

## Performance Studies and Negative Epistemology

Apophatic spiritualities revel in the paradox of the impossibility of belief, turning instead to an epistemology of the negative. From Plato's theory of ideal forms whose actuality lie beyond the sensible world,<sup>1</sup> to the existential dialectics of Søren Kierkegaard and his failed 'leap' of faith,<sup>2</sup> to French Catholic theologian Jean-Luc Marion's apophatic phenomenology of the gift,<sup>3</sup> and 'post-theological' philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's negative notion of the other through Being as both singular and plural,<sup>4</sup> ancient and modern negative theologies correspond to negative epistemologies—how one may know beyond belief, knowledge in the absence of positivistic affirmation or even hope. If we consider contemporary negative theologians alongside performance theory since the mid-1990s, a pattern of negative thought emerges. Especially in relationship to gender, queer, postcolonial and critical race theories, concern for the indistinguishable, the non-categorizable, and the felt presence of the absent and unknown marks the rise of performance studies throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. Jose Muñoz's, Jill Dolan's, and Jack Halberstam's work between utopias and other 'queer arts' highlight the revolutionary potential of impossibility,<sup>5</sup> while the 'poetics of failure' such as described by Sarah Jane Bailes demonstrate how the accidental and the unknown can open up the performance of the possible.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the development of the discourses that describe theatre and performance studies, both transformation and resistance remain key terms that indicate an abiding interest in such liminal experiences.<sup>7</sup> And such theories are based upon positivistic outcomes: learning,

development, change—hopefully for liberation and the realization of human potential. However, substrata of the negative patiently lie beneath and uphold this positivistic discourse. What can performance studies learn from the longstanding tradition of apophaticism, religious though it often may be? What can performance theory gain from a negative model of thoughtful inquiry that radically rejects the positive, not only negating any positive proposition, but striving to negate negation as well?

This book proposes (and is) a critical engagement with a kind of apophaticism—sometimes called mysticism, the ‘apophatic way’, the via *negativa*, negative spirituality, or ‘negative theology’—that emphasizes a radical denial of experience. This runs counter to popular understandings of mysticism that locate the divine in the *experience* of not-knowing itself, in the process of desiring, seeking, and fusing oneself with the transcendent divine through vision and ecstasy (perhaps helped along with certain imbibed or ingested substances).<sup>8</sup> This popular understanding locates itself phenomenologically in the embodied experience of the limits of understanding. The denial of experience that is the crux of what I will call ‘performance apophatics’ (the explication of performance as negative epistemology) must be understood in a very specific way. To ‘deny experience’ is not to deny that embodied, individual experience occurs; it is obvious that phenomenological experience provides the sense-data without which neither scientific experiment nor poetry would be possible. Meaning is derived from processes of interpretation, which depend upon experience. However, performance apophatics rejects the empiricist notion that meaning may only exist within the boundaries of phenomenological horizons (which is the same as rejecting Kant’s premise that the human mind imposes knowability upon the world). The unknown (non-apparent) deep structures that make possible experience are as real as experience itself. However, those deep structures may not and very possibly do not inform such experience. The unknown, which is also very likely the unknowable, shapes our experience even though we have no way of perceiving such unknowns. To make such an assertion is not a religious statement. Neither is it necessarily an a-religious statement. It is an assertion about the reality of the interplay between the phenomenology of perception and the existent world. Both are real. But the full reality of one may remain unknown. Performance apophatics takes this one step further: not only may the full reality of the world, or that which is other, remain unknown—the *experience* of the limit of that knowledge cannot be mistaken for any kind of knowledge about the unknowable

itself, even the knowledge that it remains unknowable. Experience of the limit of perception or knowledge is NOT knowledge of the unknown. To make this claim is to deny that the denial of knowledge is itself any kind of knowledge, even an experiential knowledge. This is what is meant by ‘denying experience’ and the process of ‘denying denial’. To be clear, denying experience does not deny that experience occurs, only that experience—including the experience of unknowing—grants any kind of knowledge about the unknown or unknowable.<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, the popular understanding of apophatic mysticism (where the experience of ecstasy fuses with experience of the divine itself) parallels in many ways the discourse of the discipline of performance studies, especially since the early 1990s when the phenomenological emphasis placed by certain movements in gender studies began to intersect with theories of performance.<sup>10</sup> The two most familiar and influential theorists in regard to the phenomenological limits of knowledge through performance remain Judith Butler and Peggy Phelan. Briefly, Butler’s landmark book *Gender Trouble* argued that gender is not a natural state but a fluctuating construct based on repeated, performed citations of social norms and expectations. In the process of repetition, the agency of subjects may be exercised when performances exceed the limits of what is recognizable, and therefore knowable, within any given gendered social paradigm (this is the cognitive instability within which drag performers play, for example).<sup>11</sup> Phelan’s ‘ontology of performance’ likewise makes use of performance’s repetitive and citational nature to argue that performance itself is what appears in order to disappear, and because its only life is in the present, and the present is not something that can be contained, performance resists commodification. Both Butler and Phelan remain foundational to the way that performance scholars approach their strange subject: performance is not a thing, but a process, a means, a way, a ritual, a liturgy, a politics, a feeling; repetitive, citational, slippery, both deferred and different. This is why we tend to speak of it as an experience and, for the most part, it *is* an experience. But I argue that there is a dark side to performance theory with potential for deep exploration. Performance is also not. Scholars have already pointed to the way that performance depends upon our cognitive gaps and epistemological blind spots,<sup>12</sup> but by taking our cue from an ancient and consistent form of theology that performs itself *against* theology—that is, a way of thinking or understanding that attempts entirely to erase its own thinking and understanding as a way of speaking about God that

immediately denies anything that can be ever said about God—we can understand performance as the denial of experience. We can understand performance not as the limit of our knowing or understanding, but the absolute denial of knowledge. In that way, performance is a negative epistemology of the most extreme degree, recognizing when and where knowledge is actually impossible and absolutely unavailable—knowledge that is not beyond our grasp, not a potential, not a respected difference or distance, but knowledge that is the complete and utter absence of any kind of knowing.

Why would we want to do this? Why take negation to such an obsessive degree that we negate the negation of negation itself? Traditionally, such radical denial of the positivistic has been followed by accusations of heresy. But in the words of theologian-historian Denys Turner, ‘Perhaps there is something to be learned from that Christian theological tradition which consciously organized a *strategy of disarrangement* as a way of life, as being that in which alone God is to be found’.<sup>13</sup>

### THE APOPHATIC TRADITION, THEN AND NOW

Since it is beyond the scope of this book to offer a comprehensive summary of the apophatic tradition,<sup>14</sup> in this next section I will instead offer as touchstones a few major negative theologians whose works might be familiar to most readers: Augustine of Hippo and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite from the classical Mediterranean world, Nicholas of Cusa from medieval Germany, Saint John of the Cross from baroque Spain, and then the modern French Jewish theologian-philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. By linking these touchstones, I will illustrate how apophaticism explores three interrelated things: the incomprehensibility and unknowability of not only the *absolute* or *divine*, but also the *self* and the human *other*. Each touchstone is especially valuable as a gauge for the consistency of apophaticism’s commitment not only to exploring the limits of human expression and knowledge, but also as a strategy for preventing conclusion and closure on any aspect of otherness—that is, as a means for negating negation.

Nicholas of Cusa was a fifteenth-century German theologian and humanist thinker best known for his spiritual treatises on ‘learned ignorance’. Cusan cosmology considers the materiality and relationality of the universe in its entirety. The ability of God to contain the world does not counteract the possibility that the world, also, can contain God. Through this mutual ‘enfoldment’ of God and world, Cusa’s writing embodies the cosmos as both enfolding and unfolding the divine:

Since the universe is contracted in each actually existing thing, it is obvious that God, who is in the universe, is in each thing and each actually existing thing is in God, as is the universe. Therefore, to say that 'each thing is in each thing' is not other than to say that 'through all things God is in all things' and that 'through all things all are in God.'<sup>15</sup>

For Catherine Keller, Cusan theology reimagines the body and materiality as all within all, multiplicity within multiplicity. It may seem static and still because its movement is so immense, in the way that the rotation of the earth is not perceptible to the casual observer even as she glances at the horizon because, to the relative size of the observer, the massiveness of the earth is so vast. As Keller writes, 'In the stone the organism has become fossil; in my hearing all things register as sounds; in my mind you dwell as a thought. But you remain still other than my thought, a sound, or a fossil, indeed registered as other within the internal relation of the thought, the sound, the stone'.<sup>16</sup> Such internal relation requires attention, in stillness, to the plurality of others that make up the unity of the self, and the multiplicity of the cosmos that is also its oneness. God is both indwelling and other, a negation and an emptiness at the heart of one's being and all being.

Regaining the negative dimension of theology through 'learned ignorance' structured much of Cusa's writing, especially in his explications of another earlier thinker, the late fifth-century mystic theologian who wrote under the name Dionysius the Areopagite, after the judge whose conversion to Christianity is described in the Acts of the Apostles (17:34). This later thinker, now known to scholars as Pseudo-Dionysius, is best-known for his mystical prose-poetical work *On the Divine Names*, which is a meditation on the transcendence of God as expressed through the impossibility of affirmative language. Through his reading of *On the Divine Names*, Cusa sought to return Christian theology to the paradox that all that can be objectively sensed, measured, and described remains nothing more than a paltry metaphor for the unnamable divine. The theatricality of the Areopagite's rhetoric in *The Divine Names* swings between poetry and prose in its demonstration of relationship between kataphatic expression (the excesses of language) and apophatic denial (expression through what cannot be expressed):

In the same way as what is intelligible is incomprehensible and unseen to the senses, and just as what is simple and formless is incomprehensible and unseen to what has shape and form, and just as the invisible and

unstructured formlessness of what is bodiless is incomprehensible and unstructured to those who attend to what has been formed according to the structure of bodies, then according to the same logos of truth:

The indefiniteness beyond being  
     lies beyond beings.  
 The unity beyond intellect  
     lies beyond intellect  
 The one beyond thought is  
     unintelligible to all thinking.  
 The good beyond logos:  
     ineffable to all logos  
     unity unifying every unity  
     being beyond being  
     non-intelligible intellect  
     ineffable logos  
     non-rationality  
     non-intelligibility  
     non-nameability  
     be-ing according to no being  
     cause of *being* to all; but itself: non-be-ing  
     as it is beyond every being, and  
 So that it would properly and knowingly  
     manifest itself about itself.<sup>17</sup>

According to Cusa's reading of *On the Divine Names*, it is through the very finitude of our conceptual understanding of God that we are able to learn more and more precisely what God is not. In this way, we can teach ourselves to be learnedly ignorant, just as the Areopagite does in the passage above, more and more precisely winnowing away everything that God is not in order to strive ever closer for a more complete assessment of his own ignorance. Anything that can be said does not express the unsayable (the divine, the other), but because of this linguistic inability every discourse also expresses the inexpressibility of the divine. The link between kataphasis and apophasis is an intimate one as described by Cusa; they necessarily balance one another: 'the theology of negation is so necessary for the theology of affirmation that without it God would not be worshipped as the Infinite God but rather, as a creature, and such worship is idolatry; it ascribes to the image that which befits only the

reality itself'.<sup>18</sup> Cusa asks his reader to put herself in an impossible place, to live in a world where God is at once constantly manifest yet forever incomprehensible. He asks his reader to overturn everything that she knows about knowledge, especially as something that one gains through experience and perception. '[T]he precise truth shines incomprehensibly within the darkness of our ignorance.' Etymologically, 'to know' is to recognize,<sup>19</sup> perhaps corresponding to a Platonic theory of learning as drawing out the innate. But Cusa's learned ignorance stipulates that whatever positivistic experience one may have of knowledge or truth, even the experience of negating that truth, must in turn be negated in order that '[we] can approach the maximum, triune God of infinite goodness—[approach Him] according to the degree of our instruction in ignorance, so that with all our might we may ever praise Him, who is forever blessed above all things, for manifesting to us His incomprehensible self'.<sup>20</sup> The only manifestation of God the human subject can know is God's very incomprehensibility, unavailability, and unapproachability—not even 'no thing' but radically nothing we can ever know.

The incomprehensibility of the divine corresponds to the incomprehensibility of the self as well. In fact, according to contemporary theologian Jean-Luc Marion, the incomprehensibility of the human being lies at the heart of the philosophy of religion. Marion turns to the spiritual autobiography of Augustine, the fifth-century North African bishop well-known today for his famous *Confessions*, to illustrate how the question of comprehension of the self has endured within the negative tradition since late antiquity at least.<sup>21</sup> Contemporary scholars of Augustine would agree, especially those who argue that Augustine contributed to or even 'invented' the notion of the interior self.<sup>22</sup> Looking at this history, Marion describes self-knowledge as a kind of unintentionally alienating procedure. We can only approach ourselves as objects among other objects in a world that can be studied. 'Strangely, I thus never know myself as *I* know, but always only as a *me* who is known, and thus as an object. I only know myself as that which I am not—as the *me*-object.'<sup>23</sup> There remains a split between a 'transcendental I' and an 'empirical me', and the one constantly eludes and escapes the other. However, through the depthless aporia that opens between the two, a paradox emerges: 'If the man that *I* am (*me*) remains inaccessible, this results not because I do not know him, but on the contrary because I know him only too well as an object.'<sup>24</sup> The intimate link between the kataphatic (here, the expression of the 'me-object') and the apophatic (the transcendence of the 'I')

reveals that the relationship between incomprehensibility and an object of inquiry indeed produces knowledge, but this knowledge must be understood as negative knowledge—knowledge *through* unknowing. For Marion, the most significant self-discovery is that of one's own incomprehensibility.

As Augustine wrote, reflecting on the breakages between his lifelong desire for God and his sinful youth, 'I became then a mystery to myself'.<sup>25</sup> This mystery informs the question he asks of the divine: how is it that he is drawn to seek God when he does not know what or whom he seeks? From where does this driving motivation that structures his very being come? The quest for God is also a quest to understand the true nature of the self. Augustine's famous opening passage to his *Confessions* portrays the self as always engaged in a restless search motivated simultaneously by the desire to face and to know the divine, and a transcendental question: what is it about me that moves me to seek the unknown?

You move us to delight in praising You; for You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You. Lord, teach me to know and understand which of these should be first, to call on You, or to praise You; and likewise to know You, or to call upon You. But who is there that calls upon You without knowing You? For he that knows You not may call upon You as other than You are. Or perhaps we call on You that we may know You.<sup>26</sup>

That Augustine should call upon God without knowing God is the surest indication of God's influence in his life, but that calling must remain in the form of a question, never an absolute, because it is always possible to fix God idolatrously in place if the calling itself becomes a substitute for the mystery of the divine (the danger then being that one 'may call upon [God] as other than [God] is'). It is the calling itself, then, the restless search that will continue until he finds rest in God, that brings Augustine closer to God. But even when he understands his very self as structured by this restlessness, when he finds the clarity to turn within, he is met with an emptiness right at his core: the restless heart itself, always waiting to be filled with God's soothing grace. Augustine 'call[s] on [God] that [he] may know [God]', but the calling is always an elaboration on its own futility.

The restlessness of Augustine's quest is also the same restlessness that describes the relationship between the manifest reality of creation and the unknowable truth of the divine. The passage that concludes 'I have



become a question to myself' describes Augustine's struggle to maintain his prayerful focus on God alone, and not become caught up in the sensory enjoyment (bodily pleasure) of listening to sung prayer. 'At times indeed it seems to me that I am paying them greater honour than is their due—when, for example, I feel that by those holy words my mind is kindled more religiously and fervently to a flame of piety because I hear them sung than if they were not sung [...]. It is not good that the mind should be enervated by this bodily pleasure [...]. In this manner I sin unawares, and then grow aware.'<sup>27</sup> But how could Augustine possibly police this fine border between prayer and the aesthetic enjoyment of praying? Augustine is troubled not only by his inability to will himself to concentrate solely on prayer, but also by the muddy entanglement of the transcendent and the human. The tangle is inescapable, he recognizes—he is not in control, even of the processes of perception and interpretation that define the inner experience which he turns toward prayer. The lack of control within his innermost self reflects the incomprehensible suffusion of the transcendent and immanent within creation. The state of being that makes it possible for him to 'sin unawares' is also the state of being that allows Augustine to set out on his restless search, drawing closer to the unknowable God through each encounter with incomprehensibility.

The negative tradition explores not only the unknowability and transcendence of the divine and the self, but of the human other as well. In fact, the other—a friend, a beloved, or even an enemy—often serves as a metaphor for the divine. While for Augustine the restless heart structures a spiritual life of continuously seeking to fill an abiding emptiness, for the sixteenth-century Carmelite monk Juan de Yepes, or John of the Cross, the movement was one of self-emptying. And while Augustine's God is loudly silent through the voice of creation that sings around him, Juan's God is both present and absent; God is the beloved whose return he awaits in constant anguish, but with whom, paradoxically, he already exists in a sensuous union that can only be fulfilled through negation of the self. In Juan's negative formulation, the other appears at the moment of self-abandon. Only by losing oneself completely may the other manifest.

Juan's best-known poem, *The Dark Night*, describes the soul as the beloved that steals out of her house under cover of darkness to meet her Lover. The last three stanzas of the poem seem to describe the union of Lover and beloved, but attention to the progress of the poem reveals a curious temporal dissonance. While the first four stanzas describe a progressive movement from house to meeting place, the fifth stanza

interrupts the linearity of the narrative with an exclamation: ‘O guiding night! / O night more lovely than the dawn! / O night that has united / The Lover with His beloved, / Transforming the beloved in her Lover.’<sup>28</sup> The sixth stanza then can be read in a revealingly ambiguous manner: either the beloved has finally united with her Lover, continuing the linear progress of the first stanzas, *or* we discover that she has already been lying with her lover for quite some time, or perhaps all along.

Upon my flowering breast  
Which I kept wholly for Him alone,  
There he lay sleeping,  
And I caressing Him  
There in a breeze from the fanning cedars.<sup>29</sup>

With ‘There he lay sleeping’ (*Allí quedó dormido*) Juan switches to the present tense, creating in this stanza a suspended moment not bound by time, or even, it seems, place—for what place is ‘in a breeze from the fanning cedars’? As soon as the moment is discovered, however, it ends, and the final two stanzas return to the past tense and continue the linear narrative:

When the breeze blew from the turret  
Parting His hair,  
He wounded my neck  
With his gentle hand,  
Suspending all my senses.

I abandoned and forgot myself,  
Laying my face on my Beloved;  
All things ceased; I went out from myself,  
Leaving my cares  
Forgotten among the lilies.

But even the narrative of the last stanza resists a linear reading, employing contradiction to emphasize the unspeakability of unknowing knowledge. If the beloved has abandoned and forgotten herself, how can she then describe the experience, especially if all cares, such as the anguish and longing of the first stanzas, have been ‘forgotten among the lilies’? Fully aware of the limits of apophatic speech, Juan’s poetry harnesses unthinkability when describing the indescribable.

In his own commentary on the poem, Juan perseverates at length on the difficulties and paradoxes of apophatic speech. It is a kind of speech that must speak through secrets, and the more a soul receives of spiritual wisdom, the more the secret is hidden, especially from the soul itself. Even when the soul feels it has entered a new place of understanding, 'led into a remarkably deep and vast wilderness, unattainable by any human creature, into an immense, unbounded desert, the more delightful, savourous, and loving, the deeper, vaster, and more solitary it is. He is conscious of being so much the more hidden the more he is elevated above every temporal creature.'<sup>30</sup> It is within this hiddenness, unbound by time and space, that the *already*—the Lover already sleeping upon the soul's 'flowering breast'—appears. The *already* is a significant aspect of Juan's negative theology, and it also performs the self-emptying that his writing works to achieve. He further explains, 'Speaking mystically, as we are here, the divine things and perfections are not known as they are in themselves while they are being sought and acquired, but when they are *already* found and acquired.'<sup>31</sup> It is only through emptying the self and remaining passively receptive to the other that Juan comes to understand the truth that he is already united with the divine.

The passive suffering of Juan's spirituality, especially concerning imagery of sexual violence ('He wounded my neck / With his gentle hand'), has provoked much commentary over the centuries.<sup>32</sup> Reuven Tsur's study of certain poetic structures as performative writing that imitates religious experience argues that by performing religious acts of cognition through poetic form, poetry can successfully convey non-cognitive experiences such as ecstasy or mystic vision. Tsur's chapter on 'Poem, Prayer, and Meditation' compares John Donne's holy sonnet 'Batter my heart three person'd God' to Juan's 'Dark Night'. In both poems, he suggests, 'The imagery of rape and thrall, as the summit of a verb-series of mounting intensity, brings connotations of immense force and urgency to the experience, as well as extreme passivity on the experiencer's part. Sexual rape ("in one's body and in one's soul") by an absolute force may result in rapturous self-oblivion, turning *passivity* into supreme *passion*.'<sup>33</sup> While contemporary readers with an ear tuned to the history of systematic cultural misogyny will be disturbed by this celebration of a rape victim's 'no' as a kind of involuntarily spiritual 'yes', such misgivings should not overlook the possibility that these male poets may have very well adopted this imagery in order to explicitly and forcibly disturb comfortable assumptions about will and self-control. Does the beloved will

herself to self-abandon, or is it something forced upon her? The implicit question, central to Juan's negative theology, is, 'How possible is it to will oneself into utter passive acceptance and receptivity?' Is there always something violent—a kind of self-violence, even—about the kind of radical passivity and self-abnegation that precedes mystic union? And how might this parallel, in human terms, the violence (hierarchy) implicit in the relationship between self and other?

Perhaps the best contemporary counterpoint to Juan's baroque mysticism is the radical passivity at the heart of the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. While for Juan the other will always serve as metaphor for the divine, within Levinas' oeuvre the reader confronts the undeniable *humanity* of the other through her unapproachability, even and especially when 'face to face'. But who is passive and who is active in the Levinasian ethical paradigm? In *Outside the Subject*, Levinas critiques Martin Buber's 'I-Thou' model for its equality, symmetry, and reversibility. For Buber, I and Thou mirror one another in a reciprocal relationship. But Levinas argues against any initial equality; the other must be first, and above the self, if there is to be any ethical relationship. 'That responsibility is elicited, brought about by the face of the other person, described as a breaking of the plastic forms of the phenomenality of appearance: straightforwardness of the exposure to death, and an order issued to me not to abandon the other (the Word of God).'<sup>34</sup> The other must be my priority, the one to whom I am ultimately responsible, not despite my not knowing her but because I never can. In terms of Levinas as a negative thinker or espousing a kind of negative epistemology, he does not deny the possibility of knowledge, but he does characterize 'knowledge' as a transformation of the known into some sort of object, in a process wherein the human being risks being misused. Therefore, knowledge, which is the assimilation of the other into the 'same' that is the I, is always suspect; it does not know what it purports to know. He argues that the quiddity of the other eludes any kind of knowing where the known would take on the qualities of a graspable object (this much in the way that Marion reflects on the aporia that opens within self-contemplation), and if the I reaches out to grasp/know the other, then he does the other an injury. 'Knowledge is held by Levinas to be a kind of violence, when deployed against human beings. It comprehends, engulfs, and assimilates the other into the (self) same. The other is to be encountered (*à la* Buber, by and large), addressed in dialogue'.<sup>35</sup> Knowledge, for Levinas, cannot *but* be an act of assimilation,

and therefore an act of violence. Within this formulation, the other seems to take on an ultimately passive role. The other is always available, it seems, either to put the Levinasian subject 'into question', or to be bludgeoned by the violence of assimilative knowledge. But this is not an entirely fair or complete reading of Levinasian passivity.

The other, for all her seeming passivity, is actively resistant in her elusiveness. As Levinas elaborates in the famous passage 'Ethics and the Face' in *Totality and Infinity*, the I is not necessarily an active agent who chooses to be 'for the Other' in ethical relationship, but it is the other who demands this commitment in a 'moral summons': 'For the ethical relationship which subtends discourse is not a species of consciousness whose ray emanates from the I; it puts the I in question. This putting in question emanates from the other.'<sup>36</sup> For Levinas, existence itself is in the relation to the other; that is, ontology *is* ethical relation, making ethics 'first philosophy'. 'The relation with the Other alone introduces a dimension of transcendence, and leads us to a relation totally different from experience in the sensible sense of the term, relative and egoist.'<sup>37</sup> This is where he differs most significantly from his philosophical predecessor Martin Heidegger, who privileges the project of existence itself (how man *conceives* Being—his ontology, then, at base an epistemology) over and above relation to the other. As Sean Hand argues in his introduction to *The Levinas Reader*, approaching ontology as relationality turns from philosophy to theology, and here Levinas is unique among other names in contemporary Continental philosophy in that he is not afraid to invoke the name of God and unapologetically blend religion and ethics. 'The communication which must be established in order to enter into relation with the being of the Other means that this relation is not ontology, but rather religion, a place where knowledge cannot take precedence over sociality', Hand writes.<sup>38</sup> Although it is tempting to interpret the passivity that structures the self-other relationship as a kind of Messianic sacrificial mediator who would 'humble himself by becoming *obedient* to the point of *death*',<sup>39</sup> a much more accurate reading would be to compare it to the Jewish ritual *Korbanot* (sacrifice and offering), which was central to the priestly rites at the Temple of Jerusalem before its destruction in 70 CE (which effectively ended Jewish sacrificial ritual). *Korbanot* is often defined as a ritual substitution wherein the thing being offered stands in for the person who committed a sin, and the 'punishment' is done to the offering instead of the sinner. But in a more spiritual sense, the sacrifice is what allows the human to draw closer

to God, the other, by 'sharing the fact of death'.<sup>40</sup> Levinas characterizes the self-other relationship as one of sacrifice, but it is not the other who is sacrificed in misdirected processes of assimilative knowledge, but the ego or the self who sacrifices its unicity (that is, its self-same uniqueness) to responsibility for the other when it offers itself as substitute for the other. Here, Levinas argues that 'Outside of any mysticism, in this respiration, the possibility of every sacrifice for the other, activity and passivity coincide.'<sup>41</sup> Sacrificial substitution is ultimate passivity expressed through responsibility. When I substitute myself for an other, truly without concern for myself, this passivity enters into the realm of the same—I am now 'for the other', no different from the other.

Levinasian sacrifice cannot be understood as a kind of moral action decided upon by a reasonable subject. The self as sacrificial subject is a state—but this state is not a 'state of being'; instead, it is an original constitution that defies ontology as 'otherwise than being'—both 'passivity' and 'passion' that 'is the incessant event of subjection to everything, or substitution. It is a being divesting itself, emptying itself of its being, turning itself inside out'.<sup>42</sup> In the language of apophaticism, we might say that Levinasian philosophy is a kind of ontology against ontology, or being that negates Being. Further, to describe the constitution of the self as a 'state' does not quite justify Levinas' thinking. 'Otherwise than being' is 'To be oneself, the state of being a hostage, [...] always to have one degree of responsibility more, the responsibility for the responsibility for the other.'<sup>43</sup> The self is always under sacrifice; in a word, the self *is* expiation, and what Levinas would call the 'original' expiation because it is prior to history, to politics, to freedom, prior to the initiative of an individual will.<sup>44</sup> This original sacrifice is the condition 'otherwise than being' that unites the self and other in 'human fraternity', but this relationship also makes of the self a 'hostage', because the self is already a substitute for the other. 'I' am already an other. 'I am outside of any place, in myself, on the higher side of the autonomy of auto-affection and identity resting on itself.'<sup>45</sup>

In Levinas's unapologetically religious ethical philosophy we find an apophaticism without mysticism, a model for transcendence that is factual and human as much as it is ephemeral. As with the negative theology of Augustine, Cusa, the Areopagite, and John of the Cross, radical passivity subtends any active suffering (the anxious longing and desire for the other, and the uncomfortable ambiguity of one's 'right to be' while facing the other) in order to recognize a truth prior to human cognition,

or what we might also call those ‘deep structures’ that make perception and experience of the world possible. For Augustine, that truth is the presence of God at the center of his being; for Cusa, that the divine enfolds all within itself; for the Areopagite, the full transcendence of the divine; and for Juan, the ‘already’ of divine union. For Levinas, that truth is the original relationship between self and other wherein the different cannot be divorced from the same, wherein the ego’s constitution will be always beholden to the resistive and restive otherness of the other, just as much as the other’s alterity will always depend upon the ego’s attempt to assimilate all into the self-same. Within each dynamic of this reciprocal tension between self and other is the apophatic negation of a process by the very process that attempts to describe it. Responsibility for the other always returns me to myself, but, writes Levinas, ‘Recurrence becomes identity in breaking up the limits of identity, breaking up the principle of being in me, the intolerable rest in itself characteristic of definition. The self is on the hither side of rest; it is the impossibility to come back from all things and concern oneself only with oneself. It is to hold on to oneself while gnawing away at oneself’.<sup>46</sup> Always ‘gnawing away at itself’, Levinasian thought expresses the apophatic heritage of philosophy within the contemporary Judeo-Christian West.

## THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES AS NEGATIVE TRADITIONS

The theatrical tradition in the West has always described itself through the experience of incomprehensibility, and we can trace the language of ignorance back to its Greek roots. When Aristotle muses on the best type of tragic action—that is, the kind of action that will excite the finest states of ‘terror and pity’—he celebrates as most effective the tragedies wherein ‘someone is about to perpetrate, through ignorance, an atrocious deed, but makes the discovery before he does it’, but even better still the kind where the protagonist ‘perpetrate[s] the deed ignorantly, and having perpetrated, [discovered]; for then it is not attended with wickedness, and the discovery excites horror’.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, according to Aristotle, the discovery of truth in the peripatetic turn from ignorance to knowledge (*anagnorisis*) reveals the beautiful aesthetic of tragedy when it corresponds to this moment of self-betrayal, which *is* itself the tragic fall from good fortune to ruin: ‘The best recognition, however, of all, is that which arises from the things themselves, astonishment being excited through probable circumstances’.<sup>48</sup> Tragedy and its enjoyment

hinges upon this incomprehensibility of the protagonist's blindness and the experience of dramatic irony it engenders for the audience—we know through the unknowing of the protagonist. If our catharsis is catalyzed by anything, it is the suspense and relief of this unknowing knowledge, as we witness within ourselves the potential for the same incomprehensible blindness that would move us to destroy that which we most love and desire. The hubris which traditionally comprises Oedipus' tragic flaw, inflaming pride to patricidal proportions, is the same kind of mistaken substitution of the absolute for a healthy dose of doubt that troubles our encounter with any system of knowledge. Oedipus' flaw is that he elevates his own certainty to the level of the absolute; he becomes for himself both the vehicle and the destination of worldly, human transcendence. That is to say, Oedipus claims to comprehend the incomprehensible. This describes both his tragic flaw and the structure of classical tragedy in a nutshell.

As part of the civic and religious festivals such as the City Dionysia, the classical tragic tradition is already linked to mystery, sacrifice, and the negative knowledge of extreme ambivalence, as embodied in the androgynous foreigner-deity Dionysus. I need not recreate a religious history of so-called 'world theatre' here, and so will only remind us of what is obvious to any student of theatre history: that theatrical traditions are steeped in the otherworldly, and have often functioned as ritual mediation between the earthly and the divine or spiritual. (It is also worth noting that ritual or religious drama, as opposed to secular drama, has served as one of the dividing lines to justify taxonomies within former canons of 'world theatre'.) Today, what might be termed 'heritage' theatre often documents early forms of religious drama: the No of Japan, the masked dance drama of Korea, Chinese opera, Kathakali dance-drama in India, the Iranian *Ta'ziyeh*, ritual commemoration in Egypt, the medieval liturgical dramas of Europe, and passion plays. In the Western tradition specters, ogres, monsters, devils, angels, magic, ritual and religious rite characterize modern drama as well, from *Hamlet* to *Faustus* to *Ghosts*. The religious other is no stranger to the contemporary stage either, whether spectacular and divine (*Angels in America*), or essentially human (*The Book of Mormon*, *Doubt*), or indicative of political and cultural difference (*The Oldest Boy*, *God of Carnage*). While theatre scholars today are comfortable speaking of performance as absence, absencing, and the invisible, as memory and memorial, as 'trace,' and even as 'ghost', not often do these discussions invoke the spiritual, holy, or divine, let alone



consider the theological, even as concepts rather than beliefs.<sup>49</sup> What seems an abrupt dropping of religious or spiritual language from theatre and performance studies is a fascinating cultural phenomenon given that religious and spiritual language was not only acceptable, but celebrated in theatre studies, performance analysis, and performer training well into the 1980s.

But perhaps such interests came to be expressed in another more *negative* way. Theatre directors of the avant-garde such as Constatin Stanislavsky, Antonin Artaud, and Jerzy Grotowski, who drew heavily from spiritual traditions and ritual, often described the performer's art as what the performer does *not* do, or strives *not* to accomplish. At the turn of the twentieth century, the goal for Stanislavsky's actor was 'experiencing'—living the utter spontaneity of response through attention and active listening to the scene partners and to the self. Experiencing is the creative state of the actor that Stanislavski hoped his system could foster, and what experiencing most certainly is not is just as important as what it is: it is *not* the representation of a character's emotional state. Stanislavski related experiencing to familiar states of mind such as inspiration, creating, creative moods, or the 'activation of the subconscious'.<sup>50</sup> He also described experiencing as a state that is 'rare' but 'happy,' 'when the actor is "seized" by the role. At such a moment, the artist feels something akin to that of a yogi who has reached a higher state of consciousness; there is an "all-perceptive" sharpening of the senses, and "intense awareness," and "oceanic joy," and "bliss"'.<sup>51</sup> Within experiencing, the actor is most fully him- or herself, and most fully immersed in the scene. There is no need to access a kind of 'transcendence', or to posit that the actor has achieved anything other than the simple stripping away of convention and affect. Skillful acting is being so entirely present in the moment that the 'as if' fades away and becomes 'is'. The Stanislavskian actor is at her finest when she makes her audience believe that they are witnessing nothing more than life as it happens; that is, that the actor is *not* performing.

At the height of the avant-garde in interwar Europe, Antonin Artaud somewhat more vociferously announced the 'closure of representation'<sup>52</sup> at the hands of his Theatre of Cruelty. Similar to Stanislavsky's non-performing actor, Artaud desired his actors to live in the 'void'—that is, 'beyond situations and words', dissolving 'thoughts and sensations, permitting them to recover their pure state'.<sup>53</sup> As Derrida recognized, the aim of Artaud's cruelty was to destroy representation by making theatre the equal to life itself; for this reason Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty 'has yet

to be born', because everyone has yet to rid oneself completely of representation's fascistic reign. Artaud describes this absence in *The Theatre and Its Double*: 'The theatre must make itself the equal of life—not an individual life, that individual aspect of life in which characters triumph, but the sort of liberated life which sweeps away human individuality and in which man is only a reflection.'<sup>54</sup> Theatre, then, should be the site of the destruction of imitation. Imitation insidiously empties life of meaning when it doubles it and so voids it by negation. 'The theatre of cruelty is not a representation. It is life itself'.<sup>55</sup> Responding in part to movements in modern philosophy at the time, especially the translation and circulation of Nietzsche's writings, Artaud likewise proclaims a death of God; as Derrida puts it, the theatre of cruelty destroys the 'theological theatre' of the 'author-God' to create a non-theological space that is 'the irrepresentability of the living present', 'dissimulated or dissolved, suppressed or deported within the infinite chain of representations'.<sup>56</sup> While non-theological, Artaud's theatre was no less spiritual, and arguably mystical, in the sense that the performer strove to strip away language and representation in order obtain pure experience—to dissolve self in union with life, in a way that undoubtedly echoes John of the Cross.

Where Stanislavsky grounded his creation of characters in textual study, Grotowski worked with the body outside of any text. And where Artaud looked to history only as a vision of a glorified and primitivised past that could model his fantasy of the transcendence of language and society, Grotowski drew from psychology and anthropology—which very much influenced an actor in one of his earlier companies, the theatre anthropologist Eugenio Barba.<sup>57</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre used an actor training method called the *via negativa*, which sought to eradicate physical and psychological 'blocks' so that the performer responds truthfully to her or his experience.<sup>58</sup> Grotowski's concept of paratheatre, or participatory theatre, also worked on eradicating blocks, here especially between 'actor' and 'audience'. In the paratheatrical space, there may be leaders and new initiates, but everyone works together on a horizontal plane. Leszek Kolodziejczyk describes Grotowski's paratheatre in 1978, at the height of its prominence in Grotowski's process:

It consists of a common isolation by a group of people in a place far removed from the outside world, and an attempt to build a kind of genuine meeting among human beings. [...] This is not a performance, however, because it does not contain in it the elements of theatre such as plot

or action. There is nothing to see for the audience, either, because there is no audience. It is, on the other hand, a cycle of meetings between people who do not know one another at first, but gradually upon getting accustomed to one another, rid themselves of mutual fears and distrust; this, in the course of time, causes them the release in themselves of the simplest, most elementary inter-human expression.<sup>59</sup>

This form is the result of Grotowski's constant problematization of the relationship 'between pretense and performance',<sup>60</sup> desiring to push his actors toward a 'total act', where the performer is stripped of social and cultural 'masks'. The theatre would be a 'place of provocation', where the 'holy actor' underwent a process of self-transformation through this shedding of ego and character that provoked in the audience a similar 'self-penetration'.<sup>61</sup> When the Laboratory Theatre accomplished this with internationally acclaimed performances such as *The Constant Prince* and *Acropolis* in the mid-1960s, the next logical step was to look outside the conventional theatre for a way to further deepen transformation and communication. Paratheatre's objective is to abandon performance itself, with its dependence on representation and mimesis. The act of pure communication, communion, is Grotowski's 'holy' act, and it can only be achieved through a negative 'stripping away'.

Given the avant-garde theatre's enmeshment with religion and spirituality, whether drawing from it in a positive sense in the way that Stanislavsky drew from yoga, or as with Artaud rejecting its institutions and dogma while mimicking its mystical strategies, the stage was set and ready for theatre, anthropology, and criticism to come together in a way that resulted in the familiar history of the 'birth' of performance studies. From the very beginning, the conversation extended the trend in avant-garde theatre to use a kind of apophatic language, especially regarding ritual transformation, that allowed one to play with notions of the spiritual or religious while simultaneously maintaining commitment to rejection of the absolute and the dogmatic. In 'Approaches to Theory/Criticism' (1966), Richard Schechner posits a continuum for 'performance' that spans five categories: play, games, sports, theatre, ritual. Play is 'free' where ritual is 'strictly programmed', while games, sports, and theatre mediate between these extremes as either more play-like or more ritual-like. Although Schechner spends the greater part of the article denouncing the Cambridge anthropologists' attempt to identify *an* essential ritual origin for theatre, his continuum of performance

is basically an elaboration of how performances are variations on 'ritual' itself as an all-encompassing category.<sup>62</sup> This has allowed Schechner to extend the values of ritual, especially its creation of symbolic reality and its self-transcendence, into analysis of other performance genres without completely dismissing ritual's 'spiritual' qualities, in a manner that persists throughout his oeuvre.

Today, the conceptualization of performance studies as a discipline is often posited in apophatic terms, continuing the fashion set by Schechner. This quotation from Lois Weaver introduces students to a program at one university: 'Performance Studies is not one-size fits all, but all sizes try to fit in. That is, if you can handle conflict, cope with ambiguity, navigate the incomprehensible, relish the rivalry.'<sup>63</sup> The preface to Schechner's *Performance Studies: An Introduction* right away offers a negative, unsaying 'definition' of performance studies: 'Performance studies—as a practice, a theory, an academic discipline—is dynamic, unfinishable. Whatever it is, it wasn't exactly that before and it won't be exactly that again'. One dominant metaphor by which performance studies has been figured is the 'unmapped terrain', an image that contradictorily connotes the kind of claim-staking and neo-colonial intrusions that many performance scholars would decry. Henry Bial introduces students to performance studies in *The Performance Studies Reader* as the 'uncertainty of unmapped terrain' that is 'exhilarating' for those students and scholars who like '*not knowing*'. Bial rehearses here a certain pedagogy that privileges open-ended questions. It's nothing new for any discipline in which interpretation of cultural material is the main agenda. But according to Bial, 'What makes performance studies unique is that it shares the characteristics of its object: performance. Just as performance is contingent, contested, hard to pin down, so too is its study.' Despite all this unknowing, Bial also emphasizes that there is a positive outcome to be had, what he calls 'the positive promise of performance studies', arguing that 'its potential to illuminate, instruct, and inspire—is enhanced, not diminished, by this ever-present uncertainty'.<sup>64</sup> As Schechner continues, 'Because performance studies is so broad-ranging and open to new possibilities, no one can actually grasp its totality or press all its vastness and variety into a single book'.<sup>65</sup> Don't try to fix performance studies down, is the implied warning. If you do, you'll be worshiping a mere idol instead. By insisting that performance cannot be fixed or defined, performance studies situates itself as a negative discipline, trafficking in denials and the unsaying of speech. Even the voraciousness of the field,

the feature which garners the most criticism, has a negative aspect: by devouring everything that could possibly be considered 'performance', it cancels itself out; by being everything it is actually nothing.

Presence, liveness, agency, memory, embodiment and event are core concepts that organize research in performance studies. As an 'anti-discipline', performance studies has conscientiously positioned itself as resistant to the control of ideologies and disciplines, charting its post-structuralist critical heritage through acts of subversion on levels intellectual and practical. Arising out of the new avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s and experimental theatres like The Living Theatre, The Open Theatre, and the Performance Garage in New York, 'performance' as a 'new' artistic genre contrasted itself to the high culture and discipline of the traditional theatre. 'Performance', writes Elin Diamond, 'came to be defined in opposition to theatre structures and conventions.'<sup>66</sup> The theory of Bertolt Brecht, becoming widely available in English around 1964, was highly influential.<sup>67</sup> If twentieth-century conventional theatre used realistic illusions to ease an audience into soporific identification with a hero who reinforced the ideology of the state, then 'performance' was identified with 'alienating' audiences from their own assumptions, and 'has been honored with dismantling textual authority, illusionism, and the canonical actor in favor of the polymorphous body of the performer. Refusing the conventions of role-playing, the performer presents herself/himself as a sexual, permeable, tactile body, scourging audience narrativity along with the barrier between stage and spectator'.<sup>68</sup> This revolutionary heritage ensconced itself in the newly budding field of performance studies as a preferential option for resistance through transformative process/ritual. The traditional lineage of performance studies that traces itself through ritual and anthropology (as opposed to, for example, theories of communication) sustains itself through liminal processes of ritual reversal and change. Jon MacKenzie argues that this preference illuminates the 'postmodern condition' of 'performativity'—'it demands that all knowledge be evaluated in terms of operational efficiency, that what counts as knowledge must be translatable by and accountable to the "1"s and "0"s of digital matrices'.<sup>69</sup> Performative efficacy as expressed through liminality, MacKenzie continues, created the 'liminal-norm', 'any situation where the valorization of liminal transgression or resistance itself becomes normative'.<sup>70</sup> This basic political structure of performance studies, one that identifies, challenges, resists, and finally bursts convention in acts of subversive freedom, remains a solid reference point.

The language of resistance perhaps surfaces most frequently in performance studies' intersections with critical theory. In introducing their anthology *Critical Theory and Performance*, Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach point to the resistive nature of the 'inherently political character [of] the performance analysis that has emerged from critical theory' when it 'revises, challenges, rewrites, interrogates, and sometimes condemns received meanings'.<sup>71</sup> The authors, like MacKenzie above, also note that the intersection of performance study with critical theory positions itself in a decidedly postmodern world. The 'topography' of the 'post-' already invites a resistive stance, one that rejects an assumed prior, authoritative, monolithic set of received conventions and works to open out the human condition as one of multiplicity, plurality, and possibility. Significantly, apophaticism's time in critical theory's limelight (the mid-1990s) coincides with the introduction of the most influential concept in performance studies to date: performativity. Performativity's various meanings course through a theoretical network of ideas woven through with psychoanalysis influenced by Foucault, Austin's speech act theory, Derridean deconstruction, and the gender theory of Judith Butler. Rather than define it as a theory in and of itself, Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick characterize performativity as something that has '*enabled* a powerful *appreciation* of the ways that identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes'.<sup>72</sup> Like apophaticism, performativity is a stance that allows a kind of engagement with presence through absence, with self through otherness, with the unutterable through utterance itself. When Derrida set out to deconstruct Austin's dependence on context and intentionality while defining the performative utterance, Derrida first painstakingly executed a similar deconstructive move on the classical notion of writing. While this classical notion takes writing as an extension of presence, *despite* the absence of writer or receiver, Derrida shows how writing *depends* upon absence in order to function (because to be writing, it must continue to 'act' as writing outside any specific context).<sup>73</sup> Only after proving that the pursuit of presence depends on absence can Derrida then reverse Austin's dismissal of the 'perversions' or non-normal uses of language (theatre, poetry, soliloquy) to argue that such 'hollow' citations actually make speech possible. If presence is composed of absence, then the performative utterance is actually a repetition, always citational, and never a pure 'event'.<sup>74</sup> Like apophaticism, performativity (in the Derridean sense at least) denies the experience of presence in order to prevent the

assumption that presence could ever be equated with anything other than itself, whether that be time, speech, writing, or performance itself.

Apophaticism and performativity share an interest in challenging not only 'pure presence' but the authority that such a proclamation would assume. At the height of what have been called the 'intercultural wars'<sup>75</sup> in theatre studies during the 1990s, W.B. Worthen argued that 'the relationship between texts, textuality, and performance is an issue deeply inflected by notions of authority—not so much professional authority, but the stabilizing, hegemonic functioning of the Author itself'.<sup>76</sup> He criticized Victor Turner for failing truly to engage Ndembu ritual through a student devised performance at the moment when it became truly, to Worthen's mind, intercultural. The students' devised ritual, according to Turner, 'didn't work' because the students attempted to show how the original ritual would be performed in a matrilineal sociocultural space by framing the performance of their own devised ritual with the bodies of the female students. He wrote, 'This feminist mode of staging ethnography assumed and enacted modern ideological notions in a situation in which those ideas are simply irrelevant.' Worthen's retort: 'Irrelevant to whom?' According to Worthen, Turner worked within a paradigm that privileged the authority of 'texts', and the Ndembu ritual was seen as one such authoritative text that could be read in a process of discernment that would reveal its meaning. 'This performance is "irrelevant" only if we believe that performance can achieve authenticity, that it can become (unlike the *text*) the faithful vehicle of the immanent, authorized *work*'. Assuming the possibility of authentic reproduction promises 'meanings which already exist elsewhere rather than [as] a site for the production of meaning, a site where the ways in which meaning is produced can be interrogated, inspected, performed'. Performance becomes 'the site for the reproduction of authority, the authority of the innate meaning of Ndembu ritual'. Worthen's trouble with rituals as authentic texts is similar to the negative theologian's trouble with positivistic transcendence, wherein God is assumed to be an ethereal being existing elsewhere. When this being and this place are assumed to exist elsewhere, speaking about God then becomes a positive interpretation of God. If a text or a performance or a concept or a divine being is recognized not as a transcendent body residing in the beyond but, instead, a limitless hole in our knowledge, something that, as an authority does not for our embodied and enminded purposes exist, then speaking about it becomes an act of kataphasis, linguistically circumscribing the borders of

what is absolutely unavailable to our knowing. Speaking of God is not the 'reproduction of the site of authority' but a humbling experience of self-examination in acknowledgment of one's complete lack of understanding and/or knowledge.

MacKenzie was not the first scholar to point out the conservative undercurrent of this preference for 'resistance', and how disrupting the liminal norm itself can prove highly subversive. As early as the 1970s, Herbert Blau offered a critique of the 'transgressive' ritual acts of the Performance Garage, arguing that the theatrical conventions they sought to transgress were not necessarily 'primary' any more than the work of the avant garde was 'new'. Blau reacts to Richard Schechner's contention that 'Either the audience is in it or they are out of it. Either there is potential for contact or there is not. I don't deny that the spectator in the orthodox theater feels something. Sure he does. But he cannot easily, naturally, unconsciously, and without embarrassment express those feelings except with idiotically limited limits.' For Blau, this is a 'nearsighted view of theatre conventions'. 'The limits are what is useful, depending on what you're looking for, and how. I have often found behavior at the Performance Garage or other environmental theaters artificial, self-conscious, constrained, improbably, falsely focused or unfocused, and lacking the potency of concentrated reflection which one can experience in an orthodox theatre.'<sup>77</sup> This echoes the question for performance studies after MacKenzie, 'What exactly is performance studies resisting in its political commitment to resistance?' If Schechner's *Dionysus in '69* or *Paradise Now* by the Living Theatre were not, as Blau contends, resisting convention so much as re-inscribing a 'regressive impulse', then were they *only* expressing 'the desire to reproduce through performance some more fulfilling earlier state of being, some avatar of the old *homo ludens*, still polymorphous perverse'?<sup>78</sup> Or, is there something in this politics of resistance that can work its way through the fashion for the liminal norm as an expression of an ethical commitment?

In the following micro-lecture by Matthew Goulish, in 'proximity to performance', the apophatic tradition via the language of the other *à la* Levinas makes its way into influential discourse about performance:

The other in all his or her forms gives me I. It is on the occasion of the other that I catch sight of me; or that I catch me at: reacting, choosing, refusing, accepting. It is the other who makes my portrait. Always. There is a shock that happens daily, that is up to us to manage. There is a positive incomprehension: the fact that the other is so very much other. Is so very



much not-me. The fact that we can say to each other all the time: here, I am not like you. And luckily. The other of all sorts, is also of all diverse richness. A hierarchizing spirit rages between individuals, between people, between parties. All the time. The world is mistaken. It imagines that the other takes something from us whereas the other only brings to us, all the time.<sup>79</sup>

Goulish's language echoes the phenomenology of the gift described by Jean-Luc Marion, who writes of the perceptual horizon, 'what shows itself first gives itself'.<sup>80</sup> The hither side of performance studies' commitment to resistance is its interest in reception and encounter without domination while serving community and participation—or, more simply, approaching the other. Despite the protests from the early essay by Blau, performance has remained a vital force for connection. And the concern for efficacy in the creation of a liminal experience is also about forging an alternative space for community. What should be the dynamics of this space? The foundational voice in performance studies regarding such a question belongs to Dwight Conquergood, whose approach to ethnographic praxis as 'cultural performance' emphasized mutuality, interdependence, and vulnerability. By using performance as a paradigm for ethnography, Conquergood resisted the dominant discourse in the field of anthropology, which prized accurate description and categorization, instead working to open up the interrelated lives of both ethnographer and subject. By positioning the ethnographer as an actor performing a role, one who is vividly aware that she is performing, the ethnographer is able to engage her subjects as co-actors who collaborate in a 'fragile fiction'.<sup>81</sup> 'The performance paradigm struggles for epistemological authenticity rather than accuracy, moral honesty instead of innocence.'<sup>82</sup> Performance, for Conquergood, is a 'cultural struggle'—how to make meaning of the world, especially in the experience of disenfranchisement—that is shaped by the interdependence of self and other. The apophatic undercurrent of performance studies, I contend, lies in its preference for liminal transformation and its commitment to an ethical encounter with the other. Often, this method and this commitment takes the form of resistance to the 'hierarchizing spirits' of the world—the lingering uneven circulation of colonial power, corporate capitalism, globalization as homogenization, and the violence of essentializing identity politics. In this way, performance studies can be seen as carrying on the apophatic tradition, which has always resisted the domination and authority of both Church and State, while seeking to create the space and the means for an ethical encounter with otherness.

But we must be clear and right away acknowledge that there is no ‘transcendent’ that *is* performance—on this I intuit that most performance scholars would agree, especially since we tend to work against any affirmation of essential origin or identity. There are two differing senses in which the word ‘transcendence’ is often deployed. On the one hand, performance may be said to ‘transcend’ notions of originality or essence, thereby escaping conventional classifications. For example, Bill Brown speaks of the phenomenon of Michael Jordan as a globally recognizable icon that both caters to fascination with the black male athlete and ‘transcends’ race.<sup>83</sup> In another recent example, Jennifer Parker-Starbucks’ reimagining of the cyborg beyond literal fusing of the live and technological ‘can destabilize various binaries: body/technology, able/disabled, even human/non-human, and allow a reflection upon bodies emerging through this destabilization in performance’—bodies, it might be argued, that not only destabilize but transcend the categories through which they play.<sup>84</sup> From this point of view, performance is seen to ‘transcend’ essence; that is, ‘transcendence’ in this sense *is* an act of resistance against the essential. But on the other hand, ‘transcendence’, when it refers to the essential, is also that which performance resists. As Derrida argues about the impossibility of the ‘pure’ event in ‘Signature, Event, Context’, performance is what refers to the *absence* of the original or the essential—that which transcends or goes beyond context. As with Schechner’s theory of restored behavior or ‘twice-behaved behavior’, performance is a repetition that is actually an invention each time, since no event can take place in exactly the same way twice (so that one could also easily say, each performance is its own original).<sup>85</sup> In a like manner, Joseph Roach models performance as a kind of surrogation, creating a substitute for something prior in an act of both displacement and replacement, but not exact repetition.<sup>86</sup> The performance of an absent original is also a core concept of gender theory, where gender itself is seen as performance that may adopt and repeat social convention but references no essential gender identity. We see the absence of transcendence also in the notion of ‘disidentification’ discussed by José Esteban Muñoz, wherein minority artists take up the oppressive discourse of the mainstream to deploy it in new and creative ways that serve alternative and resistant purposes.<sup>87</sup> And in the above-referenced language of the ‘ontology’ of performance notably posed by Phelan, resistance to commodification likewise prevents performance from referencing any essential *thing*. Consistently, scholars theorize *performance without transcendence*, or performance *against* transcendence.

Within the language of ethics, however, ‘transcendence’ is an important term that identifies but does not essentialize the other. This is why, within the language of negative theology, the absolute transcendence of the divine does not describe a God-thing that simply lies beyond the limits of human perception but, instead, indicates the absolute limit of human understanding itself in relationship to a reality that is at once no-thing. ‘The transcendent’ is not a noun. For performance studies, between its commitment to an ethics of otherness and the rejection of transcendence arises something of a conundrum. It would seem that performance studies’ ethical commitment contradicts one of its main theoretical tenets—that is, ethics necessitates a transcendence that performance studies already rejects. The language of ethics necessarily speaks of what lies beyond, what *transcends*, the grasp of what Levinas would call the self-same. Ethics is always of the other—human, animal, object, earthly, or astral. It starts with difference, which would seem to call for the establishment of two further things: hierarchy and ontology. Hierarchy arises in the task of separating self from other, and therefore giving priority to one over the other, whether that choice is to prioritize other over self or vice versa. Ontology arises in the separation as well, because as soon as something or someone is different, the self must confirm or deny the existence of something other than the self. And ontology begets transcendence; once something *is*, and *is other*, it transcends the self. Or at least, this reciprocity between ethics, hierarchy, ontology, and transcendence seems to describe their relationship. When performance enters the equation (or perhaps I should say, *function*), however, another approach to the relationship between ethics and transcendence becomes available; *performance without transcendence* corresponds to an *ethics without ontology*.

Ethically speaking, to say that something is wrong doesn’t tell us anything about that thing, but rather about the values of those making the statement. Similarly, to say that a performance has this or that ‘ontology’ doesn’t actually say anything about performance itself, but about the values of those performing; this much is clear even in Phelan’s use of the term. Performance, then, is more adequately described as a-ontological because it is always an ethical act, because performance is always performance with, against, and/or for an other. That other exists as a thing, just as I must be a thing to perceive my limited access to that other. But our thing-ness, our ontology, is not something that can be fixed down into static structure; it is fluidly relational. Performance as ethics without

ontology would understand itself as a function that explores the values of the individuals and communities under consideration within that restless dynamic of ontological interrelatedness, rather than attempting to make empirical observations about what performance is or is not. Performance is never about what I may know of an other, but only ever about my attitude toward that other and/or the experience of not knowing that other. This is the insight that the negative thinker has offered for centuries: that even in my negation of my knowing, I run the risk of consigning that negated knowledge itself to a static, rather than fluid, ontology. So the negative thinker must, again and again, negate the negation in order to prevent herself from ever coming to rest in ontological affirmation. This is what I mean by describing performance as a-ontological: it may continuously make ontological propositions, but it can never rest on ontological affirmations.

The negative discourse of performance studies has extended the language of apophaticism that quietly suffuses Western literature and philosophy. What does representation signify? *How* does representation signify...and is there an alternative to representationalism? There will always be a gap between the 'what' and the 'how', which is not so much a space to fill with discovery as an index for what lies beyond representation itself. This is what 'post-theological'<sup>88</sup> philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy means when he writes, 'An absolute negativity of the Absolute *appears* to constitute all experience of this world and its consciousness of itself'.<sup>89</sup> The 'absolute negativity' 'appears' in two senses—as manifesting itself, and *seeming* to manifest itself. The created, fictional, aesthetic worlds and environments of theatre and performance are microcosmic distillations of the world that Nancy describes, constituted by the negativity of the absolute, or what we might also call the availability yet unapproachability of the transcendent. Such worlds are made up of what they are not. The other is a material reality of one's own existence that remains unapprehensible. 'The transcendent', Nancy further explains, '—being raised high beyond its pure and simple given—has distanced itself in the void of abstraction. Those who claim, reactively, to restore its dignity lose it that much more surely in sentimentality, or in the fanaticism of pretensions to posit the Absolute here and now'.<sup>90</sup> Theatre and performance lie between the void of abstraction and the pretensions of the Absolute; it makes available knowledge of the transcendent through sustaining a learned ignorance about it. What might performances studies become if we approach it explicitly as a negative epistemology, a kind of learned ignorance?

## NEGATIVE THEOLOGY AND CRITICAL THEORY: DECONSTRUCTION

Having already discussed the negative dimension of performativity using Derrida's deconstruction of Austin's performative utterance, in this section I will elaborate on the critical relationship between negative theology and deconstruction. This relationship is one the most contentious and yet crucial places where the history of apophaticism in Western philosophy and literature intersects with one of performance studies' most influential thinkers. Being often aligned (or, as he might protest, misaligned) with negative theology, it should come as no surprise that Derrida's most influential teacher was none other than Emmanuel Levinas. Derrida ends his 'Post-Scriptum' to the essay collection *Derrida and Negative Theology* by giving negative theology this thoughtful shape: 'Negative theology [...] is also the most economical and most powerful formalization, the greatest reserve of language possible in so few words. Inexhaustible literature, literature for the desert, for the exile, always saying too much and too little, it holds desire in suspense. It always leaves you without ever going away from you.'<sup>91</sup> Where Derrida would leave negative theology at that—something that goes away from you without ever leaving you—his former student, Jean-Luc Marion, has much more to say. The differences between their two approaches to this unique use of language can be seen in a series of written responses to one another about the definition and purpose of negative theology that took place in the mid-1990s, recorded in the collection *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*. For Derrida, negative theology speaks of a promise that has already been made, and therefore, cannot help but speak, even in the negative vein:

The experience of negative theology perhaps holds to a promise, that of the other, which I must keep because it commits me to speak where negativity ought to absolutely rarefy discourse. [...] Why can't I avoid speaking, unless it is because a promise has committed me even before I begin the briefest speech? If I therefore speak of the promise, I will not be able to keep any metalinguistic distance in regard to it. Discourse on the promise is already a promise: in the promise.<sup>92</sup>

In this passage, Derrida wrestles with the classic relationship between kataphatic and apophatic speech—that in order to express the inexpressible, we are unavoidably tied to the limits of language. The 'commitment' he identifies resounds with that of the other negative theologians

we have already sampled here, who cannot relinquish their desire for or their responsibility to what remains unknown yet constitutive of the self. What happens, then, is a reconstitution and a re-affirmation, a promise of a promise: a repetition that is an aporia.

From another angle, one that would echo a critique by Marion, this passage could be read as arguing that negative discourse ends up saying nothing because it is empty repetition; it already knows what it is going to say. As Marion might argue, the passage could be read as betraying a refusal to allow negative theology to speak radical difference, even though that is what Derrida's entire philosophy would seem to be about. According to Marion, Derrida seems unable to think (or refuses to think) negative theology between repetition (a promise of a promise of a promise...) and *différance*, which is the never-to-be-grasped, touched, or understood. Marion himself would come in between, to propose for negative theology (or 'mystical theology', as he prefers) and philosophy in general, that which can be both experienced and not fully understood. Marion therefore criticizes Derrida's implicit refusal to encounter negative theology as anything other than re-affirmation of the presence of God:

In short, for deconstruction what is at issue in 'negative theology' is not first of all 'negative theology', but deconstruction itself, its originality and its final pre-eminence. Thus it is strategically important to deconstruction that it deconstruct as radically as possible the twofold claim of the so-called negative theology: that is, its claim to deconstruct God and nevertheless to reach him. If this were missing, the deconstruction which proceeds by means of *différance* would suffer first a rivalry (presence can be deconstructed without it), then a marginalization (deconstruction would not forbid access to God, outside presence and without Being). When deconstruction sets out to attack what it, along with the entire tradition, still designates with the imprecise title 'negative theology,' it is not making an attack so much as defending itself.<sup>93</sup>

Marion, here, seeks to defend mystical theology from the attack of hyperessentialism, which he sees in Derrida's definition of negative theology. In mystical theology, the real, or presence (*hyperousious*), cannot be either affirmed or denied because it cannot be secured in such a dualistic schema. Rather, Marion wants to lift out of such limited language to propose a 'third way', an event of givenness that gives itself, what he calls the 'gift of presence' or the 'saturated phenomenon'.

To understand the ‘quarrel’ between Marion and Derrida more precisely, we should recognize the two very different places from which each is coming. Derrida is a philosopher of language concerned largely with semiotics, born into a Jewish family in Algeria. The concepts for which he is best-known, deconstruction and *différance*, are agents of *interpretation* within systems of signs. Marion is a French Catholic theologian and philosopher primarily interested in phenomenology and its post-modern expression. His philosophy of the gift and the concept of the ‘saturated phenomenon’ express phenomenological *experiences*. So, it is between these two poles, one emphasizing interpretation, and the other experience, that their discussion takes place.

For Marion, phenomenological perception is multidimensional because it is situated in the flesh and it is of the earth. What appears to the senses is a ‘total gift’ because the phenomenon gives itself ‘without restraint or remainder [...] not as the semblance or the representative of an absent or dissimulated in-itself, but as itself, in person and in the flesh.’<sup>94</sup> In order to be perceived, the phenomenon gives of itself without reserve; it empties itself out, so that it is nothing but the relationship described in being given. If it retained some kernel of itself, what was held back would be a resemblance or a sign, signaling a transcendent ‘real’ that had nothing to do with the relationality of presence. Furthermore, the gift of presence is never a one-way transaction. The phenomenon is an event that ‘gives *itself* to us starting from its *self*, to the point that it affects us, modifies us, almost produces us. We never put into play the event (nothing is more ridiculously contradictory than the would-be “organization of an event”), but, itself, at the initiative of its *self*, it produces us in *giving itself to us*. It produces us in the scene that opens its givenness.’<sup>95</sup> The relationship to presence is not one of seeing and understanding, but *being seen*, and therefore of being brought into being through that reciprocal encounter. ‘Being seen’ does not close the grasp on the relationship, and cannot contain the gaze of the other, but demands an openness to presence in a space of not-knowing and surprise. This is what Marion calls the ‘third way’, the phenomenon’s total gift of self, the gift of difference that comes out of the experience of separation, that produces us in the encounter with the unknown.

But what *is* that ‘product’ of encounter? Derrida does not see the possibility of a ‘third way’ outside of affirmation or negation because, for him, any kind of presence is incompatible with deconstruction.

Deconstruction's first and final aim is to do away with the myth of presence as beyond experience and lodged in a transcendent realm. *Différance*, since it operates between distinction and recognition, between affirmation and negation, does not look outside itself for another possibility. Even though *différance* affirms the absolute alterity of the other, which is necessary for ethical relationship, it does not necessarily speak to the physical, practical, embodied experience of that relationship. What for Levinas is the experience of alterity in the demand for responsibility, Marion expresses as the experience of incomprehensibility, claiming for negative/mystical theology a 'third way' wherein presence gifts itself as overwhelming excess. But Derrida's problem with negative theology is that he sees it perform a hard, close-fisted grasp on presence. Marion's problem with Derrida is that deconstruction does not allow the reaching hand to ever touch. Derrida's approach to deconstruction and negative theology remains wary of conventional representation's potential suffocation of its subject, which would bind it to the ideological apparatus that produces it. For Levinas and Marion, religion is not so much a problem but, rather, a generative alternative or interlocutor for philosophy. But for Derrida, religion's kinship with ideology will always be too close for comfort.

And from the theologian's point of view, conscripting deconstruction as a kind of pseudo-theology presents its own pitfalls. Despite the fact that Derrida's ultimate concern is with the possibility of meaning within the impossible project that is deconstruction, we must remember that the poststructuralist school he represents is ultimately incompatible with theology. However, as an intellectual tool, apophaticism is not incompatible with any field, so the relatively simple question to ask is whether the unsaying of the sayable through the expression of the inexpressible is ultimately an affirmation of divinity. If we return to the basic definition of 'performance apophatics' that I am proposing as the restless dynamic that negates negation, then the answer to this question always has to be no. Although some would maintain that negative theology will always sustain a positivistic affirmation of faith, it is my contention that if we follow the tradition carefully, the 'unknowing knowledge' that it offers is not knowledge of God, but a strategy for encountering the reality of what cannot be known. What distinguishes negative theology from other forms (patristic, Biblical, Christic, process, constructive, etc.) is its refusal to make the leap from this 'unknowing knowledge' to faith. It is very difficult in this regard, if a strong adherence to the impossibility of faith is maintained, to argue adequately that negative theology is *not* a kind of



systematic atheism. It is also difficult to pin down, exactly, where negative theology, as negative epistemology, is not actually a kind of realist ontology, one that affirms the presence and reality of other *beings* through the systematic study of how knowledge of the existent may not be limited merely to human phenomenological perception.

### APOPHATICISM, FEMINISM, AND 'ENTANGLEMENTS'

Negative theology can be read as a kind of systematic thinking that, like poststructuralism, attempts to undo its own articulation so as to better understand the assumptions and ingrained responses that condition subjectivity. Although the analogy is far from perfect, in a similar way that poststructuralism critiques systems of power, the apophatic tradition 'deconstructs' human desire, will, and understanding to expose the artificiality of the scaffolding that tenuously upholds not only orthodoxy and dogma, but also the human limitations of language and knowledge itself. Mystic discourse, especially, has been explored by contemporary theorists for its possibilities as a critical tool. As I have discussed, Derrida sees negative theology as a useful strategy for unsaying even though he ultimately designates it as ontotheology.<sup>96</sup> Michel Foucault, through reading Blanchot, has looked back to the mystical tradition's contribution to the history of the interior self.<sup>97</sup> Michel de Certeau's study of the *Interior Castle* of Teresa of Avila explores her discovery of the self as other.<sup>98</sup> Mysticism continues to thread its way through continental philosophy. But this is perhaps truest of the ways in which French feminisms both appropriate and deconstruct critical theory and psychoanalysis using methods that explicitly draw from mysticism and apophaticism.

If, as Luce Irigaray would argue, social and political life has always been patriarchal, then in addition merely to understanding the role of patriarchy in shaping subjectivity, women and other social 'others' who seek subjectivity outside the dominance of patriarchy also recognize that to be a subject is only to be either male, or that which is not male, making the female sex that which is 'not one'.<sup>99</sup> Woman, articulated through the language of patriarchy as 'other' than man, is truly othered because she can never exist for herself, but only as the negative space that defines man; as truly other, she has never actually been represented. She, herself, is not, but in her place is the female monster—hysterical, bleeding, dangerous, sick, seductive, and yet somehow not there. As Irigaray writes, '[H]er sexual organ represents the horror of nothing to

see.<sup>100</sup> Attempting to speak herself, she strains against subjectivity itself, through the unsaying of patriarchal language: ‘No metaphor completes her. Never is she this, then that, this and that [...] But she is becoming that expansion that she neither is nor will be at any moment as definable universe’.<sup>101</sup> Negative theology shares with certain forms of feminism the notion that complete otherness disbands the power of language, because the logical gaps and contradictions that arise when trying to speak complete otherness hijacks language and forces it to speak against itself—speaking as an undoing of language, and as an undoing of power. Although it would be anachronistic to argue that early negative theologians, especially mystics, were ‘feminists’, it should come as no surprise that the unsaying strategies of apophaticism, which often work against powerful hierarchies, echo throughout the work of modern and contemporary feminisms.

Although mystics have come from all backgrounds, inhabiting the margins of every major religion, women led the movement in the high middle ages, far outnumbering men. These women came to convents where they had access to libraries and teachers, and, like the famous Beguines, often formed their own communities, and so were released from the responsibilities of family and childbearing, thus ensuring them longer lives. With varying levels of education, they nonetheless produced influential spiritual treatises, spiritual autobiographies, and works of mystical theology in writing and by dictation, such as Hildegard of Bingen’s *Mystical Visions*, Julian of Norwich’s *Divine Shewings*, Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle*, and Catherine of Sienna’s letters, prayers, and *Treatise on Divine Providence* (now considered a classic of Italian literature). These women were regarded as important prophets, teachers, and leaders, in great exception to women’s perceived inferiority at the time. The wisdom of Hildegard of Bingen, for example, was sought by Bernard of Clairvaux and the pope. Although such recognition was not formalized until after 1970, four women mystics have been named Doctors of the Roman Catholic Church: Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Sienna, Theresa de Lisieux, and Hildegard of Bingen. These women are linked together by the negative nature of their more personal theologies, wherein divine union is often described as dissolution of the self—that is, they conceive subjectivity outside and against the norms of patriarchal language and socialization. Philosophically speaking, they challenge the distinction between self and other—soul and God—in ways that ‘entangle’ being and knowing.

For example, in Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*, which is an allegorical conversation between Love, Reason, Truth, and the Soul (among other characters), the Soul 'loses its name' in divine union. Feminist scholar Ann-Marie Priest interprets this as the mystic rejecting 'her capacity to be identified, distinguished, and thus to be an object of exchange in patriarchal society'.<sup>102</sup> However, Porete also co-opts distinctly feminine imagery that would seem saturated by the patriarchal values of her church, such as the following stanza wherein her being 'not' within Christ's being is described as a pregnancy that overbears and consumes the mother to the point of her annihilation:

I have said that I will love Him.  
 I lie, for I am not.  
 It is He alone who loves me:  
 He is, and I am not;  
 and nothing more is necessary to me  
 than what he wills,  
 and that He is worthy.  
 He is fullness,  
 and by this am I impregnated.  
 This is the divine seed and Loyal Love.<sup>103</sup>

The imagery recalls the Virgin Mary as the 'handmaiden of the Lord'—willingly passive, and praised by the angel Gabriel for her self-abnegation in taking on the role of the mother of God (Luke 1:28). But between the lines of this pious poem can be detected the 'heresy' that got Porete into eventual trouble. In this annihilation, where does Porete end and Christ begin? Through self-dissolution, divine union confuses the distinct subjectivities of woman and seed—she is the seed as much as she is the woman. As Porete might argue, in this state, the soul transcends Earthly, sinful life and is simply virtuous, because it exists on the same plane with God. Insisting that the soul could reject moral teachings as unnecessary while in this state of divine union was only one of the reasons that Porete was burned at the stake as a heretic in 1310. Returning to Priest's words, Porete refused to act as 'an object of exchange in patriarchal society', and so she was obliterated from it.<sup>104</sup> There is a danger that has been noted here as well, however, of using mysticism as a marker for traits that are inherently 'feminine', and allowing 'mysticism' to re-inscribe woman as irrational and overly emotional.<sup>105</sup> Is *l'Écriture*

*feminine* a kind of mysticism? Like Porete's poetry, Hélène Cixous' writing exits the economy of heterosexual, pietistic, paternalistic discourse in order to achieve divine union—with the other as woman. According to Anu Aneja's reading of Cixous' poem *Vivre l'Orange*, inspired by and addressed to the spirit of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, the women 'probe the inner recesses of the self beyond the self, rejecting the non-face, leaving behind all traditional values of "morality", "goodness", and "humanity"'.<sup>106</sup> Like Porete's annihilation through union, this discovery of the non-self is not passive, but 'expels energy, explodes through language, with a force and a rigor which have traditionally been associated with the male voice'.<sup>107</sup>

Other scholars of religion and philosophy have explored the strong correlations between negative theology and the thought of two contemporary French feminists who both work within psychoanalysis: Julia Kristeva and the aforementioned Luce Irigaray. Ann-Marie Priest reads Irigaray's oeuvre not as negative theology *per se*, but as enacting the same negative rhetorical strategies of apophaticism. She draws a distinct parallel between Irigaray and medieval Christian mystics: 'Like the mystic who seeks to bring God into language by holding God always out of its reach and representing instead language's failure, Irigaray also seeks to create a space for the representation of woman-as-true-other by drawing attention to language's failure to represent her'.<sup>108</sup> But not only does Irigaray make use of negative linguistic strategies that echo apophysis, she issues a direct challenge to the patriarchalism of Christianity as well. Priest argues that '[i]n writing woman as God, Irigaray suggests that God is also woman: not that God is sympathetic to woman or has, somehow, a female sexual identity, but that God is (also) that which is suppressed, appropriated, denied, or simply domesticated by a patriarchal symbolic order'.<sup>109</sup> The clear parallel here between Irigaray's feminist thought and apophaticism is the inexpressibility of the truly other—whether woman or divine—within the dominant discourse.

While for Irigaray the true otherness of the other must exist outside the subject, for Julia Kristeva, the divine other resides within. However, Kristeva's adoption of religious language in describing the aims of contemporary psychoanalysis must be understood through her criticism of both psychoanalysis and religion. 'If her texts have a common thesis, it is that Christianity is merely the historical stage on which essentially psychoanalytic desires are played out: Christianity may well be an important historical precursor to psychoanalysis but, crucially, psychoanalysis

is the true successor and replacement of Christianity.’<sup>110</sup> Kristeva’s own ‘mystic atheism’, according to Arthur Bradley, ‘describes what we might paradoxically call a moment of *immanent transcendence* whereby the transcendental does not signify the opening to some exteriority beyond the immanent but the *self-excess or self interruption* of the immanent body itself’.<sup>111</sup> Kristeva’s ‘mystic atheism’ continues the negative strains of her thought; in the influential early work *The Powers of Horror*, her theory of abjection revolves around concepts of abnegation, or the self as constructed through the absence or rejection of self: ‘[...] I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish *myself*. [...] During that course in which “I” become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit.’<sup>112</sup> The process is symbolic and concretized through religion—‘so abjection, so the sacred’.<sup>113</sup> For Kristeva, in *The Powers of Horror* abjection is the perversion of exclusion and taboos, described through language of denial and self-ablation that would be very familiar to a medieval mystic. Like the mystic, Kristeva’s atheist works outside the vocabulary of indoctrination, but her atheism has a capacity for self-reflection that religion does not. ‘Religions recognize human beings’ capacity to create meaning while at the same time denying this intra- and extraphysical dynamic its value as open and renewable knowledge, so as to erect it in a hierarchical system of values.’<sup>114</sup> On the other hand, ‘true atheist thought would suppose, as Sartre suggested, a depletion of transcendence from and in transcendence. In other words, it would be a meticulous and painstaking analysis of the aptitude to represent, symbolize, and think.’<sup>115</sup> Such an ‘atheism without nihilism’ would continuously negate the negation, and resist the resistance, of absolutist speech, very much in line with the traditions of apophaticism that strain for the transcendent within processes of self-negation, against dogmatic ideas of the transcendent as accessible to an elite few mediated by the hierarchy of the Church.

In North America, Jane Flax’s psychoanalytic gender theory describes processes of representation as ‘thinking transitionally’ the fluid exchange between self and other in affective, embodied relationship. Transitional thinking asks ‘how to understand and constitute self, gender, knowledge, social relations, and cultural change without resorting to linear, teleological, hierarchical, holistic, or binary ways of thinking and being’.<sup>116</sup> Flax’s call for transitional thinking was met shortly thereafter in the work of Karen Barad and Catherine Keller, both feminists but a physicist and a theologian, respectively. Barad and Keller are interdisciplinary,

highly imaginative and poetic thinkers who are unafraid to express ethical commitment and make clear the imperatives of social justice through their intellectual and scientific discovery. They both use the concept of ‘entanglement’ to acknowledge the intimate and complex relationships between self and non-self, presence and absence, knowing and being that mysticism also implicates.<sup>117</sup> Of entanglement Barad writes:

Practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated. We don’t obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are *of* the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming. The separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse. *Onto-epistem-ology*—the study of practices of knowing in being—is probably a better way to think about the kind of understandings that we need to come to terms with how specific intra-actions matter.<sup>118</sup>

Barad’s most influential work to date, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, not only talks about such ‘intra-action’, but performs it as well, in an important interdisciplinary milestone. Not only does the book blend science and the humanities but, through this blending, Barad makes and offers an important scientific discovery in quantum physics. In the eighth chapter, she explicates Bohr’s interpretation of quantum physics through his reliance on human concepts, human observers, and human knowledge, which, Barad argues, undermines the cogency of his interpretation. She presents a new interpretation of quantum physics that builds on Bohr but removes the humanist elements.<sup>119</sup> Central to Barad’s thinking is what she calls ‘agential realism’, which recognizes matter as an active agent participating in the very process of materialization.<sup>120</sup> This challenges the assumption that matter is passive, as well as the first law of thermodynamics, that matter is inert unless acted upon. Although the comparison is broad, Barad’s interdisciplinary blending disrupts normative taxonomies of thinking and study in ways similar to the apophatic thinker who interrupts and tears through the careful constructions of dogma, exposing inconsistencies, and proposing new ways to think both knowing and being.

Catherine Keller is perhaps the most visible and prolific theologian working in the negative tradition today, even though her main focus

has been process and constructive theology. For Keller, the apophatic tradition offers not a groundbreaking discovery that will launch us into a more just and peaceful age, but a productive means of complication that has always been unfolding the ‘positive materiality of the universe’ in order to discover the mystery of possibility within the ‘cloud of the impossible’.<sup>121</sup> She takes Nicolas of Cusa as one of her primary models (though her exploration ranges from ancient Platonic thought to Barad’s entanglement theory) in order to argue that, within this highly complicated world, the simplifications that often accompany violence can be redressed through a radical relationality. She follows Mary-Jane Rubenstein’s *Worlds Without End*, who configures Cusan cosmology as a ‘perspectival universe’, to conceive of the world as, also following Barad, ‘intra-active’, ‘the multiplicity of boundless materialization, boundlessly interactive’.<sup>122</sup> Cusan ontology models this kind of inter- and intra-activity; the relationship between God and creature is one of continuous enfolding and unfolding. ‘God is unfolded in everything and everything is enfolded in God’, meaning that the “everything” of the universe as a whole is the way God is in everything’.<sup>123</sup> Such enfoldment pushes against the standard piety of the ‘God within’ that, since Augustine, veers toward a dangerous self-sufficiency and tendency to ignore responsibility to others. In the continuous unfolding of a relational universe, Keller recognizes the misty mystery of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, which is the title of an anonymous work of negative theology in the Christian mystical tradition from the fourteenth century. The roiling and rolling of colloidal vapors, like the unfolding of Cusan relational ontology, is the primary metaphor and trope by which Keller organizes her book. She encounters the cloud again and again, first at the top of Sinai where Moses meets God, and in the pillar that led the Israelites by day through the desert (which Keller identifies as Presence, Shekinah, herself), then reinterpreted as ‘infinite darkness’ in the meditations of the Cappadocian monk Gregory of Nyssa, and the ‘brilliant darkness’ of Dionysius the Areopagite’s nameless God.

From here she turns to the ‘poorly defined cloud’<sup>124</sup> that constitutes each particle of matter, the ‘spooky entanglements’ of the physics of non-separability. Physicists partake in the apophatic language of ‘epistemic uncertainty, ontological indeterminacy, rational contradiction, repressive unspeakability, unknowable infinity’,<sup>125</sup> and especially non-knowledge, demonstrated in the well-known adage from Niels Bohr: ‘Anyone who is not shocked by quantum theory has not understood it’,

which Richard Feynman further conditions with ‘*nobody* knows how it can be like that’.<sup>126</sup> By turning to science, Keller does not dismiss the cloud of the impossible for the realm of facts, but paints a world that is imagined and practiced through creative possibility, physics being one of the tools used to imagine the radical relationality of endless entanglement (a reality that can be perceived but not entirely known). Even though quantum relationality mystifies the perceptible world, the science itself works to make it ‘credible’ through ‘intimate relation to its source’. ‘If that creative source is no longer conceivable as omnipotently producing a world and directing it to its End, it may be imaginable (theologically speaking) as unfolding *in and through* that world, as in its own flesh.’ Keller brings her process theology full circle through the apophatic movement of the *via negativa*; by entering the cloud of the impossible, we encounter in its fullness the lived reality of our inter/intraconnected fleshly and material existence. And every aspect of this existence has always been conditioned by uncertainty:

[T]he ancient *via negativa* now offers its mystical unsaying, which is a nonknowing of *God*, to the uncertainty that infects our knowing of anything that is *not* God. The manifold of social movements, the multiplicity of religious or spiritual identifications, the queering of identities, the tangled planetarity of human and non human bodies: these in their unsettling togetherness will exceed our capacities ever altogether to know or manage them. In their unspeakable excesses they press for new possibilities of flourishing. So I do not find it unrelated that in the same time, in the very neighborhood of these earthbound interactions, the ancient speech of the unspeakable is emitting new resonances: of something ‘more than impossible,’ *infini*, unfinished.<sup>127</sup>

For Keller, negative theology is only as useful as the ‘possibilities for flourishing’ that it may open up; in *Cloud of the Impossible* Keller works to harmonize the contradictory negations of the apophatic tradition within the positivistic project of process theology. In this way, at the book’s end, it remains unclear whether Keller is a negative theologian herself, or whether she has harnessed the apophatic tradition to the purposes of process theology. Either way, *Cloud of the Impossible* is an extremely important contemporary expression of the apophatic tradition.

Can Keller’s processual and constructive approach to negative theology possibly meet the radical ‘negation of negation’ that I have described as the core concept of performance apophatics? Between



Keller's language of flourishing, and my much less affirmative and anti-positivistic interest in repeated negations, there indeed lies yet another conundrum that has always haunted the apophatic tradition. It is the question of what to make of the limit-experience itself. Is the moment of unspeakability actually an experience, in some way, of the non-perceptible? Quantum physics has taught us that not only do acts of measurement change the measured, but the perceiver as well. The fact that I may be affected by an absent presence does not necessarily mean that I know anything more about it...and yet, affect me it does. As a religious historian like Denys Turner might argue, to imbue the ancient and medieval negative theologians with a positive attitude toward experience may be an anachronism. At day's end, the remainder of the question is a relational structure, but it is also the index for the existence of a thing—the other. Keller hauntingly asks of this indefinable intersection between being and knowing, 'What impossibility do you crash against now? Which cloud of intensified uncertainty must you enter? What contradiction between immobility and movement, paralysis and action, realism and hope, love and responsibility, justice and forgiveness, ultimacy and doubt? What transgression might see you through?'<sup>128</sup>

Transgressive; aggressive—an aggressive kind of boundary-breaking; a dangerous act, putting yourself in unknown territory, to become a stranger to yourself, but to open yourself up to the possibility of otherness, which is compassion. Dangerously compassionate. Performance apophatics darkly illuminate the transgressions that shadow our most celebrated accomplishments. As Keller notes, these transgressions can indeed destabilize or tear apart the injustice of hierarchy and the paralysis of assumed binaries, but I am interested in the way that they also may index our sinning unawares. Humanities-based research, in its meta-discourse, cycles back to the question of transgression again and again. Like Augustine, when he realized he was worshipping the beauty of the music and not the Divine Love to whom the music was singing, our torment will be in the difficulty of recognizing inclusion apart from misrepresentation, justice work apart from intrusion, innovative scholarship apart from therapeutic navel-gazing. Is what we thought to be dialogue actually diatribe? Is what we assumed to be an act of compassion actually an insult? Are certain forms of feminism actually oppressive to some women? Does privileging minorities actually ossify marginalization? Performance is the sharp wedge that prises apart the splintering sinuousness of self and other, known and unknown, opening up the apophatic cleft that both

separates and sutures. To perform is to not know, to enter the void of non-knowledge that comprises relation. The separation is an opening—an act of betrayal and compromise, and an invitation, and a responsibility. It is where un-knowing knows itself, where we come to know ourselves as all that we are not. What could be more transgressive—more compassionate and more dangerous—than that?

## NOTES

1. See *The Republic* books V–VII, and *Phaedrus* 249c.
2. Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Writings, VIII: Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, ed. Reidar Thompste (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981) 85.
3. Jean-Luc Marion, 'Phenomenology of Givenness and First Philosophy', *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001) 1–29.
4. 'What comes to us today is the demand to give the meaning of being-in-common according to what it is—in-common or *with*—and not according to a Being or an essence of the common.' Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000) 55. Italics in original.
5. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005).
6. Sarah Jane Bailes, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).
7. And, as Jon McKenzie argues, they focus on product. See *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) 38, 131.
8. The most recent literature on apophaticism (since the mid-1980s or so) is also divided between those scholars who focus on the phenomenological experience of limited access to transcendence, and therefore primarily work within epistemology (see Ilse Nina Bulhof and Laurens Ten Kate, *Flight of the Gods: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000)), and those who are more interested in the question of how the continuous denial that such experience grants any kind of access to the divine troubles human being itself, blending epistemology and ontology (see Denys Turner,

*The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)).

9. I owe great thanks to Kim Skojagdalger-Neilsen for challenging my construct of 'denying experience'. One cannot overlook the importance of sensoriness and phenomenology's emphasis not only on the limits of perception, but also the material body (especially after Merleau-Ponty). For a discussion of the experiential limits of knowledge on the edges of bodily perception, see Danish philosopher Dorte Jørgensen's 'Sensoriness and Transcendence: On the Aesthetic Possibility of Experiencing Divinity' in *Transcendence and Sensoriness: Perceptions, Revelations, and the Arts*, ed. Svein Aage Christoffersen et al. (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015) 64–85.
10. Most influential for performance studies was Judith Butler's 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,' *Theatre Journal* (1988): 519–531. 'Though phenomenology sometimes appears to assume the existence of a choosing and constituting agent prior to language (who poses as the sole source of its constituting acts), there is also a more radical use of the doctrine of constitution that takes the social agent as an object rather than the subject of constitutive acts' (519).
11. See especially Chap. 3, 'Subversive Bodily Acts', in *Gender Trouble*, 1990 (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) 186–189.
12. Rebecca Schneider, for example, argues for the material remains of performance that a discourse of disappearance and loss may elide. See *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (Taylor & Francis, 2011) x. Andrew Sofer's extended analogy that the unseen in theatre is like the 'dark matter' of the physical universe offers a more structural and ontological approach to the epistemological question of what kinds of knowledges such invisible absences may allow. See *Dark Matter: Invisibility in Drama, Theater, and Performance* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013).
13. Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 8.
14. For a primer, however, I suggest *On What Cannot Be Said*, in two volumes (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) ed. William Franke. Not only does this anthology excerpt representative texts from every major movement and period, Franke's introductions to each thinker offer historical and cultural context.
15. Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (Mahwa, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997) 85–206 [II.5.118].

16. Keller, 'The Cloud of the Impossible', *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, ed. Chris Boesel and Catherin Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010) 36.
17. Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names* in *The Mystical Theology and The Divine Names*, trans. C.E. Rolt (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2004) 53 [Chap. 1, s. 1].
18. Cusa, 353.
19. From Old English 'cnawan'. 'Know (v.)', *Online Etymological Dictionary*, web, 10 March 2016.
20. Cusa, 354–355.
21. Jean-Luc Marion, 'mihi Magna Quaestio Factus Sum: The Privilege of Unknowing', *The Journal of Religion* 85.1 (2005): 1–24.
22. Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford University Press, 2000); Brian Stock, *Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).
23. Marion, *Privilege*, 4.
24. *Ibid.*, 5.
25. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F.J. Sheed (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1993) 197–198 [book 10, Chap. 33].
26. Augustine 3 [book 1, Chap. 1].
27. *Ibid.*, 197–198.
28. John of the Cross, 'The Dark Night', *The Collected Works of John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1964) 103–104.
29. *Ibid.*
30. John of the Cross, 368–369.
31. *Ibid.*, 371. My emphasis.
32. And some have used its imagery to explain the Catholic theology of original sin. According to G.J. McAleer, the sexual act is inherently violent unless 'Christoformly' dedicated to procreation. Therefore, Juan's imagery expresses the intimacy between humanity's fallenness and potential for salvation. *Ecstatic Morality and Sexual Politics: A Catholic and Antitotalitarian Theory of the Body* (Fordham University Press, 2005) 118–119.
33. Reuven Tsur, *On the Shore of Nothingness: A Study in Cognitive Poetics* (Imprint Academic, 2008) 53.
34. Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993) 43.
35. Michael B. Smith, 'Translator's Introduction' in *Outside the Subject*, xxiv.
36. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969) 195.

37. Levinas, 193.
38. Sean Hand, 'Introduction', *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 4.
39. Phillipians, 2:8.
40. As Rabbi Ira Stone reminds modern Jews, the Korbanot speaks a 'spiritual language which responds to the fact of our mortality, specifically the language of atonement'. He argues that, since the destruction of the Temple, Jews (and Christians) have been seeking a replacement for the Temple cult and a way to regain the benefit of sacrifice that regains life through death. Atonement through Jesus' sacrificial death became the way for Christians; within rabbinic Judaism the transformation of the table into an altar, and careful study and keeping of the laws of defilement, purity, and tithes became theirs. His ultimate argument is that contemporary Jewish liturgy needs to recover the death *transformation* of the original Korbanot (something shunned post-Holocaust) in order for the community and individual to truly thrive in postmodern society. 'Korbanot: Recovering Our Spiritual Vocabulary', *Judaism* 40.1 (1991): 53.
41. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998) 115.
42. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 117.
43. Ibid., 117.
44. In the 'original expiation' is also the sense of Nancy's community as prior to politics.
45. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 118.
46. Ibid., 114.
47. Aristotle, *The Poetics*, trans. Theodore Buckley (Prometheus Books: Amherst, NY, 1992) 28–29.
48. Aristotle, 34.
49. I am thinking, of course, of Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (Columbia University Press, 1996) offers the concept of surrogation as constitutive of social life and adopts the language of ritual sacrifice to his secularized argument.
50. Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus: An Acting Master for the Twenty-First Century* (London, New York: Routledge, 2009) 129.
51. Carnicke, 130.
52. Jacques Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', *Writing and Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) 295.
53. Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1956) 66–67.

54. Derrida is here quoting Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double*. 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', *Writing and Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) 295.
55. Derrida, 294.
56. *Ibid.*, 297.
57. See Eugenio Barba, *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt* (Aberystwyth, Wales: Black Mountain Press, 1999) and *Beyond The Floating Islands* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986).
58. Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968) 21–34.
59. Richard Schechner, 'Introduction to Part II: Paratheatre 1969–78, and Theatre of Sources, 1976–82' in Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford (eds.) *The Grotowski Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 208.
60. Lisa Wolford, *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996) 5.
61. Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968) 21–34.
62. See especially the 'performance chart': play is more like ritual, according to Schechner, than it is anything else. Richard Schechner, 'Approaches to Theory/Criticism', *The Tulane Drama Review* 10.4 (Summer 1966) 35.
63. Shana Komitee, 'A Student's Guide to Performance Studies', The Harvard Writing Project, web, 10 October 2015, [http://writingproject.fas.harvard.edu/files/hwp/files/performance\\_studies.pdf](http://writingproject.fas.harvard.edu/files/hwp/files/performance_studies.pdf). The guide was written as a teaching resource for a class as part of the Harvard Writing Project.
64. Henry Bial (ed.), *The Performance Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) 1.
65. Richard Schechner (ed.), *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) 1.
66. *Ibid.*, 3.
67. John Willett's *Brecht on Theatre* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1957) is still perhaps the most widely referenced English language translation.
68. Elin Diamond, 'Introduction', *Performance and Cultural Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 3.
69. MacKenzie, 14.
70. *Ibid.*, 50.
71. Joseph Roach and Janelle Reinelt, 'Introduction to the First Edition', *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007) 3.
72. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Introduction to Performativity and Performance' in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial (London and New York: Routledge, 2007) 200. My emphasis.

73. Jacques Derrida, 'Signature, Event, Context' in *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988) 8.
74. 'Signature, Event, Context', 17.
75. Ric Knowles, *Theatre & Interculturalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 30.
76. William B. Worthen, 'Disciplines of the text/sites of performance' *TDR* 39.1 (1995) 13–28.
77. Herbert Blau, 'Letting Be Be Finale of Seem: The Future of an Illusion', *Performance in Postmodern Culture*, ed. Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello (Madison, WI: Coda Press, 1977) 73.
78. Blau, 68.
79. Matthew Goulish, *39 Microlectures: In Proximity of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 111.
80. Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 5.
81. Dwight Conquergood, 'Performing Cultures: Ethnography, Epistemology, and Ethics' in *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013) 21.
82. Ibid., 22.
83. Bill Brown, 'Objects, Others, and Us (The Refabrication of Things)' *Critical Inquiry* 36.2 (Winter 2010): 204.
84. Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, *Cyborg Theatre: Corporeal/Technological Intersections in Multimedia Performance* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 6.
85. See Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985) 36–37.
86. Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 3–5.
87. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
88. Christopher Watkin, *Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011).
89. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, trans. Jason Smith and Steven Miller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) 4. My emphasis.
90. Ibid., 3–4.
91. Jacques Derrida, 'Post-Scriptum' in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, Harold Coward and Toby Fossay (eds.) (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992) 322.
92. Derrida, 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials', *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 84.

93. Jean-Luc Marion, 'In the Name', *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999) 22.
94. Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess*, 19.
95. *Ibid.*, 34.
96. In his early essay on 'différance', he is quite explicit about this. See Jacques Derrida, 'Différance', in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982) 6.
97. Michel Foucault, 'Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from the Outside', *Foucault/Blanchot*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and Brian Massumi (New York: Zone Books, 1987).
98. Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 96.
99. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).
100. *Ibid.*, 26.
101. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985) 229. Ellipsis in original.
102. Ann-Marie Priest, 'Woman as God, God as Woman: Mysticism, Negative Theology, and Luce Irigaray,' *The Journal of Religion* 83.1 (2003) 14–15.
103. Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen L. Babinsky (New York, Mahwa: Paulist Press, 1993) 198 [Chap. 122, 'The Soul Begins Her Song'].
104. Her works, too, have only very recently been rediscovered, having lapsed into obscurity for centuries.
105. 'Is the new "feminine" then to be redefined as the mystic?' asks Anu Aneja in 'The Mystic Aspect of *L'Écriture féminine*: Hélène Cixous' '*Vivre l'Orange*', *Qui parle* (1989): 192.
106. *Ibid.*, 196.
107. *Ibid.*, 195.
108. Priest, 14–15.
109. *Ibid.*, 3.
110. Arthur Bradley, '"Mystic Atheism": Julia Kristeva's Negative Theology', *Theology & Sexuality* 14.3 (2008): 281.
111. Bradley, 285.
112. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 3. Italics in original.
113. *Ibid.*, 17.
114. Julia Kristeva, *Hatred and Forgiveness*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) 211.



115. Ibid., 210.
116. Jane Flax outlines her model of transitional thinking in *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 15.
117. I hope it is clear that I in no way mean to argue that a scientist and theorist like Karen Barad is actually a mystic in disguise (a cringe-worthy assumption, for sure). I mean to highlight the reciprocity between the challenge to patriarchy and authority levied through the theology of women mystics like Porete, and the challenge to the lingering dualisms in both science studies and the humanities issued by Barad. To note this reciprocity is not to draw an equation.
118. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007) 185. Italics in original.
119. Ibid., 248.
120. Ibid., 151.
121. Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015) 93.
122. Ibid., 119.
123. Ibid., 120.
124. This is how David Bohm described the atomic particle. See Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 144.
125. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, 138.
126. Ibid., 140.
127. Ibid., 7–8.
128. Ibid., 106.



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