Universe Half Way*.

traditional discourses of becoming and allows for becoming to be a (re)creation of difference and repetition whose relational contours further root its ontological folds.²¹

Deleuze's theory of the fold, illustrated below, is an important piece to the development of contemporary readings of matter. Utilizing Foucault, Leibniz, and Bergson, Deleuze crafts a compelling feature to his materialism, that of the *pli*, a never-ending, enfolded, unfolded, fold. In the section below, I help illustrate the fold, the folding, and the enfolded to discuss Deleuze's materialism.

While Deleuze advocates for a monism that is a plurality in his other writings, his Leibniz book picks up the feature of the fold that then is later deployed by Foucault to rethink power. I use the Möbius strip as my metaphor to detail the material emergence of the fold, which is always becoming. Combined with Lucretius, Spinoza and Nietzsche, Deleuze creates a mosaic of compelling features to rethink materialism with his use of *pli*. I suggest this helps mobilize the New Materialists' thinking about their own version of materiality that is motivating very compelling discussions concerning race, class, gender, and sexuality within that movement.²² While Deleuze does not pick up Leibniz's theory of the fold entirely (and adheres to a creative monism, instead), the *pli* becomes the axis point on which we understand Deleuzian materialism. What Deleuze's theory of the fold allows us to reimagine is the way material force emerges in the work of Deleuze, which should be partnered with Foucault's insistence that power is productive. It is an eruption. Reimagining materialism as having a material force that is akin to power remaps force as that which is not only internal and native to matter itself, but also

²¹ Quote from page 6 The Fold...

²² We will explore some New Materialists later.

something that is being produced by the very folds of other beings. All material (subjects) become part of the topological surface that is becoming.

We must accordingly conceive of the world topologically—as a pure surface. This surface has only a single side, but is structured like a Möbius strip, where a torsion produces the optical effect of two or more heterogeneous and autonomous sides, thereby giving rise to multiple illusions. The single side is the outside; it is on this outside, and through its torsions, that power relations play out their differential distributions; it is under the conditions of this outside that power relations undergo the integrations of knowledge.²³ Deleuze claims that the “profound Nietzscheanism” of Michel Foucault lies in the fact that, in Foucault’s thought, power exists on, or is the immanent effect of, the topology of this surface. Power is not, therefore, inherently repressive, but rather productive; power “is practiced before it is possessed,” and it “passes through the hands of the mastered no less than through the hands of the masters.”²⁴ Power is a relation between forces; it is not a form of exteriority or of interiority; it does not lie between forms (of knowledge), but rather, force “exists in relation with other forces, such that any force is already a relation, that is to say power: force has no other object or subject than force.”²⁵ Power appears in various guises in Foucault— as a ‘microphysics,’ and as affectivity (“the power to be affected is like a matter of force, and the power to affect is like a function of force.”²⁶); but most profoundly, the power manifests in the ‘diagram,’ of which the infamous Panopticon is perhaps the example par excellence. But the diagram is itself a pure, unformalized function that “must be ‘detached from any specific

²³ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis : Minnesota University Press, 1988), 78.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

use,' as from any specific substance."²⁷ The diagram is not universal, since it is itself produced by the contingencies of the forces of the outside, but it is nevertheless co-extensive with the social field; it traverses and determines all of the forms of exteriority/knowledge. Hence, the heterogeneity of power and knowledge: whereas the latter concerns, and is constituted as, strata (substances and formalized functions, forms of exteriority, i.e. sayability and visibility), power is, on the other hand, diagrammatic and distributive; power relations are non-localizable and constitute "anonymous strategies" which, though they differ in kind from stratifications of knowledge, are primary in relation to the latter and constitute the latter, effecting thereby the general organization of the social field in which the forms of knowledge are located.²⁸ This logical primacy of power over knowledge is crucial: "No doubt power, if we consider it in the abstract, neither sees nor speaks...But precisely because it does not itself speak and see, it makes us see and speak."²⁹ A ventriloquism of power. Or, as Deleuze suggests, a question of truth: "If power is not simply violence, this is not only because it passes in itself through categories that express the relation between two forces...but also because, in relation to knowledge, it produces truth, in so far as it makes us see and speak. It produces truth as a problem."³⁰ Do return to that as key to your method, not just your content!

It is crucial to understand that when power is said to come from the 'outside,' this does not imply a beyond or a transcendent plane upon which power struggles play out,

²⁷ Cf. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 195-228. ³⁷ Deleuze, Foucault, 72.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

and of which our own knowledge and struggles are mere reflections or representations. Power is the formless form of the outside: “The relations between forces, which are mobile, faint and diffuse, do not lie outside strata but form the outside of strata...it is each stratified historical formation which refers back to a diagram of forces as though it were its outside.”³¹ Deleuze insists on this dimension of Foucault’s thought: force refers to an irreducible outside, “an outside which is farther away than any external world.” The two forms of exteriority (sayability and visibility) are external to one another and heterogeneous, which is to say that seeing and speaking do not converge on a given object (this is Foucault’s transformation of phenomenology into epistemology). There is necessarily a disjunction between speaking and seeing. Seeing and speaking are forms of knowledge, but “thinking addresses itself to an outside that has no form.”³²

Seeing is thinking, and speaking is thinking, but thinking occurs in the interstice, or the disjunction between seeing and speaking.../thinking belongs to the outside in so far as the latter, an ‘abstract storm,’ is swallowed up by the interstice between seeing and speaking.../thinking is not the innate exercise of a faculty, but must become thought. Thinking does not depend on a beautiful interiority that would reunite the visible and articulable elements, but is carried under the intrusion of an outside that eats into the interval and forces or dismembers the internal.³³

Thought always operates in relation to the outside, but the thought of the outside is doubly genitive: the thought of the outside. The thought of the outside is the unthought.

³¹ Ibid., 84, my italics.

³² Ibid., 87.

³³ Ibid., 87.

The question arises: there is an outside, there is power, there are sets of forces that act upon one another—but is there, therefore, an inside? An inside “deeper than any internal world, just as the outside is farther away than any external world?” Deleuze’s reply : “The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside : they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside.”³⁴ This inside of the outside is the subject : the subject is an effect of the folding of the outside. The subject is constituted as the ‘double’ of the outside, or rather the subject is the doubled-over-ness of the outside, as if a living torsion, or a vortex possessed by a duration. Deleuze notes that the theme or the concept that haunted Foucault was, in fact, the idea of the double. The passage is so profound that it is worth quoting Deleuze at length:

[T]he double is never a projection of the interior; on the contrary, it is an interiorization of the outside. It is not a doubling of the One, but a redoubling of the Other. It is not a reproduction of the Same, but a repetition of the Different. It is not the emanation of an ‘I,’ but something that places in immanence an always other or a Non-self. It is never the other who is a double in the doubling process, it is a self that lives me as the double of the other: I do not encounter myself on the outside, I find the other in me.³⁵ Such extended quotes need to be in proper form: single space, and all to right.

Foucault’s brilliance lay in discovering a subjectivity that is derived from power and knowledge, but which is irreducible to them, which does not depend on them.³⁶ On the contrary, everything depends on the fold.³⁷ To think is to fold, “to double the outside with a coextensive inside,”³⁸ but it is never the subject that folds; rather it is thought that

³⁴ Ibid., 96-7.

³⁵ Ibid., 98, my italics.

³⁶ Ibid., 101.

³⁷ While Deleuze borrows this concept from Leibniz, Foucault incorporates it into his thinking, and we can trace this throughout Foucault’s work. But, it is Deleuze who develops this.

³⁸ Ibid., 118.

folds—a fold is a differential relation of force to force. “Force is what belongs to the outside, since it is essentially a relation between other forces: it is inseparable in itself from the power to affect other forces (spontaneity) and to be affected by others (receptivity). But what comes about as a result [of the fold] *is a relation which force has with itself, a power to affect itself, an affect of self on self.*”³⁹ The subject is not the founding, intentional subject of phenomenology; neither is the subject merely given as such, as if pre-determined by a transcendent power. The subject is constituted within the given:⁴⁰ subjectivity is a struggle, a psycho-bio-cosmic battle of forces, what Foucault calls “a politics of truth.”⁴¹ “The struggle for subjectivity presents itself,” writes Deleuze, “as the right to difference, variation and metamorphosis.”⁴² Foucault himself asked the crucial question: “At what price can subjects speak the truth about themselves?”⁴³ What are the sets of forces that allow a truth to be produced? What or where is the fold from which one can speak truthfully about oneself? More profoundly: to what extent can such a ‘speaking truthfully about oneself’ be considered a form or a mode of resistance to power? A fold of the outside, folded back against itself—against power?

Thinking topologically about the world as a pure surface and integrating the poetic rhythm of Deleuze into this project necessarily points to the proliferation of forces

³⁹ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity : An Essay on Hume’s Theory of Human Nature* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1991), 107. And see also pages 112-13: “To the extent that principles sink their effect into the depths of the mind, the subject, which is this very effect, becomes more and more active and less and less passive. It was passive in the beginning, it is active in the end. This confirms the idea that subjectivity is in fact a process, and that an inventory must be made of the diverse moments of this process. To speak like Bergson, let us say that the subject is an imprint or an impression, left by principles, that it progressively turns into a machine capable of using this impression.”

⁴¹ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978* (New York: Picador, 2007), 3.

⁴² Ibid., 106.

⁴³ Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, “Structuralism and Post-structuralism: An Interview with Michel Foucault” (New York: The New Press, 1999), 444.

that are at play: reaching back to Lucretius, Spinoza, to then Nietzsche, Bergson, Foucault, and beyond. Folding the fold back against itself is necessarily folding against the multiplicity of forces that are at play, identified as power, in Deleuze and Foucault. The force of matter materializes in the language of power for Deleuze and Foucault, but should not be reduced to power that is merely imaginative; it is both productive and material. There are material forces, visible and invisible, that should be accounted for and woven into the discussion of a material duration. This braids together the vital impulse of Bergson with Deleuze and Foucault and captures a new theory of force, contained but not solidified in the fold.

Using the fold as not only an expression of force but also as the real material becoming in time helps further mobilize materiality in distinct ways. I think this is particularly important for my own work with bodies—they are material folds that are becoming and the force of the folding is precisely the material becoming that Deleuze excavates when speaking about the unfolding of reality, which is rooted in the fold of material becomings.

Bodies:

[A]ny identity is always riven with forces, with processes, connections, movements that exceed and transform identity and that connect individuals (human and nonhuman) to each other and to worlds, in ways unforeseen by consciousness and unconnected to identity.⁴⁴ An integration. And the body is the bridge. That's what I haven't seen. People don't deal with the body, and yet they don't deal with the spirit. They deal with the head. The mind. [...] What I'd like to do is talk from the body and also from these other realms.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*, (Boston: MIT Press 2001), 94.

⁴⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, ed. AnaLouise Keating, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, (New York: Routledge), 64.

The body has been theorized by many different feminist poststructuralist theorists as a discursive reality. I wish to interrupt these theories and interpretations by rethinking the body in material terms, because Trans bodies are composed of materiality and Transness is another fold in what it means to be human and perhaps more than human. In thinking about the materiality of the body and mattering bodies (both of which I develop in this project and are interchangeable), there are four important thinkers that generate new theoretical openings to further consider the work of the feminist theorists that are also a part of the New Materialist movement in some way.⁴⁶ Not each of the other thinkers I mention in this section is part of the New Materialist movement, but I bridge together the feminism that has charted the path for feminist new materialists and their movement, while also pointing beyond the New Materialist movement to bodies that materialize in Anzaldúa. It is Anzaldúa that gives the greatest imagination toward mattering bodies and therefore is a penultimate example for Trans bodies.

I begin this part of my analysis and reflection by situating a discussion on the body and the way that the body has been theorized in the work of various feminists; namely, Judith Butler, Susan Bordo, and Rosi Braidotti. I end with a section on Anzaldúan bodies as a move to reclaim that bodies matter and mattering bodies that are becoming. As a way through the varying ways that materiality has been deployed, I bridge together Anzaldúa and Bennett's vibrant matter. Noting the theoretical framework of the New Materialists, I mention, again, the work of Jane Bennett.⁴⁷ While Bennett

⁴⁶ The phrase "new materialism" was first used by Rosi Braidotti in *Deleuze and the Body*. It has since become a movement of diverse materialist thinkers. I follow Braidotti's use of new materialism and Jane Bennett as I construct Anzaldeleuzian materiality.

⁴⁷ Both of Jane Bennett's books, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) and *The Enchantment of Modernity: Crossings, Energetics, and Ethics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) have been meaningful books as I have read the New Materialism movement. Bennett explicitly showed me the genealogical trail for the New Materials movement, and I have followed

might very well be spirit-phobic and her materiality something akin to *entelechy* or *élan vital*,⁴⁸ Anzaldúa was an animist emphasizing the plurality of realities; her materiality is spirit-inflected. This becomes important as the project develops around the idea of Anzaldúan materiality and interrelatedness that recalculates the ways in which knowledge is produced and accessed within a materially rich register, such as the body, and this helps further animate a Trans Christology. A spirit-inflected materiality is also important, because the bodily materiality for which I advocate matters, has meaning; hence, bodies that matter are engaged in the entanglement of bodily knowing and bodily mattering in this world. Spirit relative to matter, as it applies to Anzaldúa, helps illustrate the plurality of life that is generated and generating with matter in its becoming material. This should signal a turn away from the body being an apparatus for scientific knowledge only or reducing bodies to discursive norms, only.

Noting the use of certain terms and theoretical ‘camps’ I follow, I draw a deeper attention to the New Materialism movement as the source of my thinking about both materiality and bodies. Certainly, Lucretius and Spinoza are important interlocutors, but the New Materialist thinkers provide an opening to re-enter the discussion of feminism that supersedes the theory that has proliferated among white feminists. Sure, the New Materialists engage the question of race explicitly, but their discourse has included people of color from the start of the movement, so this discourse is not, as I see it, a particularly whitening of matter or materiality studies, but an ever-widening attempt to de-biologize race in material terms. To tie together the philosophy and history from the

this materialist genealogy throughout my research and while reading Anzaldúa. Also, the use of reality here should not be confused with Realism or Anti-Realism. I much more prefer a more speculative realism, which opens up possibilities for a multiverse, or mutli-realities.

⁴⁸ Entelechy is drawn from Hans Dreish and *Élan vital* from Bergson.

previous chapter to this chapter, I start with Bennett as a way to keep materialism at the fore and bodies in close proximity to the material becoming that is bodily.

Where Spinoza details a theory that elucidates a purposeful being (or God) as the “force” of the substance, Bennett uses the term *entelechy* to account or “name a force or an agency that is naturalistic but never fully spatialized, actualized, or calculable.”⁴⁹ I mention this now because the materialism that Bennett seeks, which “eschews the life-matter binary and does not believe in God or spiritual forces, nevertheless also acknowledges the presences of an indeterminate vitality.”⁵⁰ While important in my own formation, this intentional obfuscation of a spiritual reality is not parallel with Anzaldúa bodies. This *entelechy* is an animated force for Bennett, but Anzaldúa prefers a much more spirit-inflected materiality, which ties together her being in the world, knowing in the world, and acting in the world to and with material bodies that are on a planetary scale. This fiercely networked system of bodies and becoming create a path of understanding the body akin to Karen Barad’s terms of ‘intra-active’ and becoming. It is because of this fiercely networked relational and spirit-inflected materiality that bodies matter in the world, create meaning, and are interrelated with all matter and things. A fiercely networked system of bodies is the proliferation of matter becoming different in the world, a becoming that is transformative.⁵¹ Take, for example, the human body. The human body contains many other bodies inside of it, matter that is woven together to make different systems, all networked together to create the human body. I suggest

⁴⁹ Jane Bennett, “Vitalist Stopover,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, eds. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 63.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵¹ In Clayton Crocket and Jeffrey Robbins’ recent book *Religion, Politics and the Earth: The New Materialism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, they discuss energy as becoming transformation. I reformulate that syntax or grammar and suggest that mattering bodies are becoming and becoming is a transformation. Crocket and Robbins’ becoming analysis can be found in chapter 8 of their book.

matter and bodies are networked together in a relationality that illustrates a network of togetherness, a becoming.

The materiality of the body, following the pattern that was explored in the previous chapter, creates a framework for considering the ways in which relationality and material bodies exist, and are intertwined with one another. This entanglement of bodily relational material creates a larger framework for bodies to contribute meaning in the world, not be reduced to mere perception of the world. The relationality that is inherent in the work of Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty gives greater support for my own impulse to read a type of dynamism into the work of Spinoza. I recognize this is a later interpretation of Spinoza's work, but it nonetheless is present, especially in the work of the New Materialists, particularly in Braidotti's work, among others. I believe Deleuze follows a certain reading of Spinoza that may reach back to Herder.⁵²

Given that I support a type of material reality that is motivated by a relational composite framework, I think it is important to note that this "body" becomes a body through its relational processes, which are networked with the "lines of forces" existing within and on an axis of becoming. The material reality of the body, comprised of a single matter substance, further becomes a material reality due to the connections with other bodies residing on the plane of Nature.

This chapter details feminist theorists' use of the body. In a similar way to the previous chapter, I trace three feminist thinkers in order to show the resonances and disconnections of material bodies. I conclude by critically and constructively moving beyond these feminists toward a more plural reality seen in Anzaldúa's work. To recap,

⁵² Herder, *God: Some Conversations*. This is also seen in Deleuze's *Expressionism* book and *The Fold*.

the first three chapters seek to fortify my position on materialism, then I bridge together the materiality of the body by showing the historical philosophy from which contemporary philosophers borrow and ways that this history points to the monism that is under-recognized in Anzaldúa. These chapters also provide a path of understanding that materiality is dynamic, not embedded with language, or co-constituted with language, as we will see in Butler. The fifth chapter provides a genealogy of the body through the lenses of philosophy, in particular that complicated work of Spinoza's deterministic and mechanistic philosophy and the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I make an additional move to include Deleuze, though I recognize the baggage of phenomenology that he and his followers discuss and the complications of these intersections, but I think these intersections are rich with a dynamic expression of bodies that later influence feminist writing. This present chapter shows the failed materiality of Judith Butler and her reliance on a type of performative materiality that is discursively constituted from iterative practices through / by privileging language over materiality.

An accounting of the body through the previous four thinkers clarifies bodies as material, relationally intertwined, and material that perpetually is in process with other material realities.⁵³ I suggest working in the intersection of Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze to arrive at borderland bodies, an account that points toward Anzaldúan bodies as plural material subjects, animated by material "lines of forces." A Deleuzian material phenomenological accounting of the body corresponds to Anzaldúa's theory of the body, and particularly its *mestizaje*-ness and the new *mestiza* consciousness. Anzaldúa defines matter in this way in her notes from 1999: "The material universe is not made up of

⁵³ Realities, here, are plural not suggesting that there are multiple ontological realities or that beings are multiple or plural, but to follow the formula from Deleuze that monism = plurality.

things—it is only energy and lines of force continuing to produce temporary forms that are in a state of continuous flow.”⁵⁴ Noting this definition of Anzaldúa’s materiality fortifies my own impulses to bridge together Deleuze with Anzaldúa, a rhizomatic becoming where their differences create a new material reality. I see Merleau-Ponty as being particularly important, too, since his body is not an object in the world, but rather a perspectival experience that materially negotiates other lines of forces. I see this as an Anzaldeleuzian⁵⁵ material phenomenology.

An Anzaldeleuzian material phenomenology elucidates⁵⁶ an understanding of the body, an en fleshed plural mobile subject who perceives and is perceived, and whose condition of possibility is her networked-ness or inter-relatedness to and with other subjects and objects,⁵⁷ residing on flat ontological terrain that is always becoming.⁵⁸ The idea of becoming for both Anzaldúa and Deleuze is a turn to the futurity of an interrelated universe. Instead of a focus on the static ontological idea of being, Anzaldúa’s idea of becoming is an ontological turn and connected with bodies as that which are becoming. This body, understood in this modified phenomenological framework, is a body that is connected to the multiple locations within *el fronterizo*, a mosaic horizon that continuously alters her subjectivity and connections, and does so relationally.

⁵⁴ Gloria E. Anzaldúa Archives, The University of Texas at Austin, Benson Library, Box 102, folder 2 1999.

⁵⁵ In an effort to exist between theories and discourses, I re-imagine these two thinkers and create a mash-up of their names in Anzaldeleuzian. The mash-up should signal the dynamism that one can endeavor to have with the matter of thinkers’ ideas that remain. I have attempted this in this particular mash-up.

⁵⁶ I use elucidate as a way of illustrating that bodies body themselves, like Heidegger’s truth truths itself.

⁵⁷ It is important to note that Anzaldúa did have relationships with nonhuman objects. For example, she once talked about making love with / to a tree, and apologizing if she bumped into a piece of her furniture.

⁵⁸ Here, flat refers to being radically immanent. Gloria Anzaldúa held distinct beliefs in aliens, spirits, *yumaja*, and multiple realities. I do not see this as a belief in the transcendent, necessarily, but rather the invocation of fused realities that do not exist along the binary of transcendence and immanence. I see this flat ontological plane of becoming as radically immanent that energizes material lines of forces that are spirit-inflected.

Anzaldeleuzian bodies are fiercely networked within the borderlands as a result of these bodies' struggles, and meet in the juncture of nepantla.⁵⁹ I mention nepantla as a way to illustrate the space of becoming, which I will outline in my conclusion. But, nepantla is the space of neither/nor and both/and, and the space of always shifting and becoming, simultaneously. This is a material space of becoming which is transformative. I identify these bodily experiences as being akin to material nepantlism. This material nepantlism⁶⁰ conforms to ever challenging and changing essence of one's subjectivity, identified as the new mestiza, for Anzaldúa. This form of subjectivity holds the tolerance for ambiguity and compensates for the cycle of difference and repetition that is inherent to nepantla. The relational networks or borderlands are linked to the body's composite material; the body transcends these borderlands, but the body is also linked to and with these borderlands in a materially phenomenological manner.⁶¹ The Anzaldúan body is an entanglement of materiality that spans ontology, epistemology, and ethics negotiating 'lines of forces' in its own relational networked becoming.⁶²

⁵⁹ Nepantla is a Nahuatl term meaning "middle" or "torn between ways." Lara Medina translates this term as "middle," and Anzaldúa translates this term as "torn between ways." Another way to translate this term is to suggest "dismemberment" to highlight the materiality of the body, but "dismemberment" does not keep the materiality of the body together as a networked becoming matching. Nepantla might better be defined as "becoming in/between," neither in the middle or the outside, but becoming in the Mestizaje space of in/betweenness. This "new" middle or in/between space is designed to resist the colonial occupation that perpetuates and 'heal the open wound.'

⁶⁰ Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987). Anzaldúa refers to a "mental nepantlism," but instead of reducing the body to a mind or extensions of thought, I replace "mental nepantlism" with "material nepantlism."

⁶¹ Borderlands should be interpreted in a robust way and expand beyond the US/Texas/Mexico border, which is what often Anzaldúa mentioned. Yet, borderlands, according to Anzaldúa, were psychic, spiritual, sexual, and cultural. Borderlands must be more than nation/state borders and expand toward a more universal borderland phenomenon.

⁶² My hope in this project is to develop an ontology of becoming by using matter and bodies. I think the materiality of bodies are always becoming, so I mention becoming here as the frame and network of how to understand my orientation relative to matter and bodies.

CHAPTER ONE

UNDERSTANDING THE BODY: THE FIRST FOLD

There are several other ways one can understand the body stemming from philosophy. Psychoanalysis is yet another example of the ways that the body is constituted by language and consciousness. For example, in the Mirror Stage of Jacques Lacan, the body is in bits, until one looks at his/her image in the mirror. At this moment, the body comes together becoming a unified mattering reality, affected by relational processes. The body's affect is its capacity to relate and change. The postmodern epoch purported the body as (a) fragmented reality, and has rendered this body unstable. This might be entirely the case that the body is unstable material and only bits and pieces, but I shall argue for a mattering reality that is not a unified self, *per se*, but a self-organizing and self-transformative material reality that is dynamic in its becoming. This argument has looked to Spinoza and Deleuze for a way to consider materiality and also at Merleau-Ponty for a way in which a phenomenological approach can be valuable. I have also leveraged the material relationality that I argue is seen in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, and when these four thinkers are braided together a different contour of materiality emerges, and bodies literally become and become different in the borderlands of thinking and thought. These bodies are becoming (an onto-phenomenological turn), as this project is comprised of the method of diffractive thinking that resides along a “moving horizon, always from a decentered center, & from an always displaced periphery.”¹ Together,

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. By Paul Patton, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), Preface, xxi.

these thinkers help elucidate Anzaldúan bodies that are plural, multiple, and different. I use Anzaldúa's own body as a way to illustrate this.

Moving through the above information helps further situate this chapter as the one chapter where I bring together a materialist framework with varying theories of bodies. This chapter holds the materiality of the body as primary point of departure and looks at three feminist thinkers using philosophy in a manner that has constructed popular theories of the body, though I will argue that two of these thinkers' attempt to use materiality is actually a failed materiality. The three thinkers are: Judith Butler, Susan Bordo, and Rosi Braidotti.

It is important to note that Butler is influenced by Foucault's work, particularly from *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) to *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* (1976). It is namely Foucault's work on the relationship between knowledge, discourse, and power that has influenced Butler, but Butler ignores central features of the Foucaultian project, such as genealogy, concepts of technology, and strategy.² Foucault's project helps solidify Butler's own work on performativity and analyzing the body through terms of social norms and repression; I believe this is how she is able to construct a discursive body against the more material body that is seen in feminist theory of sexual difference. Furthermore, Butler utilizes a Hegelian framework to do this work and draws on a particular definition of becoming that is not associated with the definition of becoming in feminist theory of sexual difference or Deleuzian feminism. This definition of becoming (German: *Werden*), as described in Mikko Tuhkanen's essay "Queer Hybridity"³, is the

² Kathleen Ennis, *Michel Foucault and Judith Butler: Troubling Butler's Appropriation of Foucault's Work*, A Dissertation, University of Warwick, 2008.

³ Mikko Tuhkanen "Queer Hybridity," in *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, eds. Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009, 92.

term on which her theory of performativity is built. This, he says, is “perhaps the single most important concept for the institutional recognition of queer thinking.”⁴ Her later work is a turn to what I term metaethics that engages the intersection of religion and politics in compelling ways. Butler’s work has dominated some segments of the fields of feminist and queer theory for years, instituting performativity as the primary means through which bodies become.

The work of Bordo, likewise, has significantly dominated some of field within feminist theory, and with Butler, has made a considerable impact on the ways in which bodies relate with food.⁵ Bordo’s work, however, displaces materiality for the more popular linguistic turn in feminist studies, and her materiality is only materiality in name. I think these two theorists elucidate a failed materiality relative to feminism and bodies. As a way of showing a more productive materiality that is activated along an ontological plane, I introduce Rosi Braidotti’s work. I find her feminist commitments and philosophical expertise helpful when thinking about transcontextual and transdisciplinary ways of doing scholarship. It is her materiality to which I pay careful attention, because she reimagines Deleuze from a nomadic feminist standpoint. I also recognize there are limitations in using Braidotti’s work. Namely, she writes from the Eurocentric center and does not pay attention to issues of race (or other women of color who have theorized in a

⁴ Ibid., 92. I don’t know if I agree that this theory is the single most recognizable and institutional aspect of Butler’s queer thinking/theorizing. That seems to place a lot of stock on the theory of performativity. While I know it has been important for queer thinking, I don’t know that performativity is the single most recognizable institution of queer thinking. What is queer about Butler’s work is her unearthing of a discourse of “sex” that has solidified heteronormativity. I think her work has dislodged this style or manner of thinking to allow for other forms of thinking and production of knowledge to emerge. I also am aware that my genealogy for queer theory does not begin in the traditional starting place of Sedgwick, Foucault, and Butler. Rather, I look to queers of colors, namely Gloria Anzaldúa.

⁵ Jane Bennett writes a book on the materiality of bodies, food, and trash. It would be interesting if Bordo activates her version of materiality to see both Bennett and Bordo in a deeper conversation.

similar manner). Though I recognize these limitations, I include Braidotti, nevertheless, because of her insightful and skillful way of weaving together multiple disciplines with strategic philosophical importance. I end with a section on Gloria Anzaldúa. Her theories, which masterfully create plural realities recalculate both margin and center, and likewise reimagine bodies along a moving horizon where “lines of forces” constitute their being and becoming. She poetically and philosophically writes from the displaced center, or borderlands. As my primary interlocutor, Anzaldúa creates a way for her readers to further engage the entanglement of ontology, epistemology, and ethics. I see this in her last published essay, “Now Let Us Shift,” and argue that Anzaldúan materiality is the entanglement of these three philosophical domains.⁶ Following the section detailing feminist theory, I investigate difference at the intersection of Gilles Deleuze and Gloria Anzaldúa. I utilize this thread of thinking to further push Anzaldúa’s thought and theory regarding bodies and materiality beyond its logical end that helps further illustrate the plurality and difference inherent in Anzaldúan bodies.

Sexual Difference as a Critique of Essentialism & Social Constructionism

The human body is comprised of material that indeed matters.⁷ Large segments of feminist theory have battled this line of thinking throughout its history when it comes to making sense of the body.⁸ Recently, some white feminist theorists have managed to bring a mattering body to the fore, but women of color feminism have privileged bodies

⁶ Gloria Anzaldúa, “Now Let Us Shift...the path of conocimiento...inner work, public acts, in Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, eds. *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 540-578.

⁷ Material bodies have ethical import, and a sustained focus on the materiality of the body will help unmask this importance for studies in race, sexuality, and theories of the body. I see this importance being particular to my own field, Ethics, but also to other marginalized discourses like queer studies and sexuality studies.

⁸ Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

in their analytic frameworks and theories since, some might argue, the beginning of their development. With feminism theorizing against the overwhelming realities of misogyny and the oppressions of patriarchy, feminist theory (in some ways) lost the material body as a doing and becoming in the world. The material body that feminist theory created was a body that was an object in the world, inactive and largely discursively constituted. To consider the mattering body in feminist theory, I suggest the theory of sexual difference that is popular among European feminists. The feminist theory that is found in the theories of sexual difference is an important theoretical move in the scope of burgeoning feminist theory. There are several ‘feminist’ theorists one can consider when exploring sexual difference: Luce Irigaray, Claire Colebrook, Rosi Braidotti, among others.⁹ I suggest Rosi Braidotti as an important figure to consider when thinking about sexual difference and the body. This ‘camp’ largely came from feminist theory influenced by French Social Thought after May 1968.¹⁰ Braidotti’s work on sexual difference stems from a Deleuzian sensibility of feminist theory. What this means is that feminist theory is a theory of difference that is influenced by Deleuze’s recovery of Spinoza that includes a notion of single matter substance.¹¹

Sexual difference departs from both essentialism and social constructionism by positively highlighting ‘difference’ as a way to reimage the materiality of the body, and to be part of the feminist theorizing. For those who follow both sexual difference and

⁹ I am not trying to oversimplify what others have also suggested. For example, see Emma Perez’s work in *Chicana Lesbians* and her first book on theory.

¹⁰ This refers to the student riots that took place across factors. The New York Times has an article that explains this time as the ‘revolt that never too place.’ See the article here: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/11/world/europe/11iht-paris.4.12777919.html?_r=0. Accessed on February 14, 2024.

¹¹ Deleuze’s work recovers Spinoza and Nietzsche, among others, like Hume and Bergson. Braidotti’s work is largely informed by Deleuze’s recovery and interrogation of Spinoza.

Deleuzian feminism, this project argues, “that the political ontology of monism, which Deleuze adapts from Spinoza, offers some relevant opportunities for feminist theory.”¹² What the feminist theory of sexual difference focuses upon is not the Cartesian dualism, but the mind-body parallelism, and an interrogation of the one substance: “an intelligent flesh-mind-matter compound.”¹³ What this ‘one substance’ reveals is the process of differentiation, in Deleuzian terms. Differentiation is the inevitable force and elaboration of difference. Another way to say this is that the ‘one substance’ reveals the process of becoming. Difference, the concept theorized by Henri Bergson and later picked up by Gilles Deleuze, should be understood as having four primary facets:

1.) difference presents itself as differences of nature; as such it is the object of empirical intuition, the investigation of specific and irreducible differences, natural articulations of the real, the ways in which the real divides itself (rather than is divided by us) in its elaboration;

2.) it functions through a force of internal difference; as such it in the internal dynamic of open-endedness, ensuring that not only does it differ from itself, or become, it also differs from everything ‘like ’it, everything with which it shares a species or category, a resemblance. Thus species, or categories, modes of resemblance, have their own inner dynamic, or ‘tendency’, a difference in nature;

3.) it operates or acts through degrees of difference; which entails that not only are terms differentiated, but they are also linked through their different degrees of

¹² Rosi Bradotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Bradotti*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 143-144.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 144.

actualization to tendencies and processes that are present everywhere but expressed or actualized only in particular degrees (of contraction/dilation);

4.) and its movement must always be understood as a process of differentiation, division or bifurcation.¹⁴

The last of this list elucidates a movement that is always a process of differentiation, division, or bifurcation.¹⁵ “Bodily differences are both a banality and a cornerstone in the process of differentiation of variation.”¹⁶ This project highlights Spinoza’s idea of the body, and its focus on the body as “intelligent matter.” The mind for Spinoza is “embodied sensibility” and an object of the body. These are understood as mind-body parallelism, and the feminist project of sexual difference bypasses the hazards of essentialism altogether.¹⁷

The relational materiality of Spinoza-Deleuze-Merleau-Ponty creates a plane of consistency when detailing the body as material reality, and one that matters. What is oftentimes articulated in white feminist theory projects is not a material body, but a discursive body. I believe many feminist theorists draw on the discursive strategies of poststructuralist thinking, in particular Foucault and Butler, when theorizing the discursive body. Defining discourse in this way suggests that discourse is a way of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands, and Other Texts, 1953-1974*, (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2002), 45–47.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, “Bergson, Deleuze, and the Becoming of Unbecoming,” *Parallax*, 11, 2, (2005): 4-13.

¹⁶ Rosi Braidotti, 144.

¹⁷ While it seems as though I am making a political statement concerning the production of an essentialist feminist theory, I am not. I am rather attempting to highlight the distinction of sexual difference and the ways in which this project avoids the biologism of other feminist projects (largely the essentialism camp).

the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern.¹⁸

And secondly, discourse is “... a form of power that circulates in the social field and can attach to strategies of domination as well as those of resistance.”¹⁹ Recognizing these definitions, it should be noted that discourse is a rather slippery notion in Foucault’s work but at the most basic level he uses the term to refer to the material verbal traces left by history. These traces that are left by history are not only discursive or reduced to language, or linguistic patterns. These traces embody a level of materiality that has the power to effect history. He also uses it to describe ‘a certain “way of speaking.”’²⁰

Discourse in the Foucauldian sense dominated feminist theory, and a discursive body emerged as the overwhelming understanding of bodies. In Butler’s 1993 *Bodies That Matter*, she advances the discursive construction of the social field as a process of materialization of social norms through processes of repetitive citation of performative actions; the reality that the repression and iteration of social norms constructed Butler’s body (or materialized in her language). Here, the use of discourse is different from Foucault’s historical composition, but nonetheless important to showing Butler’s focus on the discursive construction of bodies, delimiting the active materiality and ongoing materialization that foreground the linguistic turn.

¹⁸ Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1987), 108.

¹⁹ Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (eds.), *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 185.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Tr. A. M. Sheridan Smith. (London: Tavistock, 1972), 193. I should also note that discursive markings on material bodies are a real thing. Consider the recent police violence in the United States of America that disproportionately affect black and brown bodies. In many ways, these are material violence that stem from the discursive markings of state violence.

Discursive strategies may be reduced to mere language, or discursive strategies may, in fact, be the traces of history that affect the material bodies through relational processes. I consider this latter way of reading Foucault as a material-discursive thinker who contributes to the thinking that bodies matter in their historical composition. I consider Foucault's work on prisons and the ways that power shapes and forms the material body by not only the power of language but also the institutionalized power of policies, laws, and governmentality, to be important to his material-discursive work.

What has been significant for research on the body in feminist and queer circles is the discursive turn, and its inadequacy; this style of research has dominated theories and philosophies of the body which privilege language over bodily materiality and active materialization. "To describe the materiality of the body as a construction in Butler's theorizing, then, is not to resort to linguistic determinism or cultural constructivism. We take it for granted, she notes, that somebody, or in more recent formulations, something, (e.g. Culture, Discourse or Power), does the act of constructing."²¹ This is a perfect example of the ways in which the discursive body emerges in Butler's work; I call this a failed materiality. This author suggests that a 'something' formulates the body, but these 'somethings' (culture, discourse, or power) are all rooted in language. I wish to reimagine bodies in material terms and do this by showing the raw material that is seen and developed by a variety of scholars (Barad, Braidotti, the new Materialism movement, and Bennett).²² I argue that Gloria Anzaldúa advocates for a return to radical material

²¹ <http://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/odin/odin2.html>, accessed March 6, 2024.

²² I should note that in Butler's later work, especially her work on assembly, there is more of a nuanced version of materiality, though I still think it is rooted in Hegelian notions of becoming that stem from language, not the philosophy of matter. And, so, at root, Butler's philosophy is not as materialist as what I would hope it would become.

bodies, bodies that are human and more than human, materially connected in the world, plural, and otherwise, and this ‘turn’ to materiality and bodies provides a significant resource in analyzing bodies.²³

As a way of illustrating the discursive turn, I begin by articulating bodies as seen in the work of Susan Bordo and Judith Butler. I then detail bodies as seen in the work of Rosi Braidotti, a Deleuzian feminist who incorporates the work of Gilles Deleuze and Spinoza’s materiality into her work; this ‘turn’ yields a new material ‘turn’ in studies of bodies. I believe there are parallels to Spinoza’s single substance monism and the radical materiality that is seen in Anzaldúa, and therefore I situate Deleuze and Anzaldúa in conversation with one another to expose the difference and differentiation in the dynamic becoming material bodies that explores radical self-organizing and self-transformation as a result of becoming nepantler.²⁴ Anzaldúa has largely been understood as a literary scholar, and her books are categorized as creative fiction in big box stores, like Barnes and Noble.²⁵ I believe that we should rethink our understanding of Anzaldúa as mobilizing a particular style of philosophy whose roots are material. Exposing materiality in this manner helps illustrate the deep philosophical commitments that Anzaldúa had that have thus far been ignored in scholarly writing.²⁶ I am hoping to reclaim the philosophy of Anzaldúa in a way to further mobilize her thought and theory for enacting radical social change and also to help develop the language of becoming and

²³ The use of the term ‘radical’ references the ways in which Anzaldúan materiality is rooted in her version of monism, which I believe can be parallel to Spinoza’s single matter substance.

²⁴ I use this term to illustrate the becoming nature of matter and the ways that matter and material bodies are always negotiating thresholds of power in their becoming and thresholds of categories.

²⁵ While I argue that Anzaldúa is a philosopher, her books are categorized as fiction and therefore not used in philosophy departments as “real theory.” I find this unfortunate.

²⁶ Much of the recent work on Anzaldúa explores her poetry and creative writing. Few scholars are using Anzaldúa as a philosopher who works at the intersection of ontology, epistemology, and ethics. I am in this latter group of scholars who seeks great potential in reading Anzaldúa as a philosopher.

interrelatedness that is already native to her work, which I believe is central to the task of becoming as transformation.

Bodies in Bordo, Butler, & Braidotti

There is an obvious split when one considers how the body is interpreted. That “split,” though perhaps more apparent when engaging in the theories of Susan Bordo and Judith Butler, is one that I want to mention as a way to navigate my interest in the ‘mattering’ body. In short, the split, which is highlighted in Bordo’s book *Unbearable Weight* and Butler’s book *Bodies that Matter*, hinges on the ways in which these two theorists understand women and the body, and their theories perpetuate their differences, and the differences are seen throughout feminist theory and feminist philosophy. This well-known split has influenced the ways in which feminist theory has theorized about bodies and has managed to avoid materializing bodies in their theories.²⁷ Materiality has functioned in particular ways in the theories of Bordo and Butler. Materiality has been not an agential force of materialization but rather materiality has stemmed from Foucault and Althusser, functioning as a historical composition where language and materiality are embedded with one another. In this latter interpretation of materiality, bodies are fixed categories where inscriptions of power and discourse are embedded; language and materiality are intertwined, therefore not allowing materiality to be a dynamic relational process. While I will detail this split to help move toward bodies as material reality, an important addition must be noted: Gloria Anzaldúa. Following the short analysis detailing Bordo and Butler’s differences and exploring the body relative to Rosi Braidotti, I will point out the ways in which the body is materialized in Anzaldúa’s work,

²⁷ Hird is useful in thinking about this split.

and how Anzaldúa, herself, theorizes a material body, especially notable in her early work.²⁸

I argue that Butler and Bordo purport to use a materially rich philosophy, but its materialization is highly constrained by poststructuralist thought and language, and both of these thinkers' point of departure relative to materiality is the interdependence of materiality and language; I think this highlights a failed materiality in both thinkers that in turn fortifies discursive bodies. Braidotti brings together Spinozist single matter substance and a theory of sexual difference that bridges together a type of dynamic materialization that results in a body that is dynamically becoming where matter precedes language; she roots her theory of becoming in a life that she calls *Zoe*.²⁹ The dynamism of *Zoe* privileges a theory of materiality as an active reality or active force in the world. It is important to note that for Braidotti, materiality precedes language, but not in the same way that materiality and language are embedded for Butler. I see materiality privileged in the work of Braidotti, because this New Materialism is tied to ontology, whereas materiality and language for Butler is part of the social construction of reality, not an ontological reality. The work of Gloria Anzaldúa in conversation with Braidotti and Deleuze bridges a type of assemblage thinking together on bodies and difference, a materially structured 'juncture' or intersection that puts difference-in-action together with material bodies.

²⁸ It is sufficient to note that in Anzaldúa's corpus, she points toward a post-humanist body. While I focus primarily on a humanistic body, I will draw out this distinction only to a point, because my interest is in the material body that is seen throughout Anzaldúa's early and middle writings.

²⁹ Cite New Materialisms book—Braidotti's article

Judith Butler

Perhaps it is Judith Butler who is famous for the phrase “bodies that matter.” She did write an entire book on the “discursive limits of sex.” What is important in noting Butler is her positioning the body as a ‘thing.’ She also seeks to show her readers that the lived human body is comprised of material or matter, and she does this by deploying a complex notion of bodies that are performatively constituted as matter. She argues bodies matter, or count, for something, but her theory of materiality is highly constrained by her use of language and poststructuralism (and the centering of the Subject). I argue that bodies do indeed matter in a decidedly materialistic way motivated by ongoing-networked relational processes. I further suggest that bodies are texturized by discursive markings, or moments when the body is ‘visited’ by discursivity. This might be similar to Michel Foucault’s positing bodily inscriptions.³⁰

Judith Butler writes in a decidedly poststructuralist and critical theory genre as a feminist philosopher, and contributes to the burgeoning of feminist theory and feminist philosophy. Butler’s work, like Bordo’s, is a cornerstone in feminist theory. What Butler theorizes relative to bodies is focus on the construction of power relations and ways that bodies (particularly, women’s bodies) have been exposed to relations that have been detrimental to their flourishing. Butler’s work combines the critical analysis of philosophy, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and critical theory. She is often cited as an initial contributor to the ever-evolving anti-disciplinary discipline of queer theory.³¹

³⁰Judith Butler, “Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions,” *The Journal of Philosophy*. Eighty-Sixth Annual Meeting American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division. Vol. 86, No. 11, pp. 601-607, November 1989.

³¹ “anti-disciplinary” is my designation in speaking about queer theory. It seems to me that this “discipline” is constructed (methodologically and theoretically) to be anti-normative and thus anti-discipline.

Butler works at these critical intersections to contribute to the discourse concerning women, largely conceived. Her theories of the body, however, yield a much more discursive reality, than that of Bordo's more "materialist" turn. Unlike Bordo's use of food relative to women's bodies, Butler does not use any tangible elements when theorizing the body. For example, *Bodies that Matter* suggests that there is nothing outside language, and the hierarchy of materiality and language is a false hierarchy, because it is language that only exists. Judith Butler has shown the materiality of the body is a construction that emerges out of a field of power that shapes its contours, marking it with sex and gender, but this 'marking' or bodily texturizing is discursive, which ultimately yields the body a passive site of materiality. She says, "the process of that sedimentation or what we might call *materialization* will be a kind of citationality, the acquisition of being through the citing of power, a citing that establishes an originary complicity with power in the formation of the "I."³²

Butler points out that we need to rethink the very meaning of construction and the grammatical structures that we use when we talk about construction. For her, it is "neither a single act nor a causal process initiated by a subject and culminating in a set of fixed effects. Construction takes place not only in time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms."³³ To describe the materiality of the body as a construction in Butler's theorizing, then, is not to resort to linguistic determinism or cultural constructivism, or even essentialism or social constructivism. We take it for granted, she notes, that somebody, or in more recent formulations, something, (culture, discourse, or power), does the act of constructing. This illustrates

³² Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 15.

³³ *Ibid.*, 10.

what I consider to be Butler's failed materiality, hinging on a discursive construction of the body that is constituted by outside affects (culture, discourse, or power), instead of finite materiality extending from single matter substance.

This radical difference between referent and signified is the site where the materiality of language and that of the world which it seeks to signify are perpetually negotiated. This might usefully be compared with Merleau-Ponty's notion of the flesh of the world. Although the referent cannot be said to exist a part from the signified, it nevertheless cannot be reduced to it. That referent, that abiding function of the world, is to persist as the horizon and the "that which" which makes its demand in and to language. Language and materiality are fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependency, but never fully collapsed into one another, i.e., reduced to one another, and yet neither fully ever exceeds the other. Always already implicated in each other, always already exceeding one another, language and materiality are never fully identical nor fully different.³⁴

This is again part of her failed materiality. It is failed because Butler constructs a framework where language and matter are co-constitutive with one another and in this framework, language precedes matter. Language is always before what is in the world; this solidifies a failed materiality in my thinking. This is the case because I do not think that Butler advocates for language as material, but rather that language precedes matter. If language is material, then language is everything and this would conform to a monist reality. While Butler ostensibly wrote a book concerning the material body in *Bodies That Matter*, what is often reported about this text is that bodies are eclipsed by the

³⁴ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 69.

discursivity of her own work and her emphasis on the performative turn that is her reformulation of Hegel's *Werden*.³⁵ To highlight yet another example of Butler's failed materiality that is found in *Bodies That Matter* is when she writes of the quality of materiality. She writes about materiality as a particular type of quality and kind, but this qualitative statement concerning matter elucidates her emphasis on language and linguistic dynamics that call matter into being. "But what then do we make of the kind of materiality that is associated with the body, its physicality as well as its location, including its social and political locatedness, and that materiality that characterizes language? Do we mean "materiality" in a common sense, or are these usages examples of what Althusser refers to as modalities of matter?"³⁶ It is clear in this quote and the above quote that Butler does not theorize around a materiality with agential force, but rather a performative becoming that is rooted in the intersection of language and materiality, an interdependence that subordinates materiality and privileges language.

Susan Bordo

Close to the same time that *Gender Trouble* was published, Susan Bordo published *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*.³⁷ In this text, Bordo seeks to formulate a theory concerning bodies and does so from the perspective of feminist theory and Western thought, all relative to women and what she considers to be contemporary issues, namely eating disorders. This text gives readers an opportunity to articulate a theory of the body; in fact, the body is a fleshy material reality, argues Bordo.

³⁵ Though Butler never calls the body she theorizes a "discursive body," I find that it is, indeed, a discursive body that is performatively constituted.

³⁶ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 69.

³⁷ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2004.

The book conforms to the subtitle of the book: *Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. What interests me most in this text is the way that Bordo deals with ‘real,’ not imagined, bodies. From asking the question “Whose body is this?” to exploring whether hunger is ideology, the body that is unmasked and interrogated is a real body relative to women (an unambiguous category for Bordo) and the issues or stereotypes of Western culture.

Aside from the ways in which Bordo’s text deals with women and bodies, it also functions on a theoretical level within the field of feminist philosophy and feminist critical methodologies. It seems that portions of this text are written as a response to Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*.³⁸ In *Unbearable Weight*, Bordo includes a chapter that was previously published in *Feminist Studies*³⁹ that reads like a response or critique of *Gender Trouble*. Perhaps what Bordo’s text gives us is a way to deal with the impeding postmodern reality that is ever fragmenting real bodies and perpetuating the imagined body, which is largely discursive. While the critique or response is valuable, what is important is the visibility of bodies, fleshy bodies, in Bordo’s work.

In Bordo’s *Unbearable Weight*, she theorizes the activity, passivity, and gender of women and the ways that “The Heavy Bear” perpetuates the reality of women’s bodies being passive material. In “The Heavy Bear” the body is presented as hunting us with its passive materiality, its lack of agency, art, or even consciousness. Insofar as the “spirit’s motive” is the guiding force, clarity and will dominate; the body, by contrast, simply receives and darkly, dumbly responds to impressions, emotions, passions. This duality of

³⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminist and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd edition, (New York: Routledge,) 1990.

³⁹ Susan Bordo, *Postmodern Subjects, Postmodern Bodies, Feminist Studies*, 18, no. 1 1992, 159-175.

active spirit/passive body is also gendered, and it has been one of the most historically powerful of the dualities that inform Western ideologies of gender. First philosophically articulated by Aristotle (although embodied in many creation myths and associative schemes before him), it still informs contemporary images and ideology concerning reproduction. According to the Aristotelian version, the conception of a living being involves the vitalization of the purely material contribution of the female by the “effective and active” element, the male sperm.⁴⁰

This paragraph reminds us that the dualism of gender pairs with bodies and locates (or stabilizes) women’s bodies as passive material. What is missing from her argument, however, is an active materiality for women. Bordo refuses the passivity of dualism, but does not lift up an active alternative for women’s bodies being actively material or mattering. I call this another failed attempt at claiming bodies as matter and material. The other importance of the above lengthy quote is that Bordo situates the active and passive materiality with biology, the sperm and fertilization, to be precise. I think this limits my own attempt to privilege a robust theory of materialism that is active, becoming, and transformative. For this reason, I claim that Bordo’s materialism is a failed materialism. [ok, but “failed” is heavy-handed....yet certainly lucid.]

Rosi Braidotti

While Bordo and Butler are helpful in identifying differences within US feminist theory, especially with regard to the ways in which they construct their body, it is Rosi Braidotti, a transnational feminist resource, who speaks of a materialist theory of becoming, and whose work on bodies and subjectivity has revolutionized feminist theory,

⁴⁰ Susan Bordo, 11-12.

especially theories of difference. Rosi Braidotti, a feminist Deleuzian scholar, has been committed to the intersection of feminist philosophy and critical social theory. Given this, her work for me meets at critical intersections: Deleuze and feminist theory, which is shaping the ways in which I am able to continue to trace the materiality of the body—from Braidotti to Anzaldúa. Rosi Braidotti argues that the body is an inter-face, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces, it is a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc.) are inscribed; it's a cultural construction that capitalizes on energies of a heterogeneous, discontinuous and affective or unconscious nature. This vision of the body contains sexuality as a process and as a constitutive element. Embodiment provides a common but at best very complex ground on which to postulate the feminist project. On the luna-park that marks the website of this conference, the body would definitely be on the roller-coaster.⁴¹

Braidotti theorizes a way to consider bodies as multiply constitutive of differing and competing 'matter,' perhaps best understood as elements or moments of discursivity.⁴² While she maintains a materialist theory of the body, she leaves openings for discursive realities to intersect with the materiality of the body. Braidotti, affirming the cosmopolitanism of material effects that manifest in things like race, ethnicity, and sexuality, among others texturize the body, but in material ways; these each mentioned above are material realities and should not be reduced to discursive realities in an attempt to manage bodies. Certainly, the scripts of race and class have material effects on bodies.

⁴¹ Rosi Braidotti, "Between the No Longer and the Not Yet: Nomadic Variations on the Body," n.d. Accessed on July 1, 2023 <http://www.women.it/cyberarchive/files/braidotti.htm>

⁴² I will touch on this idea of a 'moment of discursivity' later when I address how the body is "texturized by discursive markings."

We see this in the #blacklivesmatter movement here in the United States.⁴³ Race and class, though socially constructed, have managed to surveil bodies in ways that have had lasting material effects. It is important to recognize the scripts that have been deployed against bodies of color and name their material effects, and these scripts have also helped to shape these bodies. What Braidotti generates in her work is an enfolded materiality or an embodied materiality; she uses these terms interchangeably.⁴⁴ Concerning bodies and matter—a key composition to Braidotti’s argument regarding embodiment and sexuality, both matters of feminist struggle: the material body combines this complex ground of becoming and being that Braidotti borrows from Deleuze and shapes it in a way that accelerates its becomingness. This extends toward a Transness or a Transing.

Being embodied means being in and of sexualized matter. This sexual fibre is intrinsically and multiply connected to social and political relations; it is anything but an individualistic entity. Sexuality is simultaneously the most intimate and the most external, socially-driven, power-drenched practice of the self. As a social and symbolic, material and semiotic institution, sexuality is singled out by feminism as the primary location of power, in a complex manner which encompasses both macro and micro relations. Sexual difference - the sexualized bi-polarity, is another word for power in both the negative or repressive (potestas) and the positive or empowering (potentia) meaning of the term.⁴⁵

Braidotti skillfully illustrates bodies as networked processes, which are materializing along a plane of difference. In this quote, Braidotti claims sexuality is matter, or a material reality, even calls it a fiber. Sexuality participates in the materializing of experiences within relationships. Bodies are sexualized matter, different

⁴³ #blacklivesmatter started as a social media campaign to address the overwhelming disparity of attentiveness to black and brown bodies, following the killings of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, among others.

⁴⁴ Consider the BLM movement and the Israeli-Arab Standing Together movement. These two movements require us to consider the intersections of our materiality and the ways our materiality impacts our lived experiences.

⁴⁵ Braidotti, “Between the No Longer and the Not Yet: Nomadic Variations on the Body.”

in their becoming, but already existing on a plane of becomingness. In this way, bodies are networked realities and matter exists on an ontological plane, multiply connected and always becoming, as a result of the body's politically networked relations. Braidotti, a theorist whose multiplicity and plurality of identities, and interculturality, speaks into the existing discourse concerning bodies, helps re-imagine embodied (nomadic) subjects that are affected by what is often cited as the post-modern reality. Likewise, Anzaldúa theorizes about plural identities, plural bodies, and Mestizaje, which is parallel to Braidotti's work in many ways. Braidotti theorizes in the above quote a way to consider the dynamics of power relations relative to embodiment. That, embodiment and enfleshment are interchangeable and contribute to a robust understanding of becoming as transformation. For Braidotti, it is matter *qua* becoming and bodies *qua* becoming. This syntax contributes to the interrelatedness of being a networked ontology that contributes to knowledge production and action in the world. For It is because of this networked ontology that the idea of mattering bodies becoming is part of the active and enfleshed materialism. Further in her lecture, she correlates bodies and embodiment:

/The sort of 'figurations' of alternative subjectivity, which feminism has invented, like the womanist/ the lesbian/ the cyborg/ the inappropriate(d) other/ the nomadic feminist etc. differ from classical 'metaphors' in calling into play a sense of accountability for one's locations. They express materially embedded cartographies and as such are self-reflexive and not parasitic upon a process of metaphorization of 'others.' They provide, on the critical level, materially embedded and embodied accounts of one's power-relations.⁴⁶ A materially embedded cartography as a metaphor for 'figuration'

⁴⁶ Braidotti, "Between the No Longer and the Not Yet: Nomadic Variations on the Body."

speaks to a Deleuzian technology for plurality and multiplicity that the subject enfleshes. This plurality further materializes along the matrix of becoming. It expresses the subject's capacity for multiple, non-linear and outward-bound inter-connections with a number of external forces and others. This model of inter-relations works as well in Deleuze and Guattari's many references to animals, plants, viruses, and to the chaosmos as a whole. It is about multiple alliances, symbiotic connections and fusions.^{47/}

Braidotti's work, from the three-volume series on Deleuzian manifestations in feminist thought⁴⁸ to her very insightful work on ethics and ontology, theorizes and invites her readers to engage critically with issues important to the feminist struggle and bodies. In fact, the body that she creates in her 'materialist theory of becoming' is a body that resides in the interstices of thought—in between the 'no longer and not yet,' as does her feminist theory; this, in many ways, is similar to the Anzaldúan body which is always residing in the borderlands or in nepantla—an already and not yet reality. This standpoint where the body is constituted further roots bodies in a materiality that is becoming. Braidotti's feminist thinking and theorizing is analogous to Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness, where blurring the boundaries and always becoming multiple due to transformation, speaks to a new kind of feminism. She says,

Feminist thinking takes place between the no longer and the not yet, in the in-between zone between willful, conscious political practice and the not-necessarily

⁴⁷ Rosi Braidotti, "Affirming the Affirmative: On Nomadic Affectivity," *Rhizomes*, Issues 11/12, 2005/2006.

⁴⁸ Here I am referencing Braidotti's work in *Nomadic Subjects, Metamorphoses, and Transpositions*. These three books help shape my own positions concerning bodies and materiality. The text that preceded this trilogy (*Patterns of Dissonance*) is also incredibly helpful. What Braidotti offers her readers is an interdisciplinary way of engaging philosophy and social theory. She also has what I consider to be a 'feminist' commitment, and her feminism is structured as a transnational feminism. Because of her interdisciplinary work, then, her construction of bodies is an ever-complicated notion of materiality, illustrative of Spinoza and Deleuze and Queer Theory.

conscious yearning for transformation and change. I see feminist theory as the activity aimed at articulating the questions of individual gendered identity with issues related to political subjectivity, the production of knowledge, diversity, and epistemological legitimation.⁴⁹

What Braidotti's feminist theory does for those of us who engage in the act of theorizing across genres is enable us to have tools that address the intersecting realities of materiality and discursivity alongside three philosophical domains: ethics, ontology, and epistemology. This web of philosophical domains is a hallmark of the New Materialist movement. They theorize at the entanglement of ontology, epistmeoloyg, and ethics. I find that Anzaldúa's work also intersects with these three philosophical domains. These elements become part and parcel of the bodies we investigate, engage, and ultimately en flesh. Feminist theories and feminist activities, *a la* Braidotti, en flesh a struggle to re-materialize not only the body but also the subject's capacity to know, as well as the body's production of knowledge, and reality / one's being and becoming in the world. "In the end—Feminists are proud to be flesh."⁵⁰ Likewise, Trans animals are proud to be folded upon and enfolded by their flesh.

Bodies materialize in a particularly dynamic way in Braidotti's work. "I prefer a deeply embedded vision of the embodied subject. In the light of contemporary genetics and molecular biology, it is more than feasible to speak of the body as a complex system of self-sustaining forces."⁵¹ For Braidotti, the body remains a "bundle of contradictions"

⁴⁹ Braidotti, "Between the No Longer and the Not Yet: Nomadic Variations on the Body."

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid. This statement points toward a Deleuzian notion of the body that he recovers from Nietzsche. These are important points along the way to highlight to show the assemblage of thinking and their constructive moves.

as it is a related animal entity, a composition of genes comprised into a genetic data-bank, while also remaining a “bio-social entity.” The body is a *socio-sensory reality*⁵² that is always being re-materialized in its own becoming. This material socio-sensory reality is a self-organizing and self-transformative single matter substance that relies on its relational processes that are fiercely network in this world. That is to say that the body is a set of a systematized and personalized inscriptions or memories that is bundled together into a ‘thing,’ but is not a passive site of citation, as Butler argues that it is passive site in *Bodies That Matter*.⁵³ As such, Braidotti articulates the body as it has materialized in postmodernity: “it is part animal, part machine but the dualistic opposition of the two, which our culture has adopted since the 18th century as the dominant model, is inadequate today.”⁵⁴ She concludes, “This means that we can now think of the body as an entity that inhabits different time-zones simultaneously, and is animated by different speeds and a variety of internal and external clocks which do not necessarily coincide.”⁵⁵ By this assertion, the materiality of the body is more than what is contained *in* the body. Materiality is ever expansive extending beyond the contact zones of my own bones and muscles that constitute my “body.” [key...]Bodies, especially in an age where virtuality dominates our means of communication, stipulate an ever-growing reality of materiality, and we should recognize this as a new material turn in understanding bodies. Trans bodies are the largest hint of the material turn toward a fleshly becoming that balances both divinity and humanity.

⁵² *Socio-sensory reality* is my way of naming the materiality of the body. Much like Braidotti uses “intelligent-flesh-matter compound,” I think of the body being constituted by the socio and fleshy senses to yield a composite material that we call the body.

⁵³ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 15.

⁵⁴ Braidotti, “Between the No Longer and the Not Yet: Nomadic Variations on the Body.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Anzaldúan Bodies That Matter

This section traced three mainstream feminist thinkers' theories of bodies. While Braidotti's theory of the body is the theory I find most compelling, my reading is not without critique. Braidotti, a thoroughly embedded European scholar, fails to articulate the materiality of the marginalized body, or the body that is perpetually displaced by the ideological center. This is where Anzaldúa's theorizing multiple realities and a formative theory of the material universe intersects with Braidotti's Deleuzian feminism.

Anzaldúan materiality is a materiality that is fiercely networked, participating in the process of materialization and related to all persons and things and participates in ongoing cycles of difference and repetition that is often articulated as cycles of *nepantla*.

While noting the failed materiality of Butler and Bordo, Braidotti offers Anzaldúan scholars a way to reimagine materiality existing along the plane of becoming. This necessarily means the inclusion of Gilles Deleuze with Anzaldúa's theories. But, this intersection is not without differences or uncomplicated. Given the subordination of matter to language in the work of Butler, it is important to utilize thinkers who privilege matter in their theorizing to help bring material bodies into clearer view. I think Braidotti does this and Anzaldúa certainly does this. Though many argue that Butler creates a mutually constitutive dynamic of matter and language, I disagree with this read of her and rather look to the New Materialists who help bring bodies into a more material reality; this motivates my own thinking concerning the materiality of bodies which are becoming.

Transing is the direction toward which we are becoming together. When we embrace Trans as an analytic and an identity (and identifier), our notions of material

bodies become larger, not in a size category but in our ontological and epistemological rendering. We come to know our matter in deeper ways when we encounter Transness.

CHAPTER TWO

BECOMING: SPIRALING WITHIN THE FOLDS

I come to the concept of becoming after surveying the body, because I think bodies and becoming are deeply connected. Becoming is a central component to my work, one that I explored in *Body Becoming: A Path to Our Liberation* and in other places. I find this concept pivotal to a TransChristology as I interrogate trans-plantation; trans-formation; -trans-figuration, and; transhumation. As Jüngel wrote, “Gottes Sein ist im Werden.” Translated, it says, that “God is in the Becoming.”

I borrow this term “becoming” from Deleuze and Guattari who define becoming “as a process of change, flight, or movement within an assemblage.”¹ “A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or at the limit, an identification.”² It is neither filiation. It is sufficient to say that bodily materiality is a mobile assemblage that becomes-bodily, through its relational processes that are rooted in matter becoming material, to this larger ontological framework of becoming, motivated by new forms of agency existing in today’s entangled world. The becoming-bodily is partly due to the physiomateriality that is advanced by Anzaldúa in conversation with the vitalism of Deleuze and Barad’s intra-activity. Becoming bodily does not re-inscribe particular boundaries; becoming stimulates a reworlding of bodies’ materialization as becoming-bodily. These relational processes are not correspondences with one another but rather a moment in time and a moment within the eclipse of becoming when bodies become nothing other than themselves; there is no subject that is

¹ Deleuze and Guattari.

² Ibid.

becoming, only matter materializing along the thresholds that are always in the process of becoming. When I write of a bodily becoming, it is fundamentally theological. “This is the point to clarify: that a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself; but also that it has no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the first.”³ Bodily materiality in this sense is deterritorialized. The body, as a mobile assemblage, is not an organic whole, where specific elements are held in place by the organization of a unity, the process of “becoming.” In becoming, “one piece of the assemblage is drawn into the territory of another piece, changing its value as an element and bringing about a new unity.”⁴ An example of this principle for Deleuze and Guattari is best illustrated by atoms, which are drawn into an assemblage with nearby atoms through affinities rather than an organizational purpose. This is the process of deterritorialization whereby properties of the constituent element disappear and are replaced by the new properties of the assemblage. This is bodily materiality existing on an ontological plane of intra-active becomingness that is radically deterritorialized.

Recalling the ways in which the body is a mosaic existence living in the borderlands of becoming, bodily materiality is on an ontological plane of an indefinite becoming and multiplicity. The borderlands, then, a type of “mosaic territory” challenges the normative horizon of homogeneity, because borderlands, as plural material (that are always materializing), are marked by multiplicity and congeal with an ‘intra-active’ ontology of becoming. Bodies are always in relationship with these borderlands.

³ Deleuze on becoming.

⁴ Ibid.

As Deleuze and Guattari explain, “the process of becoming is not one of imitation or analogy; it is generative of a new way of being that is a function of influences or flowings rather than resemblances; or as in-flowings, as Keller has taught me. The process is one of removing the element from its original functions and bringing about new ones.”⁵ Becoming then, seen as the ontological inseparability of multiplying the materiality of bodies and existing on the ontological plane of difference and multiplicity, marks bodily materiality as differential material and that which is becoming in the world “as an endless process of self-transformation” and self-organizing material. The process of materialization in relationship to the process of becoming-bodily relies on the duration of their communication; hence, the ongoing relational processes take place in the matrix of the borderlands. The ‘event’ or ‘intra-active’ becoming, though in relationship with other matters that are becoming, is not an evolution of materiality or agential bodily materiality. “Becoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary.”⁶ This friendliness of becoming is queer in nature; the in-flowings are infinite. The ‘intra-active’ becoming produces differential material that is an alliance with bodies. Said differently, ‘intra-active’ becomings produce bodily materiality as difference-in-itself that further materializes along (or in) the matrix of borderlands. An ontology of ‘intra-active’ becoming produces radically different bodily material that are in alliance with other bodily materials. These bodily materials invoke the speciated divide of human and non-human. These alliances, emerging as bodily materiality participates in the material-becoming-different process, thereby supporting difference as becoming, and an ‘intra-active’ reality further materializes on an ontological plane of difference as

⁵ Deleuze and Guattari.

⁶ This is Deleuze and Guattari as explained through the dictionary of Deleuze and Guattari.

consistency. This ontology of 'intra-active' becoming is always involving bodily materiality as difference and multiplicity.

Becoming is always being and all theology is ethics. We need a theology of becoming that is grounded in theological queerness. That section follows and ties together becomingness and queerness that is grounded in theology.

*Theological Queerness*⁷

Theological queerness is grounded in anti-assimilationist politics that seeks to steward a normative horizon of flourishing for the underside of history specifically, & invites the world to join in practices & an orientation of desire that forward flourishing for all. To be grounded is to cultivate the inner awareness of paying attention as a practice of life and to frame this practice of paying attention as part of the work of contemplation. We cannot steward anti-assimilationist politics if we continue to be swept up in the neoliberal tides of today's political machinations, which are rooted in a competitive relationality and oppositional politics. The work of being grounded in anti-assimilationist politics is to notice that the overwhelming framework of being in the world is largely constitutive of neoliberalism and the avoidance of the politics of place coupled with the competitiveness of capitalism, and oppositional politics. To be grounded in anti-assimilationist politics is to plant seeds for another possible world and to use theological sciences as a primary source in rhizomatic ways. We must root into theological queerness through technologies of place and participate in the ever-expanding

⁷ Theological Queerness is a definition I am developing that offers an alternative to queer theology. I have been developing this in consultation with Dr. Nancy Elizabeth Bedford who has given generous comments to me on several drafts. This definition remains incomplete and becoming ever different in each iteration. Theological queerness is iterative and resembles difference and repetition in the spirit of Deleuze.

wisdom that emerges when we are paying attention to the mysteries of the God of the Gospel.

Theological queerness, as this project proposes it, makes an epistemological break from “queer theology” insofar as it is not rooted in any identitarianism. Though, before I continue, let me add how important queer theology has been for those who are seeking more identity based theologies. Queer theology creates conditions for me to have a chance to rethink it along the lines of theological queerness.

Queer Theology has given rise to identity based theologies that have helped give language to LGBTQIA persons, along with allies learning how to navigate sexuality and sexual minoritized groups. I recognize this importance, but make an epistemological move toward Theological Queerness to help weave together ontology, epistemology, and ethics. I am transing queer theology toward Theological Queerness.

Theological queerness recognizes the limits of identitarian theologies & endeavors to transcend them in an effort to include all, all while acknowledging that the logic of inclusion demands the logic of exclusion. What I mean is that when we include, we fundamentally exclude, and this is part of the oppositional politics from which I turn away, and theological queerness seeks to be expansive in its orientation and practice. A helpful analogy might be understanding that when we include, we tend to do so on the basis of sameness and homogenizing tendencies. In an effort to steward the politics of radical difference, theological queerness, expansive in both orientation and practice, relies on theories of difference to be intelligible. Difference has no norm; yet, in the repetition of difference, there are traces of what might be seen as norms.

The limits of identitarian theologies relies on identity as the source for one's orientation. This encumbers queer theology as an identity based theology that skews queerness and stabilizes queerness as an identity, opposed to an orientation. Orientation is part of one's becoming; part of our other-wordliness. Theological queerness embraces the counter-normative in ways that point to(ward) the flourishing for all and choreographs a divine dance whose logic is rooted in Trinitarian dynamics. I mention this because there is a radical interconnectedness of all things that points toward Trinitarian dynamics. The Trinity plays an important role in theological queerness as its logics forward the kind of interconnectivity theological queerness can have as one relates with the God of the Gospels and the God that is in all things (*panentheism*).⁸

Theological queerness composts binary thinking in keeping with the post-structural lineage of queer theory. Theological queerness also avoids normative thinking that often informs values, habits, and practices. Further, Theological Queerness disavows hommonationalism in that Theological Queerness does not purport an association of a nationalist ideology with LGBT rights. Coined by Jasbir Puar, homonationalism is a coordinated effort to create a nationalist ideology of LGBT rights. Much of this rights-based language is rooted in neoliberalism and therefore accelerates the hyperindividualism and the Geist of whiteness. Theological Queerness sees homonationalism as a coordinated attempt to further marginalize queerness into a flattened identity composed only of one's sexual identity when, we know that queerness

⁸ Theological Queerness is my invention and it is a way to steward panentheism in broader terms than just God is in all things.

transcends sex and sexuality. Theological Queerness sees homonationalism as a betrayal of queerness and an accelerated support of neoliberal ideals & structures.

In the spirit of turning away from oppositional politics and binary thinking, theological queerness decenters the idea that sex, gender, sexual orientation, ability, or bodies are fixed within the modern binarisms of male / female, able bodied or nonabled bodied, or straight and gay. While “queer theology” is predicated on breaking down binaries, it focusses solely on sex and gender, and sexual orientation, and this sexual dimorphic paradigm limits queerness to being driven by identity and identarian politics. Theological queerness insists on a rhizomatic framework of fluidity that extends the conversation of queerness to address not only femicide, but also eco-cide, transcide, and epistemicide. In this way, Theological Queerness destabilizes normative forms of ontology, epistemology, and ethics.

Theological queerness, grounded in anti-assimilationist politics, seeks to steward a normative horizon of flourishing for the underside of history, specifically, & invites the world to join in practices & an orientation of desire that forward flourishing for all, because the world palpitates for an eschatological hope that is rooted in the ‘not yet.’ Theological queerness embraces the counter-normative in ways that point to(ward) the flourishing for all and choreographs a divine dance whose logic is rooted in Trinitarian dynamics.

Theological queerness composts [green smile..] binary thinking in keeping with the post-structural lineage of queer theory. Theological queerness also avoids normative thinking that often informs values, habits, and practices. Further, Theological Queerness disavows homonationalism in that Theological Queerness does not purport an association

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Theological queerness endeavors to continue in the spirit and materiality of Liberationist Thought, Theories, & Theologies in that it is chiefly concerned with the underside of history & the margins of the margins, most especially sexual minorities, which I identify as women, children, queers, the poor, refugees, people affected by war, ecocollapse, veterans, and transgender people. Theological queerness is rooted in the art and practice of meaning making and continuing to be on the way, following Jesus of Nazareth. Theological queerness embodies a Trinitarian approach in that this work choreographs the dynamism of multiplicity while maintaining its singularity, though neither normatively singular nor heteronormatively singular. Theological queerness threads creatively through the eye of the needle in such a way that bridges philosophical insights with theological mystery while advancing a specific ethical dimension of flourishing for all.

The theological method inherent in theological queerness is both a deterritorializing and reterritorializing; it is (in the spirit of Gregory of Nyssa) an ever expanding theology that constitutes and extends queerness, not by way of identity but thru means of orientation by way of the Spirit in that this work choreographs the dynamism of multiplicity while maintaining its singularity, though neither normatively singular nor heteronormatively singular. Theological queerness threads creatively

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Exile

While Advent, the season in which I am writing this section, frames the coming of the Christ child, we also have to remember that Advent is followed by Epiphany where Jesus, Mary, and Joseph found home by another way. They were exiled to Egypt. Likewise, many Trans folks are finding home by another way, myself included. I am living in exile in a sanctuary state and many other Trans people are fleeing anti-Trans states for sanctuary states. In order to fully understand the need and purpose of a Trans Christology, we must look to the ways in which exile shapes our experience and indeed our identities.

As of now, New York, Minnesota, and California are destination states. There are laws codified in the State legislatures that protect Trans people. But, what does exile do to our standpoint? Our context shapes and shifts into a terrain that we do not know when we are in exile. In fact, I write from land that is vibrant with other beings inhabiting it,

yet I do not know these beings, be them animals, spirits, or otherwise. My point? I am on land that is holding me and I am seeking to root into this foreign land, so that I can continue to become who I believe I am being called to be. Exile has an unfamiliar odor to it and an unfamiliar texture; one that I do not perceive and do not know. How do I be my full self when I am still holding the trauma of fleeing and becoming a Trans refugee in a place I do not know how to know?

Barth wrote about the Son being a foreigner. I want to reflect on his writing and discern ways his work might help the constructive work I am endeavoring right now.⁹ Becoming a foreigner in New York has meant that I needed a job, community, healthcare, and belonging. These things are hard to find and establish in a competitive capitalistic society in which we are living. Yet, living in exile has created conditions for me to find all that I need, plus much more. Exile is not an easy place to be. For many people, being a foreigner challenges our mental health and our emotional stability. I know it has challenged mine, too. But, what can exile teach us during this time of accelerated violence against Trans people? I think one of the things exile has taught me is that I am not alone. I meet Trans people from all over who are trying to flee their fascist state; trying to crowdsource enough money to leave and find sanctuary. That has been almost impossible for people to accomplish given the economic situation of so many. Trans people, many of them, are stuck living in dire situations where their livelihoods and safety remain in question.

⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1 The Doctrine of Reconciliation, 150-160.

Death

While death hovers near and haunts Trans people, we must consider the cost of being and becoming Trans. There were over 300 Trans people killed globally this year in 2022.¹⁰ Many Trans people spend most of their time fleeing death threats and violence. Given the past six years of targeted harassment that I have faced and the intensification of violence, I understand very materially the cost of being Trans and what this cost does to the nervous system. While many Trans people are targeted and harassed, some Trans people are violently attacked by an oppositional political agenda and other Trans people die by suicide due to the societal pressure to conform. I want to hold this carefully as suicidal ideations are something that I faced in the summer of 2022 after the Proud Boys and other Neo nazi groups targeted me.

There is also an element of death that is encountered when we come out as Trans before we even take our first dose of hormone replacement therapy or consider having gender affirming surgery. This death of a constructed self, a given self, is met with the hope and possibility of another possible constructed gender. All gender is drag, says Judith Butler; so, we are performing a construction each time we dress or play or come out. Yet, coming out as a Transhuman implies that we are putting to death the perception of what was given to us and the ways in which we have been conscripted into a gender.

Rebirth

The constant renewal that Trans people undergo as they are becoming is the rebirth pattern that Trans people have to offer this constructive Christology. My own

¹⁰ Statistic is found here and yet only 24 people were counted here in the States. There is a discrepancy when counting Trans deaths, because many Trans deaths go unreported due to Transantagonism and Transmisogyny.

rebirth in Palestine being accepted by Muslim men was the euphoria I needed to not only embrace myself, but celebrate the image in which I am made. My trip to the Palestinian territories was also a chance for me to live into my own becoming, my own rebirth. It was an opportunity for me to see the materiality of shape-shifting that applied to my own becoming being.

Traces of an Otherwise Becoming Being

There are traces of self and other that are in relationship as we endeavor to become our full selves. Traces of an otherwise becoming-being is the work of trans plantation, trans formation / transfiguration, and transhumation. These elements of transness is connected to the foreignness of becoming. The foreignness of becoming is what the Second Person of the Trinity experienced when the Son became a foreigner.

Shapeshifting and Metaphors of Becoming

I have looked to several religious traditions, theorists, and other authors to determine how to speak of a Trans Christology in the form of metaphor, but words fail. A Trans Christology is an event of becoming and requires us to imagine the in between spaces of becoming human. I look to Gloria Anzaldúa and J.R.R. Tolkien to be able to have language to speak about what is unspeakable and always becoming. But Anzaldúa plays a primary role with Tolkien providing the theological lens and opening for me to read Anzaldúa as a theological source for This Christology project. She will have in what follows a primary and major section detailing her materialist orientation to theology and bodies. If God is in all things, than God is in both matter, beyond matter, and in the materiality of our bodies and beyond the materiality of our bodies. We are entangled with

God, as Anzaldúa shows. A Trans Christology necessitates entanglement as the source of becoming. More on that later.

Looking at literary heroes, let me narrate some of Tolkien's mythic world in his famous *The Lord of the Rings* that embodies elements of Transness. Tolkien's beings of light (gods) are named the Ainur and they begin as spirits and incarnate so that they can create in the physical world. God in Tolkien's universe begins as a Mind that creates the world and engages with it. But, Tolkien's Ainur are called in participate in shaping the world in a way that God alone cannot and live in a holy land of light called Valinor. When Frodo is in Mordor, he is stricken by a light from the star Eärendil, which is a reflection of the light of Valinor and helps Frodo and Sam complete their quest. Frodo ends up going to Valinor at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, where he spends the rest of his days. Alongside this, let me add in elements of shape-shifting that is inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa.

CHAPTER THREE

BRIDGING AND REWRITING ANZALDÚA AS A ‘GENERATIVE’

MATERIALIST: A NEW LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS OF MATTER

“With awe and wonder you look around, recognizing the preciousness of the earth, the sanctity of every human being on the planet, the ultimate unity and interdependence of all beings--somos todos un paíz. Love swells in your chest and shoots out of your heart chakra, linking you to everyone/everything--the aboriginal in Australia, the crow in the forest, the vast Pacific ocean. You share a category of identity wider than any social position or racial label. This conocimiento motivates you to work actively to see that no harm comes to people, animals, ocean--to take up spiritual activism and the work of healing. Te entregas a tu promesa to help your various cultures create new paradigms, new narratives.”¹

Anzaldúa’s scholarship, her life’s work, her art-making-theory is framed by the process of images and communication, lines of flight, if you will.² This process, or becoming-being, as she articulates throughout her writing, connects the tongue (the physical part of the body) with thought, both matters of materiality that should not go unnoticed. Combined, these two machines of the body (the mouth and the brain, which are both bodies) help illustrate the connectedness of thinking, being, and becoming. In this sense, Anzaldúa’s work (from art found in images and art found in narrative or poetry) stimulates a generative material reality that mobilizes a framework of becoming. In order to give you a foretaste of the work of Anzaldúa, I wish to detail the importance of her work (that I understand to be at the particular intersection of theory and praxis) in this chapter. I will use this chapter to connect Anzaldúa’s theory of generative materiality that I trace throughout her work with the larger work I am attempting relative

¹ AnaLouise Keating, ‘I’m a citizen of the universe’: Gloria Anzaldúa’s Spiritual Activism as Catalyst for Social Change, *Feminist Studies*; College Park Vol. 34, Iss. 1/2, (Spring 2008): 53-69,344

² This is illustrated in her essay on the red and black ink, found in *Borderlands*. I also borrow this language from Deleuze & Guatarri who’s philosophy very much are ‘lines of flight.’

to the materiality of the body as that which is becoming. And, Transness appears in the motion of the materiality. I will do this in the following ways:

The first feature that is important to note is that of motion or movement, which contributes significantly to Anzaldúa's theory-making-practice work. Seen particularly in the titles of *this bridge called my back* and *Haciendo Caras / Making Face, Making Soul*, and even further to *this bridge we call home*, movement is the art of a becoming motion. The work of seeing Anzaldúa's work as 'becoming motion' or a 'generative materiality,' is in part recognizing the processes by which her theory comes to be, or becomes. There is always movement in Anzaldúa's theories, and also in her imaginal work, that helps frame her theories as something that has an internal force of becoming. In this way, Anzaldúa's work in its entirety is the art of becoming motion and contributes to a generative materiality.

When I theorize movement, it is important to note that sometimes movement is on the wind-swayed bridge, and other times it is the movement of political action. The title of these books frames such motion of becoming and secondarily suggests a particular style of movement that is generative, which is manifest in the in/between spaces of becoming, often characterized by *nepantla*. In the *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, a chronological collection of writings and images, the reader is not only introduced to published material of Anzaldúa, but is able to chart the motion and movement that is central to her theory-making-practice work. Likewise, in connection with motion and movement, the second feature is the concept of bridging and radical interconnectedness, a central feature of Anzaldúa's work. Both bridging and Anzaldúa's metaphysics of interconnectedness are woven throughout her work. They give texture to the already

existing philosophical framework of her scholarship. Given the ways in which Anzaldúa used her own racial positioning as a Chicana and Tejana to bridge with white feminists, this not only generates a new contour in anti-racist coalitions, but also builds bridges with difference as a political act. One must also recognize that the act of bridging is not an act to solidify ideas or actions but to create a much more porous orientation in relationality that further contributes to a sense of radical interconnectedness. The third feature that is incredibly important for my work is Anzaldúa's anti-normativity approach that results in a new contour of anti-disciplinarity. This feature is important for my work because I actively leverage Anzaldúa's resistance to static norms and normativity in her theories that privilege multiplicity and becoming, a particular philosophical thread that I trace throughout this project. While norms are incredibly valuable in ethical method and theories, I find that the anti-normative shift is central to a more robust queer and decolonial orientation, which conforms to Anzaldúa's own work as a work of resistance in an attempt for an orientation of radical interconnection with all things. I do not suggest that Anzaldúa abandons values; her work is rich with value-laden theories that often are under-determined, enfleshing a notion of queer freedom. This notion of queer freedom is non-teleological in orientation, but directed and framed by radical interconnectedness. In this sense, then, it differs from Spinoza's *conatus*, which is strategically teleological.

Anzaldúa's own anti-normativity helps frame her anti-disciplinarity, which is helpful for my own work, since I transgress normative disciplinary categories and privilege theoretical promiscuity over against privileging the singularity of one theory over another, or the stability of one singular norm that is not porous or cannot change.

These three features mentioned above help coordinate the porosity of bridging and radical interconnectedness that is rooted in a generative materiality. These three features, seen through Anzaldúa's work, should encourage researchers to mine Anzaldúa's theories for their rich philosophical roots. Likewise, these three features fit together as part of the overarching assemblage theory that Anzaldúa has utilized, particularly the exteriority of consciousness, nature, myths, and other elements, to displace and replace what it exists in an effort to continue to chart her becoming-being. This is very much a 'bottom up' framework that privileges fluidity and exchangeability through multiplicities.

I see this work as bridging work, a familiar terrain to Anzaldúa's own theory-making-practice work. I will attempt to detail generative materiality as a reality and philosophical register that is not only becoming but also contributing to a larger ontological frame that connects knowledge production and ways of knowing with our everyday practices, or ethics. Doing this type of bridging work helps further generate the radical interconnectedness of ontology-epistemology-ethics, an entanglement of becoming-being. While Anzaldúa herself does not use the philosophical categories, others—like Karen Barad—attribute these terms to Anzaldúa's work. I follow suit in advancing this thought further to root Anzaldúa's theory as deeply embedded philosophical work that is productively decolonial and queer.

In a field (philosophy and critical theory) where Anzaldúa has either been fetishized or marginalized, it is important also to illustrate the importance of Anzaldúa's theories as they relate to a larger philosophical domain that otherwise go unnoticed and certainly under-recognized. When I speak about Anzaldúa's work, I am referring to the corpus of her work, and do not focus primarily on *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New*

Mestiza. The importance of looking at the entire corpus of Anzaldúa's work leverages a greater philosophical frame, whereas simply focusing on *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* minimizes the larger philosophical framework that she deploys. I do not want to marginalize the robust philosophy that is included in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, but I wish to expand my focus to include pre- and post-borderland materials. The importance of illustrating Anzaldúa as a serious thinker and producer of knowledge destabilizes traditions that have eclipsed her work, among others' works. To mobilize Anzaldúa as an important philosophical thinker is to not only transgress dominant strands of theory and philosophy but to imagine and enact a creative opening to rethink the domain of philosophy and our love for wisdom, which, for Anzaldúa, is located in the imagination producing bodies, *el cenote*.

To begin this important work, I outline generative materiality as a primary framework for Anzaldúa's materialism that is supported by what I call animation. I will argue that animation is a particular style of nomadic movement that is seen throughout Anzaldúa's life and work.³ Secondly, I connect generative materiality and its animated feature with Anzaldúa's knowledge-making framework that is grounded in a metaphysics of interconnectedness. Doing this ties together (or bridges) ontology and epistemology, two domains that have driven the discipline of philosophy and in turn radically marginalized the work of women of color theorists, and most certainly Anzaldúa. This is what I see as Anzaldúa's constructive gift toward a Trans becoming. What Anzaldúa gives us in this work that is grounded in the reality of bridging together domains of

³ Anzaldúa moved from the Rio Grande Valley to Austin and to the Bay Area / Santa Cruz, among other places, during her life. I argue that these nomadic movements contribute to her own theory-making-art practice.

thought and action is a way to rethink our reality, and embrace the light of imagination that is always being animated in the dark, in the folds of matter becoming.⁴ Certainly, every theory has a practice, and Anzaldúa's work elucidates this claim. The act of bridging privileges a relational ontology, or what I call becoming-being, first mentioned by Anzaldúa in her poetry/narrative of *El Mundo Surdo*. This language is found in Anzaldúa's own work but has yet to be theorized sufficiently. This is one attempt to theorize the importance of the ways Anzaldúa's work is philosophically rich and motivates readers to think in a philosophical register. And, furthermore, this move to think about Anzaldúa in a philosophical register is a particular style of movement in philosophy and theory. The move includes the self in all of its plurality of becoming and is strategically part of the philosophical register through which Anzaldúa theorizes.

Anzaldúa's Materialism as a Generative Materiality

As I have investigated the account of 'new'⁵ materialism, I have discovered that this account of materialism is one that is in motion, or animated. I have come to understand this motion akin to a material becoming and I call this material becoming generative. Generative materiality is matter that is in flux, in process, or becoming. Its lure is framed by both the affirmative qualities of matter becoming and the negation of what is. The apophatic reality of matter that closes off and creates a new line of flight is the very potentiality of a becoming-being. Transness is centrally an apophatic turn in becoming, but the kataphatic is not far behind. While Transness is an apophatic turn in becoming, Transness holds the kataphatic, too, and reshapes the kataphatic in the

⁴ Anzaldúa's dissertation, which she never called a 'dissertation' is titled "Light in the Dark."

⁵ I place 'new' in quotes to draw attention to the fact that what is being done in New Materialisms is not all that new. The language that is being deployed in this philosophical camp is contributing greatly to philosophy and cultural theories, but it is far from being new.

becoming. It is a material reality that is animated by its self-organization. Self-organization is an organization that is internal to self, but also in relationship with other material realities that exist in the web or entanglement of connection. The relational importance of generative materiality is one that is important to the work of Gloria Anzaldúa that is also mobilized through the act of bridging. An example of bridging is the political act of relating with white feminists about which Anzaldúa writes, which for many Chicanas and women of colors during the 1980s and 1990s was problematic. The metaphor of bridging not only creates the capacity of connection, but it also privileges an open-mindedness to reality becoming material.

Anzaldúa's poetry is one place to begin thinking about movement and motion relative to matter. In her first published poem, "Now Let Us Go" or Tihueque, the reader is drawn into the periscope of becoming. I quote the poem below to build a case for elements of motion that are internal to poem. I also quote the poem to show the importance of Aztec myth that materializes as revisionist mythmaking in Anzaldúa's work. I do not analyze the poem in terms of meter, measure, or rhyme, but rather the materiality of the language that is offered, metaphors such as rise that denote movement and motion. The act of carving hearts and the sun rising all cast a motion-filled shadow that moves with the poem, and poetic rhythms motivate our thinking regarding a framework of becoming.

One year in a distant century during Teoteco,
 The 12th month of the solar year Five Rabbit,
 in the reign of the Four-Water Sun,
 I carved 12,000 hearts in honor
 of Huitziltopochtli, God of War,
 who made the sun rise each morning.
 In each succeeding year thereafter
 ceremonial drunkenness robbed me

as many hearts embraced the furnace sacrifice.
 Only the hearts of the finest Náhuatl braves
 and luckiest prisoners and warriors
 at the sacred flesh.
 Today I lie in a musty museum
 and register 5.5 on the Mohs scale.
 But my origin, my volcanic obsidian,
 hard as granite
 comes in good stead.
 In my childhood I was a mirror.
 I threw a vitreous luster, dark-green.
 But now the iron oxide running in my veins
 dulls my edge
 and the air bubbles trapped in me
 reflect my age
 Time passes.
 I rest and await the flesh.

The Aztec calendar uses animals to frame their solar year, and the year of the Rabbit occupies a particular direction or orientation, South. The only other animal that is oriented to(ward) the South is the lizard. We can position the South as being ‘bottom’ to North (Top), and when we reframe South as bottom, as would be the case in sexual minority or Kink communities, we come to a greater awareness of the role of the South that might motivate a particular movement in Anzaldúa’s poem that motivates an urgency of ‘now let us go...’ Recognizing the power of the South (or bottom), one begins to see how that particular power shapes and shifts reality and recasts a new contour of becoming motion. When we consider the role of the South or the Valley in Anzaldúa’s life, we come to an awareness that the South, in particular the Global South for centuries, has been the object of imperialism and the particular subject for colonialism; the South has bottomed for the Global North and has resulted in ongoing colonialism. The Valley in Texas has certainly been that, as have the rest of the South in the United States. And, yet, while we recognize the role of the South, it is also important to recognize the ways in

which the South continues to enmesh power. While this power is not one that is mobilized in the Global North, it is important to acknowledge the inherent power of the Global South. Noting this, Anzaldúa writes using the imagery of God. Turning to the motion of sun and the power of the sun helps to continue this journey of becoming motion.

The imagery of the God of War making the sun rise each morning creates not only a metaphor of movement but real, actual moments of movement and motion where the matter of the sun is in flux, rising each morning, and it is interesting to think about the sun rising at the hands of the God of War when the bottom positioning to that of ongoing colonialism recasts notions of becoming.

In this sense, the God of War is the cause of the sun coming to light. The sun is becoming. The sun as subject for part of the ceremonial ritual of the knife becoming, once a mirror and now a knife, is a central feature to recognizing the ways in which the multiplicity of interconnectedness frames this poem. It is in this moment of acknowledging the multiplicity of interconnectedness of Global North (Top) and Global South (bottom) that reframes such positionings and instead invigorates new contours of movement.

The language of origin also motivates a type of movement in this poem that initiates beginnings or becomings, an ever-expanding reality. I interpret this move of an ever-expanding reality as one where Anzaldúa assumes a new positioning relative to the orientation of the South. One might read a particular contour of power into writing about the knife's origin and the ability for the knife to shape and shift. There is power inherent in the knife's origin, so how does the orientation of the South (or bottom space)

affect the movement of ‘now let us go’? When Anzaldúa writes about the knife’s origin, as volcanic obsidian, we recognize and acknowledge that the once obsidian nature has become something as hard as granite. The use of the language of origin, also, puts this poetry in motion, not in progression. The poem is moving, though the words on the page are captured in a particular frame of becoming. Even the language of ‘lying in a musty museum’ is a type of movement, perhaps nomadic movement, that is illustrated in Deleuze’s work, but a movement nonetheless. The metaphor that is created by the language of lying in a musty museum helps further illustrate the becoming nature of matter and the ways in which matter generates itself and is self-organizing. This frame of becoming, I argue, is throughout Anzaldúa’s work and the socio-analytic category of the body can be used in conjunction with the frame of becoming.

Anzaldúa’s material becoming is not spirit phobic, unlike the work of Jane Bennett. Spirit is alive and captures the nature of this material becoming-being. Spirit is what mobilizes the movement of becoming and roots the entanglement of interconnectedness. Important to note when writing about origins is that Anzaldúa assumes a particular orientation relative to the ceremonial knife. She assumes the knife to be her, and in particular, the Indian inside her. In various places,⁶ Anzaldúa writes about the Indian inside all of us, the one that we police the most, and who is la Chingadada.⁷ When thinking about Top and Bottom space in sexual positioning and in thinking about her assuming the knife to be Indian self, there is a consistent doubling of movement happening. What I mean here is that the consistent doubling is one of simultaneously embracing bottom space and also topping from bottom space. There is

⁶ *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, among other places.

⁷ The literal translation of ‘la chingadada’ is ‘the fucked one.’

not only the doubling but also the duality of being both / and. Simultaneously, she is assuming Bottom space and identifying that as the Indian inside of her (and even writes that the knife is laying down, presumably in a waiting position), but what is interesting is that she infuses a contour of power into this Bottom space and enlivens the knife (herself) with a particular agency that is rooted in power becoming, which materializes along planes of waiting for flesh, according to the poem. This further shows evidence of an animated matter-reality that is in motion and becoming.

To suggest that Anzaldúa creates a philosophy of animated matter that is generative and becoming is to say that the foundations of Anzaldúa's theory-making-art-practices are not rooted in language or what some philosophers and theorists might call the linguistic turn. Haunted by the becoming nature of matter, Anzaldúa uses language in material ways. She has done this throughout her writing, and her poetry helps readers engage this element of her theories. She uses language in material ways by engaging the imaginal as a very real and material thing that exists. This 'haunting' is always a return to the material, always a return of the matter becoming different. The poem, I argue, is one such way. Other examples are the ways in which she writes about walking on the beach in Santa Cruz and the ways in which her path was undulated.⁸ This language helps materialize language and further illustrate the materiality of language. The importance of pointing out the movement of matter helps strengthen the reality of becoming, a reality that is in flux or in process. Movement, also, helps illustrate the ways that matter is a self-organizing unit, which is also becoming.

⁸ This is a phrase that is used repeatedly in her writing.

Becoming as a particular feature that illustrates a generative materiality has roots in matter that is animated. Animated matter that is self-organizing, organic in its essence or nature, helps to further frame a material reality that is also rooted in movement.⁹ So, with the connection of a material reality that is entangled with movement and is also animated, the result of this equation is becoming. Becoming as a framework of always being in flux or in process also illustrates the relationality that animation has with matter that is self-organizing.

I see this frame of becoming particularly useful in interpreting Anzaldúa's work. Not only does Anzaldúa's work privilege ongoing movement but her work also privileges a frame of interconnectedness and this entanglement of connection or connectedness is a central part of her own philosophy of becoming. Movement, also, for Anzaldúa can be related to a Divine process, I think. She often talks about moving alongside the ocean, which is a double-movement, and a further entrenching of the entanglement of becoming. This double-movement is also a lure into becoming, which should not go unnoticed. It's even scriptural—by way of the word Tehom.

I also see the frame of becoming and the frame of interconnectedness as part of the overall frame of plurality, or multiplicity. That each of these are implicated in the entanglement of Anzaldúa's work, which might be understood as a unit but the multiplicity of the features of the entanglement help produce the ongoing plurality that has been a part of Anzaldúa's work from the start. This so-called 'unit' should never be understood as a singularity. Her poem, Tihueque, invites the reader to take note of the

⁹ I use the term 'rooted' to help illustrate the stability of matter, even in a highly contingent reality that is our world. Matter is stabilized by its roots of nomadic movement.

multiplicity of becoming, or the ways in which the self is ontologically plural.¹⁰ Noting this does not diminish her single-substance reality, or monist vision, but it does help readers bridge together the real capacity of a framework of entangled becoming to multiply within a web of interconnectedness. It is similar to the entanglement of a spider web. The spider web is a single entity, but plural and multiple in its connections with the larger web. It is radically entangled in its becoming as the spider spins repetitiously and the web becomes a single yet also plural or multiple material reality. I see this spinning as a kind and quality of Transness and Transing for Anzaldúa. She reshapes and reworlds belongng, becoming, and beingness.

The Intersection of Continental Theories and Gloria Anzaldúa: Method and Tracing Anzaldúan features in “Materialist” Philosophies

Methodology is always an important place to start when analyzing philosophy. Derrida creatively used the methodology of deconstruction and illustrated this sometimes by crossing through terms or words in his writing. In some ways, to read Derrida as a materialist deconstructionist would be transgressive to the field. Yet, Derrida did as much constructivist work in the field of deconstructionism as he deconstructed norms within philosophy. In a siminar but queer and quite possibly a Trans vein, Gloria Anzaldúa’s own code-switching and use of Aztec metaphors and terms, including Nauhtl, creates a new contour of materialism. I use the term ‘new’ not to denote something that

¹⁰ In reading the *Entrevistas / Interviews* book, I have a clearer picture that perhaps she not only thought of herself as a multiple or multiplicitous, but also as plural. And, yes, I do not betray her monism or monist orientation in suggesting that she is an ontologically plural self; I follow Deleuze and Guattari’s formula that monism = pluralism. They cite this in *A Thousand Plateaus*, and we might be able to understand this as an aberrant monism. The experience of multiplicity or the multiplicitous self that is a unified One is not one that emerges from an experience of subtraction, but rather from addition. I follow this formula as it relates to the ontologically plural self that is always adding more selves through pure experience.

has not existed prior, but to indicate an emergence, an irruption, of a contour of becoming.

While Gilles Deleuze collaborated with Félix Guattari and generated a new schizo-analysis for philosophy, Gloria Anzaldúa charted new terrain in her theory-making-art-philosophy. This new terrain is often found in the work of bridging. Through this method of bridging that establishes her theory-making-art-philosophy, Anzaldúa was likely a forerunner in what is now called New Materialism. As mentioned above, movement and the often-times double-movement remains an important feature to Anzaldúa's materialism.

Found in children's books, poetry, short story, fiction, and theory, along with her archives, this theory-making-art-philosophy, as I am calling it in this project, helps to not only destabilize dominant and normative methodologies that are used throughout the domain of philosophy, but also illustrates a new turn in the philosophy of materialism.¹¹ I mention Anzaldúa as a new turn in the philosophy of materialism, because her work not only bridges together matter and language in compelling ways, but her work ignites our thinking in new materially tangible ways. The tangibility of Anzaldúa's work is something that is keenly important for tracing her as a materialist philosopher. Tangibility, also, illustrates Anzaldúa's aesthetics and affect (a predecessor to what is now termed affect theory). The tangibility of Anzaldúa's work is an important feature to her materialism, that is often dismissed as creative writing. Yet! In a popular category, such as creative writing, readers encounter a growing philosophical register whose intra activity is identity, aesthetics, and philosophy. The identity category that is deployed in

¹¹ I use the phrase theory-making art-philosophy as a way to raise up the in/betweenness of Anzaldúa's own theories and the ways in which she engages thresholds and ongoing moments or spheres of nepantla.

Anzaldúa's work transgresses traditional representational politics. The Mestiza, while existing on an ontological plane that is always becoming, does not conform to traditional second wave feminist identity categories. The Mestiza transcends these politics of representationalism by including aesthetics and a larger ontological framework that I see as that of becoming.

Important to this is the way Anzaldúa offers readers new tools in the construction and the 'doing' of a materialist philosophy, and the most important tool is that of the imagination, or the imaginal. One of the turns that I see as important in emerging materialist philosophies that relates to Anzaldúa is the use of images to create theory. The imaginal is an important feature to Anzaldúa's production of a materialist theory that should not go unnoticed. The imaginal, comprised of both images, words, and other meta ideas mobilizes her philosophy. Herein lies another example of the double-movement that I think is important in re-thinking Anzaldúa as a materialist philosopher.

The image of *el cenote*, for example, found in the *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*¹², is one such example of the ways in which the imaginal is used to access a materialist register in Anzaldúa's philosophy. Recalling the motion and movement (becoming-being) of *Now Let Us Go / Tihueque*, the image of *el cenote* compliments this poem by showing another layer to the recurring features of movement and motion that are animated throughout Anzaldúa's theory-making-practice work. Whereas Anzaldúa adopted the voice of an Aztec ceremonial knife in *Tihueque*, she, in this image, paints herself into the imaginal movement of dreams that are becoming. Dreams, which reside in *el cenote*, irrupt Anzaldúa's reality through the process of mental and physical

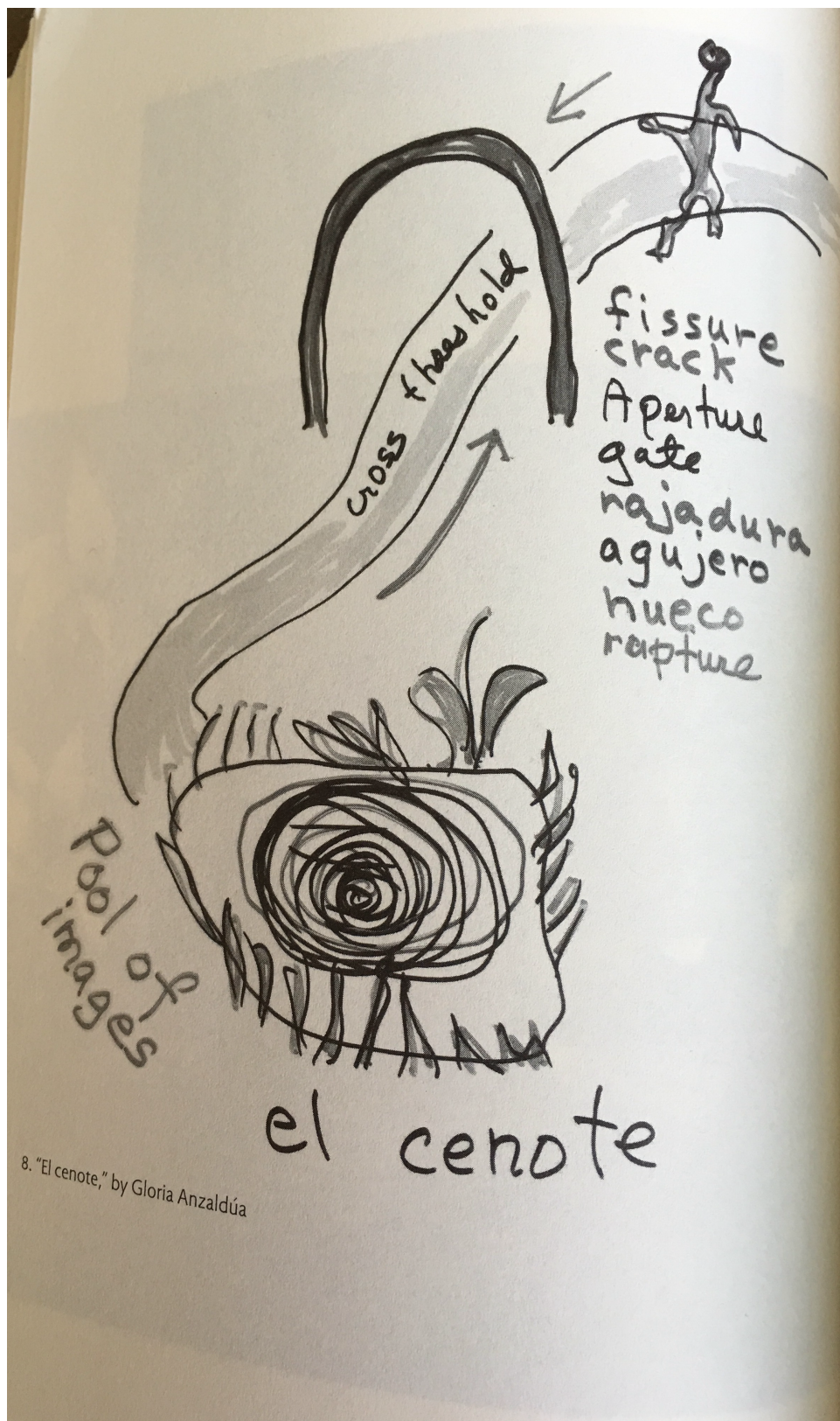
¹² "El cenote," Gloria Anzaldúa, #8, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. by AnaLouise Keating, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 224.

nepantilism¹³ and her becoming a threshold being. Dreams, another contour of a fold that is becoming, is Anzaldúa's theory of el cenote that is far under utilized but should be framed as a productive flow of becoming.

You might have noticed that I use words like fold (from Deleuzue) and the knife from Anzaldúa. These are tropes that are often seen and felt and experienced by Trans bodies. The materiality of the becoming body or becoming being is grounded in the experience of these tropes of the fold and the knife.

¹³ I use this variation of nepantla to refer to thresholds and in/between space.

Image One¹⁴



8. "El cenote," by Gloria Anzaldúa

The image depicts something akin to a river, which helps visualize and further mobilize movement. There are several moving pieces to this image, contours of becoming, as I call them. There is an image of a figure, but it remains to be known if it is human, or not. This figure is pointing toward and across the threshold, where there is an arch extended from one side of the flow to the other side. The flow leads to the pool of images, el cenote. Some terms that are associated with the flow that leads to el cenote are: “fissure, crack, aperture, gate, rajadura, agujero, hueco, and rapture.”¹⁵ These terms are all written with a different color or firmness, allowing them to be lighter or darker. Even in the listing of these terms, there is movement. Fissure begins at the top of the list, and going with the flow to its left, the list moves downward toward the pool of images, and the last term is ‘rapture.’ Interesting to this image is the fact that there are two different arrows. One pointing in one direction and another, below the cross threshold, pointing in the opposite direction. This is evidence of the ongoing, double movement of the flow, similar to the ways that Anzaldúa describes the universe being flows of energy. This intentional doubling of movement within the flow that is carved on the canvas, the flow multiplies, or becomes, a new-fashioned reality. The emergence of such doubling is the centrality of a becoming force, a material reality that shapes and shifts toward and away from the pool of images. The energy forces the flows (symbolized by arrows) help further contextualize movement.

Noting this is important to further mobilizing a framework of generative materiality. What is generative about this image / material is the fact that there are forces

¹⁴ “El cenote,” Gloria Anzaldúa, #8, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. by AnaLouise Keating, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 224.

¹⁵ *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, 224.

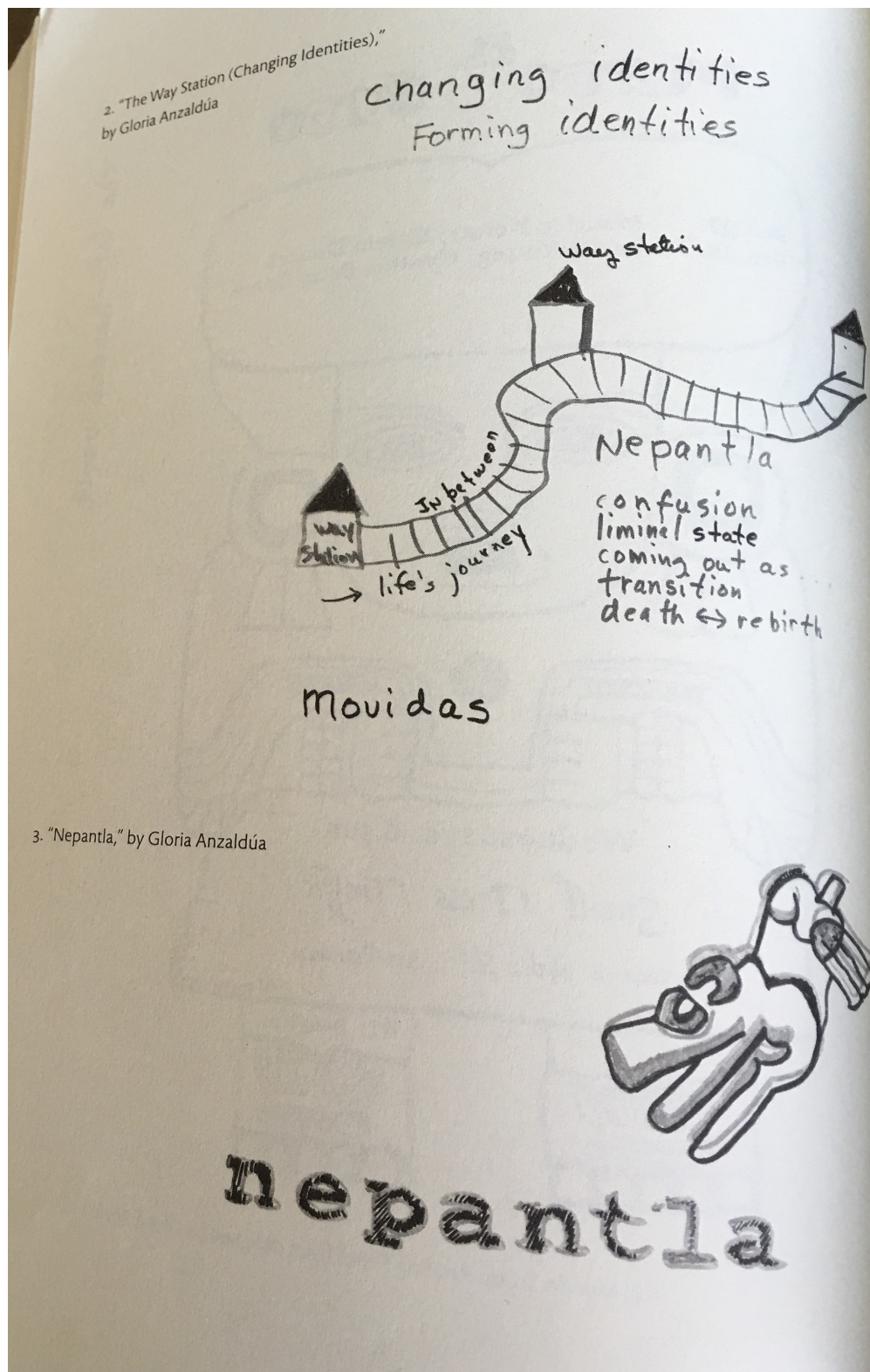
of becoming that are central to the image. The image itself is in motion, a particularized flow of becoming material.

The other image that I think helps create a framework of generative materiality is that of “nepantla.” A Nahuatl word, meaning “in between,” signifying flow(s), Anzaldúa’s image in the *Reader*, again, has arrows that articulate multiple flows of becoming. Also important to this image is the text that is used to explain the image. Words of becoming, like that of changing identities, are used to articulate the meaning of nepantla. While I do not want to focus on the politics of identity and rather on *movidas*, as articulated in the image, it is important to note that materiality might very well have an identity, one of generativity. Similar to el cenote, Anzaldúa explicitly writes *movidas* below the flow that is spliced that illustrates an in betweenness. *Movidas* is translated as ‘move’ in Spanish. Nepantla, a Nahuatl term, as a term that is rooted in movement enfleshes a double movement, that of generating a new(er) identity and also moving bodies from one point to another. This movement is always predicated on the force of becoming. Movement is already a flow that meets and connected with the flow of becoming. These flows are not in competition, but that are coalescing in their becoming. Their becoming results in a difference becoming different. Identity is different during the nepantla process. Nepantler@s at root are ones who are becoming different, due to process and internal/external movement. The explicitness of Anzaldúa’s mentioning *movidas* further implicates the multiplicity of movements, the doubling in becoming.

The following image is Movidas, as illustrated by Gloria Anzaldúa in the Gloria Anzaldúa Reader.¹⁶

¹⁶ Gloria Anzaldúa Reader, 220. I find it curious that both “changing identities” or movidas and nepantla are on the same page in the image. I think it is important to note that Anzaldúa uses the god of wind to illustrate nepantla, and for her changing identities, she uses the term ‘movidas.’

Image Two¹⁷



Generativity, as illustrated even in Lucretius' work in the chapter to come, are moments of becoming, moments of change and process that are always a process of difference becoming different. I use this formulate of difference becoming difference because it implies a radical process of change, a process of change that is rooted in the very process of change and becoming. Anzaldúa's work, which I think is rooted in a movement of difference becoming different, is a type of theory-becoming-practice that privileges the imaginal and creates contours of material becoming. The imaginal, as a medium that displaces the over-dependence of language, produces new material contours and generates a framework of becoming. In Anzaldúa's work, while there is movement that is central to her theory, movement is also central to the imaginal, and this acknowledgement further mobilizes the ways in which movement doubles and proliferates, causing matter to become a plurality in its very becoming material. Anzaldúa's very definition of the universe rests in the power of plurality that is a singular reality, a productive monism, if you will. This is a time to point back to Gilles Deleuze and his multiplicities and pluralities. These ideas are connected by flows of imagination and becoming. A very Trans way of coming to a productive monism. By productive I mean to suggest that the monism is materializing in the flows of the imaginal. The imaginal should not be displaced as mere fragments of becoming, but should be claimed as real moments of material becoming.

To read Anzaldúa as a generative materialist is to transgress (in some ways) the normative frameworks that contain (new) materialism. By this, I mean that the new materialists privilege an ontological framework that conforms to a monist perspective, and while I do not discredit this perspective or orientation, I want to destabilize the

singularity of the monism that is privileged by the new materialists and advocate for a monism that is becoming and generative, a monism that is part of the plurality of the imaginal. I think Anzaldúa's work re-imagines monism as a plurality becoming through the imaginal, through the flows she privileges. These flows, while plural, should not indicate a Cartesian dualism, but rather a monism that is productively becoming in its singularity.

Bodies of A Generative Materiality

I will argue in this project two concepts that are intimately connected and cohere to be a singular reality: that bodies are material and material bodies are always becoming. By analyzing the role matter and the becoming nature of matter, then also analyze the role matter has in contributing to the discourse on bodies, bodies become much more than a humanist project. Noting the ways in which language has shaped our understanding of bodies, I put forward a framework of movement and doubling that is central to matter that in turn affects bodies. I see this same frame of movement in Anzaldúa's work and theories. Bodies, though never outlined or contained as "material" in Anzaldúa's work, yet imagined and materialized in her art and theorized in her essays as material realities, are generated by a material imagination. This material imagination, mentioned earlier as the imaginal, is generated from contours that are material and emerge from physical elements. The acknowledgement that matter is generated from what is in the world is not a surprise. That I suggest this idea of matter is in movement, or comprised of a flow, helps frame matter's generativity. Bodies, too, emerge out of a generative materiality and bodies take shape and form within the flow of becoming. A generative materialism, as I see in Anzaldúa's work, involves not only lines of flight (the

movement of matter), but also the emergence of the imaginal, connected together to generate contours of matter becoming material, a creative evolution of bodies. This perhaps is what a Trans becoming is and what a TransChristology can be, a creative evolution of bodies becoming more deeply human.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRANSCRIPTION: ENFOLDING IN BECOMING

Pulling together the threads of theory, philosophy, culture, and theology, I now turn toward the heart of the matter: Christology. This fold is an enfolding in becoming more deeply human. I have used various philosophies and theories, feminist and otherwise, to understand bodies as material; as becoming and transforming. That is a lens through which I am seeing and sensing a kind of bodily intelligence that is material. I also have reworked some of my materialism to reflect a more generous materiality that can speak to Transness and to which Transness can speak.

I now turn to the more constructive work of pointing toward how the Trans experience speaks to a new fold for Christology. I start with Trans-Plantation (incarnation), then move to Trans-Formation (ethics), and then end with Trans-Figuration (hope). This chapter will be written in a narrative fashion utilizing story as method and content, mythopoetic signals, and autoethnographic material from my travels that will bring together the heart of this becoming. I close the chapter with a short conclusion exploring the Trans-Humation of all things. I will weave together theory with story to help create what I am calling an analog theology¹ where the history of bodies and materiality speaks to this constructive work. Analog Theology is an effort to bring together historical memory with the futurities we long for. For example, we long for heaven on earth, but who is creating that place for us? Perhaps this is where a

¹ Analog Theology is something that I am creating that fuses together history and historical memory with futurities we long for.

TransChristology can nurture space and pace. We take history seriously and have a multidisciplinary lens to interpret our individual and shared history and then intentionally create the world we want. Analog Theology is connected to Activist Theology. Activist Theology is the praxis; Analog Theology is the dialectical conversation with history and the futures we long for. A TransChristology is born from this particular intersection or borderland.

Trans-Plantation (incarnation)

In 2022, I traveled to the Palestinian territories for three weeks. I found myself in Bethlehem one day after having walked six miles. I was sitting at the Banksy's Walled Off Hotel, near the West Bank Wall that is being constructed to wall off Palestinian people. I sat at the bar for a bit drinking a Palestinian India Pale Ale and then retreated outside to see the mural on the wall that Israel is building. For some reason, one that is deeply embedded in my materiality, I suddenly knew that I needed to have Top Surgery, which is referred to as gender affirming surgery or Chest Surgery. I felt like this intelligence that I embodied at that moment was central to my becoming human, or more deeply human. I was located in a place and in a time where I could feel the somatic folds becoming within me. I emailed my doctor at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and relayed the message that after being in the Holy Land I needed to have gender affirming surgery, particularly Top Surgery. From six thousand miles away, I was able to schedule my first consult with the doctor. Upon arriving home, I was just weeks away from that first consult that would save my life! My body was alive, its materiality was buzzing with excitement. I was and am still becoming. My body is intelligent; my fleshly matter is intelligent.

I felt as though I was becoming more myself after sending that email. I felt as though I became human after that email, or more deeply human. There was something about interarnation within myself that I was experiencing in 2022. I first encountered interarnation when I read Catherine Keller's book on the topic. It felt true to the experience I was now having as a Trans person. I am being and becoming interarnated. I continued my travels walking 5-6 miles a day loving the terrain and seeing the places that hold so much history. I was experiencing Advent early that year! God was about to help me become more human during actual Advent in 2022; I was soon to be scheduled for my surgery!

The rest of my time in the Palestinian Territories were fabulous. I injected my Testosterone from the Galilee looking out at the lake. I felt so close to my body during this time and began learning from my body in rich ways. I have always struggled with belonging and the sense of freedom. Yet, for some reason, I felt as though I belonged with Muslim men who were receiving me as a common brother. Not only did I feel belonging and freedom, but I felt seen. While I never came out to the people I met as a Transguy, they saw me in this new fold of generative and emergent masculinity that was recognizable to them. They saw me. They continue to see me. Perhaps belonging is what a generative materiality of the body is! Perhaps this is what it means to be alive or awake or experience wakefulness, which requires a kind of motion within the body and around it. Perhaps I was living the text that I had read so many years ago and spent time engaging with philosophy and cultural theories, and the New Materialist Feminisms.

Though Advent is when we celebrate the coming of God or the becoming of God, we know that the Spirit is swirling and spiraling around in all the cracks, in all the failed

places, in all the spaces where life seems to be struggling. The Spirit breathes new life into these spaces, into these cracks, into these crises. My trip to the Palestinian Territories did so much for me and my own becoming, but it also solidified relationships with Muslims that I never would have had the honor and privilege to behold. I am still in touch with the men I met—the men who fed me and helped me; the men who saw me clearly. What I find so profound is that in this moment of Trans-Plantation, in connecting with the ground of my being in Palestine and the West Bank, I found my footing, literally. This feels to me like a somatic moment of theological wisdom. I found myself in my body in a foreign place, and this foreignness created conditions for me to become myself – to become incarnated with the God who is always becoming. In the midst of all that is swirling, I am reminded that I am interested in the person and work of Jesus and how the experiences of Transgender beings might be parallel to Jesus. In that spirit, let us consider Jesus as a Trans Christ. The incarnation was an event where Jesus became a foreigner, as Karl Barth theorized. As a foreigner, I want to make a case that the incarnation is a kind of transing event.

With the advancement of science, we can now assign chromosomes to human beings and we can assign sex at birth. Mary, who we assume had two X chromosomes gave birth to the Christchild who was assigned male at birth. The spirit carried the seed of the Father? The spirit gave rise to assigning Jesus as male at birth? In that time, there could not have been a female Messiah, one of the questions I asked in my Hebrew Bible class in college at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas. I was curious then about the incarnation and the Christ figure. What if the incarnation, which I call Trans-Plantation of the Son as a foreigner is a Transing experience? I do not ask in a rhetorical

fashion. I am asking about a material event – one you might say planting the seeds for the Christian faith to grow. A Trans-Plantation! An event that Christians believe happened on this earth. The incarnation is central to the Christian faith. Trans-Plantation has roots and bears seeds and has a range of emotion and affect. What if the Son becoming a foreigner is a Transing event that can be called Trans-Plantation? What does that do to our Christologies? In my mind, this is good news for Trans people and good news for Christology! God is always found in the becoming, as Jüngel wrote.

Trans-Formation (ethics)

All theology is ethics. I write this in *Activist Theology*, my first book where I wrote in a more narrative fashion using mythopoetic language and theology to talk about moving theology back into the streets. That book is my story on how I became an advocate for ethical futures; it is a narrative based book where I trace the meanderings of theology for ethical purposes. Activist Theology is a way of being in the world and a way of doing theology. It is a political theology that calls forth ethical futures using the discipline of theology. All theology is ethics: I learned this phrase while I attended seminary at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. I didn't know what it meant until much later, until I was writing *Activist Theology*! I know many people separate theology and ethics. And, some schools have an emphasis on social ethics and others theological ethics. What I mean is that theology matters; it is material. There are consequences to our theologies. One is that Christians have colluded with and funded the genocide of the Palestinian people. People who helped me feel more at home with my own beingness. When we have the awareness that theologies are material and matter in the world, we can do better; we can have better habits. We can come to a better sense of values that shape

our habits. We can be excellent to each other. We can create beauty in material ways. That's what generative materiality feels like. That what bodies have the potential of producing! All theology is ethics.

Ethics is something that matters to me a great deal. I remember meeting someone in Denver, CO who said they don't care about ethics. I found this curious. How can we not care about our actions in the world? How might we nurture right action in a world deeply compromised by supremacy culture? How might a new fold of Christology help us discern a way forward? I think Trans people have a kind and quality of intelligence that can help us reformulate our ethics and our ethical behaviors; this is another Christological fold.

In the weeks that follow Easter, the lectionary readings tell the story of Thomas who would not believe without touching the wounds of Jesus. After the Proud Boys targeted me a week before my gender affirming surgery, I successfully had surgery at Vanderbilt. The technical language is a double mastectomy with chest contouring. The surgery went well. Because of the recent targeting event, Vanderbilt University Medical Center took great care of me and my wife, Erin. We had two guests with us, my martial arts teacher and a dear friend who drove up from Memphis to be with Erin and me. These moments are really when we need a witness! We arrived at 5:00am at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. I checked in. Because of security protocol, my name was not used in public. After sitting for a while and waiting for a brief moment, an operating room nurse came to get me. He towered over me. I thought to myself: this is the moment of my becoming and I am in his shadows right now. He took me back; Erin and our friends waited in the waiting room. The staff verified my name once we were in the room

tucked away. Meredith, my friend and VUMC hospital chaplain was there to greet me! They didn't have to be there at 5am, but they were! The surgeon came in and prepped my body, marking it where all the cuts will be made. Meredith prayed with me and then Erin and Courtney joined me in the room. Not long afterwards, I was wheeled back to the operating room and they asked me what kind of music I'd like to listen to. I told them Brandi Carlile, a contemporary singer songwriter and folk singer! She's also queer! I fell asleep listening to music I love. My body could perceive the cuts; the folds; the becoming. I woke up from surgery and Erin was there to greet me! She snapped a picture of me in the recovery room and was very proud of me. I narrate this story, because this material step to have my body re-ordered and Trans-formed was part of creating conditions for an ethical future for myself and also so that I could listen more acutely to my body. After all, the Spirit is spiraling amidst the folds. But this is not the end of the story.

The next day, I found myself very dizzy; a material consequence of the anesthesia that I was given? The body is sensitive and sensing material, after all! A friend had sent money for me to rent a recliner to sleep in for a week. So, I was resting and recovering in the recliner. Because I was not allowed to shower before surgery, Erin decided to help give me a bird bath. I still had two drains on both sides of my body collecting fluid from surgery. It would be several weeks before I got the drains out and the drains are a pain! They have to be measured and emptied twice a day. So, I was naked in the bathroom and had stepped into the shower for Erin to bathe me. I became overwhelmingly dizzy. I thought that I would pass out. I knew something was wrong with me and I texted a doctor friend of mine in Nashville who is a world-renown emergency surgeon. I explained to

him what was going on. He told me to make sure I was drinking enough water. So, I had been following his instructions. But, something was definitely wrong; I could feel it. It was bubbling up. I stepped out of the bathtub fearing I would pass out and sat down on the toilet. At that moment, I passed out and as I was passing out, I remember standing up. I was then told what happened next: I hit my head on the hanging mirror, which was attached to the bathroom door, and then hit my head a second time on the door frame and then slid down the door frame and came to awareness. Erin was yelling for help and I suddenly came to awareness. Erin asked me questions about orientation; they were assessing me, which I appreciate. Erin asked me my name, and I told her my given name: Robyn Henderson-Espinoza. I find that to be curious, since I had been using Roberto Che Espinoza since returning from the West Bank. I understand that going back to an earlier self is common with various forms of trauma.²

What does this mean that I deadnamed myself? I was literally in a moment of becoming. I told Erin to quickly text the surgeon, a friend had already called 911, and the ambulance was on its way. The surgeon, who had given us his phone number, told Erin to have me taken to VUMC and the fellow will meet me in the Emergency Room. In the chaos of passing out, I deadnamed myself and in that subsequent moment, I knew I was different; I knew that I was Roberto Che Espinoza. The memory of Robyn Henderson-Espinoza is still deep within me; I was called this name for a long time, but now my memories needed to shape and shift. I was still being incarnated in those moments of becoming!

² Catherine Keller offered me this useful insight, and this insight helped me connect with that event in a material way in my body. Having a trauma-informed philosopher-theologian as your guides (as both Nancy and Catherine have been) helps you refold and enfold the story in better and deeper ways.

Being loaded up in the ambulance naked was certainly something to see! Because I was so dizzy, the EMTs decided to wrap me in a blanket! Thankfully, December in Nashville is not super cold! I arrived to VUMC's Emergency Room after a bumpy ride in the ambulance. Upon our arrival, we learned that there was no room for me, so they put me in the hall. I was wrapped in a blanket and very dizzy. Now as I reflect back on this event theologically, this feels very parallel to the birth of Jesus; there was no where in the inn for him and his family! This material event extends Trans-Plantation into Trans-Formation. Erin couldn't come see me until I was in a room, but they quickly found a room because the surgery fellows were working overtime and feared that I had internal bleeding and was bleeding out.

I noticed that I had a bad bruise on the left side of my incision on the left side of my body. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, the Left and Front side of the body typically correlates with Yin energy, and the Right and Back side of the body typically correlates to Yang energy. If there is an imbalance of Yin or Yang energy, we can become defensive and protect our Yin energy, like an animal. We tend to cover the Yin to protect. When there are imbalances, the energy can go to one side of the body to express itself. The actual point or what is close to that point where the bruise appeared is the end of the spleen meridian. In the Five Element Theory, the spleen is associated with the earth element. And, within the earth, there is a Yin and Yang. Again, planetary material of which helps compose our materiality. The surgery fellow feared it was a hematoma. With Erin at my side, the doctors gave me a gown to cover myself and began to unwrap my chest. Soon, my wounds would be visible to me and I would see this masterpiece. I got a sneak peak at my chest and knew I had made the right decision. Not long after, the fellow

who performed my surgery with the head surgeon, both Iranian born, gave me a shot for localized pain and began to open up my wounds. Then, he stuck his fingers into my wounds and I winced. Erin quickly said: “that means he’s in pain. He doesn’t feel pain until it really hurts.” The fellow confirmed that I not only had a hematoma but had internal bleeding and would need to return to emergency surgery that night. I had this moment of believing deeply in the God of the unknown; the abyss that is becoming. The Tehom. Erin had to leave me at the hospital overnight, so that I could have this emergency surgery and then hopefully come home to recover.

I narrate this part of my becoming, because I saw how deeply the surgeons and fellows cared for me. It felt Christological to me. They touched my wounds; they put their hands in my wounds and I suddenly felt more of my becoming. Erin quipped at my side and said: “You literally just had a Thomas moment!” The care that I received is rooted in the ethics for another possible world. We often don’t think in fugitive futurities, but I do! I look to various global indigenous communities to learn how to outfox the empire, how to survive the collapse of imperialism and late-state capitalism when Trans people and anyone who is different is being hunted, surveiled, disposed of, or executed. Fugitive Futurities is what I see in the Zapatistas in Mexico. I look to the Zapatistas to help me understand how to unhinge from the Global North and be in solidarity with the Global South. Another possible world is what I believe Trans people are curating.

The intelligence that Trans people embody is a kind of Christological intelligence. God became human, so that humans might become like God. I feel this deeply in my body that I have some kind of access to divine intelligence because of my transitional

journey of becoming. So, what do Trans beings have to say to Christology, and what does Christology have to say to Trans beings?

In every culture, there are human beings who fall outside the binaries, like me. Indigenous communities here in the US and all over have a special category for people like me. As an adult, as I've been returning to Mexico every six months or so in order to get to know my ancestral lands, the visits have been another Trans-Plantation event! When I was in Oaxaca, I began researching queerness in the state. What does it look like? I was curious. I found the Muxe people!

I am most familiar with the Muxe in Oaxaca, Mexico, which is where my family is from. In the Zapotec language, there are no pronouns, they simply say 'this person.' A Muxe is someone who is assigned male at birth but dresses and otherwise behaves like a woman. That can border on essentialism, especially when we ask "what is a woman?", but I wish to use this traditional rendering of Muxe to help articulate how a Trans ontology of becoming establishes a fleshly and bodily epistemology that then shapes our ethics. Trans beings are a model of Christology. I use "model" here after the way René Girard developed his mimetic theory. I believe that Jesus was an anti-mimetic model, and that so are Trans beings.³ We embody a morality that transcends our current theological crises and we can speak into these crises more effectively when we can be seen as people who are becoming and on the way. I believe Transness is fundamentally Christological. For example, Trans people are writing books about care; Christology calls us to love, which is fundamental to care. Trans people are creating mutual aid networks; Christology

³ I recently wrote and published a short essay for Political Theology Network on Jesus as a Political Atheist. That essay will be published on May 11, 2024 online. As of this writing, I do not have the link.

calls us to find Jesus in the underside of history. The underside, like Latin American Christologies, are where God is. For Latin America, it was the poor who constituted the underside of history. I would say that Trans people consider their mutual aid networks to be intersectional. When we eradicate poverty, which many Black Trans Women are, we live like Jesus. Transness has to be at the heart of the matter of Christology.

So, what does Christology have to say to Trans folks? As I think about my own Trans experience, I see a lot of parallels to the life of Jesus. While I do not think Trans people will save us or should be the recipient of our burdens, when we rethink Christology from a Trans perspective, we find a divine becoming. Christology can and does speak to the Transfiguration (hope) of Trans people. When we recalibrate Christology to include the element of Transing, we find more possibilities within Christology. We allow incarnation to become interincarnation and by that I mean that Transness is rooted in relationality of self, other, and otherworldliness. I learn this from Catherine Keller's work. That is Christological. When we create conditions for ethical futures that include Trans people, that is also Christological. Christology offers a futurity for Trans people. That futurity is multiple and plural and always coming toward us, becoming. When we knit together Transness and Christology, we literally enfold divine intelligence into the process of becoming and the Christic potential becomes ever more material, in a generative way.

Trans-Figuration (hope)

Despite the struggles I've had with targeted harassment, my travels and becoming a foreigner in Palestine, the West Bank, and El Salvador helped me face the risk of becoming Trans. While I have identified as Trans since 2008, I did not seek medical

intervention until 2019. I spent over ten years facing the risk of my becoming, first in identifying as Trans and second as assuming a more masculine of center orientation and lived experience. I have always worn men's clothes, for example. I never thought myself to be a man, but I love generative masculinities and I discovered generative masculinities during my travels to the West Bank. Mohammad, with whom I text every day, gave me the kuffiah off his back! That moment Trans-Formed me. I want to model that kind of masculinity. But, the downside of masculinity is that we all have shadow sides and can be so deeply and materially shaped by ideologies of essentialist thought. In fact, I found myself more inclined to do things that men did and this is what drove me to academia. I had two white men model academia to me and send me off to Chicago to study with Dr. Nancy Elizabeth Bedford. That was hope meeting me; that was God coming toward me.

Becoming a foreigner in Chicago, IL in my mid-twenties, leaving the fertile ground of West Texas, I started to become. I was living with my former partner, Stephanie, at the time and did not have the best language to describe our relationship. Neither one of us were looking for a relationship, but we found ourselves together. For better or worse. In class one day, Nancy reflected that if the eunuch could be baptized, then LGB people should be included! It was a hope-filled moment. I felt myself come alive. It was an intercarnational moment. I began reading everything I could on queerness, even though I did not identify as lesbian or gay. I truly felt otherwise. Note that this was before queerness was so popular as an identity and added to the moniker of LGB. Note also that LGB doesn't include the T. We have come a long way for better or worse. So, as I was reading as much as I could on queerness and discovering scholars of

color writing on gender variance through story or blogs, I began to become even more curious about myself. Perhaps an incarnation moment!

I also knew I was not female, but I did not have the language for myself, only the image of the eunuch being baptized. Hope buoyed me during this time, because I was not out in seminary and only out to my friends in the city identifying as queer. I was still trying to figure out what that word meant to me. Hope continued to meet me at every turn. I was becoming. I felt the strong attraction to Transness and felt like that was / is my story, but I did not feel called to be a man; whatever man is. I left Chicago in 2008, a year after I started using they/them pronouns and identifying as Transgender.

During my first year of doctoral studies, the term “enby” emerged or non-binary. That felt like me! I quickly began reading about non-binary gender identity and gender beyond the binary, and this felt like a moment of Trans-Formation; ethical futures were brewing within me, my body, spirit, mind, flesh, and bones. This was a Christological moment for my becoming, which started the day I left Texas and deepened the minute I began attending protests in Chicago, which were populated by many different kinds of people. Hope has always guided me, not in a parasitic way nor in an overly optimistic manner, but in a way that confirmed to me that God was / is in this process. God is becoming within me. I have been using this language of God being in all things and found in the becoming; I need to clarify what I mean. God is self-generating materialities, which is in all things, including me and the virtual. We are knit within a web of interconnectivity. The becomingness of God is fundamentally relational. I experience this as I live life. This happened through people I met, through conversations I had, through travels and experiencing foreignness. I met the becoming God through hope by

challenging conventions and normativities around gender and sex and sexualities. Transformation became part of the process, and it still is. Ethics are central to my manifesting hope through Trans-Figurations. I am enfolded in both ethics and hope. The mobius strip is expanding and spiraling and inviting me to further become more me—more than human? Is this theosis?

I find that hope can be cheap hope, not the substance to which I am referring: hope through ideas; hope through community; hope through resources. At each pleat of the fold of my own becoming and prior to when my body was cut and folded upon itself, I found hope and care (ethics) in a therapist while I was in my first faculty post at Pacific School of Religion. There, teaching on a visiting scholar line, I found Transcare; this was hope becoming material. I was getting closer to the kind of interarnation that I experienced when I had Top Surgery. But, that was too far in my future to imagine. I knew I had gender dysphoria with my chest. I never connected with my body because of the way my chest was. I would have had Top Surgery long before 2022, but I had a partner who was not invested in my becoming. Stephanie and I eventually separated and divorced not long after I went to California to teach...and become.

Moving to California by myself was like a rite of passage. It was a Transing. I searched high and low for my people, but I did not find them. I was also looking for a slower pace of life and relationships that would nurture me and I did not find them in the Bay Area. I did live with a Presbyterian pastor who offered to help me should I choose to have Top Surgery in California. But, the timing was not right; I was not ready to become interarnated. Still, I sought out gender affirming healthcare and learned as much as I could before leaving California for Nashville, Tennessee.

Each of my pivots as a nomad, which I did very much identify with nomadism during that time, were creating conditions for me to further lean into becoming Transgender. I was well on my way, and at each pivot, I felt the dynamism of the Spirit safely guarding me and pointing me in the directions I was to sojourn. This might sound naïve, but with a PhD in hand, I was rooting into the materiality of my theology and my body. Could the two meet and harmonize? What I mean is that I was getting closer to being able to live the ideas that had and continue to shape me. It would not be until 2024 as of this writing that it took me to become a foreigner in a small village in Western New York and a local church pastor where I teach theology each Sunday during the sermon to truly realize that Trans-Plantation, Trans-Formation, and Trans-Figuration are always happening and becoming and nurturing us.

Not long after I had moved to Nashville, I was referred to a holistic doctor who introduced me to Dr. Shayne Seabold Taylor. Shayne started and ran the gender clinic at Vanderbilt. She became my doctor and would be the recipient of all my emails concerning going on Testosterone, which happened on the 50th anniversary of Stonewall, and also of my emails from Bethlehem regarding the consult I needed to have Top Surgery. Hope buoyed me throughout all of this transition and transformation and transfiguration; this continues to be the case as I chart out a fugitive futurity here in Alfred, NY. My move to Nashville, a fold that I keep keep enfolded to this day, showed me what kind of life I wanted to have. This life was mainly revealed through food and conversation. I realized that I needed a slower pace; Nashville is not a slower pace! I was at odds with this realization, but I trusted in the hope that had buoyed me all these years. After seven years in Nashville, it was time for me to become a foreigner, again, this time

fleeing my home for sanctuary. This also seemed parallel to the life of Jesus. My prayer is that I never have to return to Jerusalem. I am not called to be a martyr. Though Jersulam was where I found myself, the Jerusalmen that I thought Nashville was became a death-trap for me. That tells me that Nashville was not Jerusalem and not where I can be me. I needed to find a place to be me, which here in Alfred, NY, I am just Roberto Che Espinoza, the new pastor. This very interesting becoming where I am just me tells me I am closer to that matter that shapes me into becomingness.

Trans-Humation (conclusion)

I believe God is in all things. I refer to this as *panentheism*, and I borrow the term from Jürgen Moltmann. While I first encountered the term in Moltmann's writing during seminary while living in Chicago, I know Catherine Keller has written extensively on *panentheism*. When I read Moltmann and Keller together, I find a beautiful tapestry of thought that is helping me not only live but make more material or intercarinate. We need a both / and approach when thinking about theology and the language we use to describe our ideas. I like to read Moltmann with Keller. It is an enfolding joy that helps me imagine a fugitive future.

While I was in the Palestinian Territories in 2022, I was experiencing incredible gender euphoria and also have epistolary exchanges with my teacher, Dr. Nancy Elizabeth Bedford. She offered this word to me: Transhumation. I began thinking about this term and considering the possibilities for Transness. A TransChristology must include the Transhumation of all things. Recently, I read an article where a fungus is infecting cicades and they are all becoming gay. While I do not think being Transgender is a pathology, or maybe it is in more of a divine way, I do want to consider the reality of

if God is in all things, then does that point to the Transhumation of all things? This is what Christology has to say to Trans people and what Trans people have to say to Christology. It is both / and; and, we should not alienate difference just because difference cannot be stabilized or normalized quick enough. Allow me to comment on the language of pathology before moving on.

If Transness is a divine pathology, then we need to consider how rich Transness is and the possibilities of Transness. I use pathology here in a generative way, not in a dehumanizing way or negative manner. The root of the term pathology is *pathos*. This is a Greek term. *Pathos* means affect or the appeal to emotion; there is a definite connection between Transness and affect at the root of a Trans ontology.⁴ A divine pathology could be a way to reclaim how Transness is being weaponized right now in our current political climate. We (Trans beings) might know something divine! I do not know all things; I am not omniscient, but I do know things from a bodily and fleshly perspective that I did not know prior to coming into better (right) relationship with my body. The wisdom of my body and the relational access I have to my materiality – that is always becoming – helps me see that a TransChristology must include a teleology of Trans-Humation.

To continue the thread of philosophy, let me frame Transness. And, let us start with the theory that preceeded this chapter. Transness is generative material that is always becoming. We know this because we affirm the lenses I wear to examine the worlds of philosophies and theories like that of Bradotti, Butler, and Barad. We arrive at this place of a TransChristology or the constrution of a path toward a TransChristology,

⁴ I don't have evidence of this in scholarship; this is what I have observed from paying attention to Trans people. This is a bodily knowing.

because I have utilized a multi-transdisciplinary approach to rethinking theology and also pulled from different historical strands of the Christian Tradition. This is an example of Analog Theology, weaving and interconnecting history with the present to create the future that is already with us. Anzaldúa and Deleuze help bring us to the cusp of a TransChristology. Transness enfleshes an ontology of becoming and embodies a fleshly folded epistemology out of which ethics emerges and Transforms our world. For Christology, Transness reframes the person and work of Jesus. I do not think Trans people become (the) Christ, but Trans people have access to a kind and quality of divine intelligence that can help us all flourish in what I hope are ethical futures. Divine intelligence is part of that process of theosis and theopoesis. Divine intelligence is another enfolding of the becomingness of God into and within our fleshly materiality. God is in us in a particular way that we encounter a deep humanity; another part of our divine pathology.

I am making a theological claim when I suggest that Trans beings have a special awareness or capacity to be more than human. In the same way that a deaf person or blind person has special awareness and is more than human, I think Trans beings are similar. Differently abled persons have access to a kind and quality of intelligence that I see in Trans people, too. I could also say that Transgender is a disability and I would be using this in a generative manner. Why this work is important is because Trans humans and differently abled humans have divine intelligence. They embody a deep humanity; a deep ecology of becoming. This special awareness that Trans people have I call divine intelligence. Their bodies enfold and embody a quality and kind of intelligence that is more than human, is more deeply human.

CHAPTER FIVE
PASTORAL INTERVENTIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND FUTURE
DIRECTIONS: ENFOLDING THE FOLDS AND PLEATS

The most important piece of my work in embracing my vocation rooted in courageous moral leadership at the end of empire is the work of translating theory to action, and this section is designed for exactly that purpose. In a time when I have had to flee my home as a Trans refugee and seek sanctuary in a state that can protect me, though I am suspicious of what kind of list I will be on when I do seek sanctuary, I am simultaneously also serving as a public pastor to many trans and nonbinary people. My intellectual activism only goes so far, if I am unable to translate thought to praxis.

The pastoral intervention will combine my work in the public square, a site known as social media, the institutional church, and the academy. I plan to commission a piece of art to accompany this body of work that I am cultivating and constructing, so that a TransChristology is also captured in image, along with word. I will also form a liturgy for livability that is rooted in a TransChristology to accompany this body of work, because the translation piece is primary because so much of the theory is inaccessible to the commons. Because I have in mind the commons as my primary audience, it is important that I steward my resources in multi-transdisciplinary ways.

This summer, I plan to survey a few people at a Christian community festival where I am speaking to hear what they have to say about the person and work of Jesus. I am traveling to Germany to speak and I want to hear what others have to say about Jesus. So many people are fleeing Christianity because it has been weaponized against them.

But, what if there was another way? What if the female medieval mystical tradition provides us a way to re-imagine and recalculate dogma into life-affirming theologies that forward a transmutation for all? There is so much wisdom in the mystical traditions, which we did not have time to wade into together, but we did experience Wildegfortis. I am reminded that the female medieval mystics might be another transing event in the larger Christian Tradition. For now, we will use Wildegfortis as an example of a mystical transing event and we will rethink the person and work of Jesus. We have a need, an urgency to do this work – to rethink theologies from the underside of history – because so many people are being disposed of, especially Trans persons.

The gods of this world are killing us all, but what if Trans persons embody a fold of intelligence that can create conditions for another possible world? I think we can!

Liturgies of Livability

Each year, I speak at Vanderbilt Divinity School in the Liturgy class and I show the footage from Charlottesville where I was picked up by my security detail and hustled into a protective area. I speak on Liturgies of Livability. I wish to provide a Liturgy of Livability as a pastoral intervention for another possible world.

While we are pressed on all sides,

Let us not lose hope that another world is possible.

While we journey within and without,

Let us not be swayed by the norms of our political empire.

While we are entangled in the matter of ourselves and of the world,

Let us be a part of the flow that is becoming.

Our brother Jesus led the way, born of a virgin with no earthly Father,
Perhaps the first Trans(figured) material body that is leading the way.
May we follow on the way and be wise as serpents as we trod our camino.
May we find ourselves folded in the entangled spirits that are becoming ethical
futures.

Conclusion

The person and work of Jesus is important in this political moment because the person and work of Jesus has been weaponized against the least of these. We are, in many respects, in a failed civilization, and if we can rehabilitate a theology of Jesus, our Older Brother, then perhaps we can serve the end of empire together, en conjunto. If we can accelerate a theology of the person and work of Jesus that counters normative mimetic violence, then we might be able to put Life back together through a network of belonging with one another. I hope that the theory, along with the art will do this work and support a liturgical life that might buoy people who need that kind of frame for meaning making experiences.

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