

A Poststructuralist Liberation Theology?: Queer Theory & Apophaticism

BRANDY DANIELS

“...the option for the poor is still viable in postmodernity.”

—Kwok Pui-Lan

“To deconstruct the concept of matter or that of bodies is not to negate or refuse either term. To deconstruct these terms means, rather, to continue to use them, to repeat them, to repeat them subversively, and to displace them from the contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power.”

—Judith Butler

“To speak of Christ is to be silent.”

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

From an early emphasis on “the preferential option for the poor” and roots in the plight of the economically downtrodden in South America,¹ to a call for the recognition of the “blackness of God,”² to gendered justice and language for God,³ liberation theology has foregrounded interpreting Christianity from the lens of the marginalized and stressed a *telos* of justice and freedom from systemic oppres-

1 Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, Revised. (Orbis Books, 1988). See also, Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Orbis Books, 1987).

2 James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th Anniversary. (Orbis Books, 2010), 63. See also, James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev Sub. (Orbis Books, 1997).

3 See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, 10 Anv. (The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002); Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, Revised. (Beacon Press, 1993).

sion. While not precluding these laudable values, poststructural theory has raised questions of the viability and efficacy of liberationist aims and methodologies. In this paper, I will examine some key critiques proffered by poststructuralism and gesture toward a potential constructive response that attends to these concerns while remaining firmly within a liberationist paradigm. Queer theory, I suggest, is a particularly useful resource for this endeavor. Its critique of ontological categorization and epistemological certitude as key sites of oppression provide a foundation—albeit a contingent and apophatic one—that is relevant to and useful for a liberationist theological framework.

This paper will proceed in three main sections. I begin by briefly explicating key poststructuralist critiques of liberation theology, focusing particularly on its concerns regarding “epistemological imperialism,” on the delimiting theoretical and political impact of “an epistemic/ontological regime.”⁴ From there, I examine how queer theory might serve as a helpful resource, turning to Judith Butler’s analysis of *Paris is Burning* to suggest that poststructuralism enables a way to attend to the ambivalence of agency and constructed nature of categories of subjectivity while also affirming the materiality of the body, thus affirming a liberationist aim while moving beyond a reification of classifications of identity. In the third and final section, then, I suggest that the language and tradition of apophaticism is a potentially constructive way to bridge poststructuralism and liberation theology.

PART I: EPISTEMOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM? POSTSTRUCTURALIST CRITIQUES OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Liberation theology finds one of its most trenchant and compelling criticisms in poststructuralism. Various poststructural critiques have elucidated how liberationist discourses have problematically, not to mention ironically, relied on the insights of modern Enlightenment values and priorities—on an epistemological and methodological framework that engenders the very oppression and marginalization that liberationists seek to resist.⁵ Relatedly, poststructuralism evidences how, in relying on these epistemological claims, liberation theology implicitly affirms a universalizing discourse that problematically reifies and ontologizes identity at the expense of, rather than for the benefit of, those on the margins.

Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, both central figures in the poststructuralist canon, mount compelling critiques at precisely these points. One of the progenitors of poststructuralist philosophy, Michel Foucault has demonstrated how power and domination operate within the formation of knowledge itself. Foucault provides an “archaeology of knowledge” that traces precisely this relationship, cri-

4 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2006), 18, xxvii.

5 In her essay “Liberation Theology in the Twenty-First Century,” Kwok Pui-Lan notes how liberation theology is often implicated as an “heir of the Enlightenment.” Jeorg Rieger, ed., *Opting for the Margins: Postmodernity and Liberation in Christian Theology* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2003), 74.

tiquing the modern, Kantian premise of an “objectivity of a knowledge.”⁶ The way we classify knowledge, Foucault explains, demonstrates its culturally constructed character as well as its operations as a form of power. “Once knowledge can be analyzed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition,” he explains, “one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power.”⁷ For him, this knowledge as a classifying system of control also then operates as a social code that punishes deviancy, ultimately creating subjects that conform—which are simultaneously persons who are coerced.⁸ It is precisely in the constitution of these categories, the production of subjectivities, that domination is manifested.⁹ Foucault later defines this form of domination as biopower, with the creation of categories of identity being one of its key features.¹⁰ “The appearance within the biological continuum of the human race of races, the distinction among races, the hierarchy of races,” Foucault writes, “is a way of fragmenting the field of the biological that power controls.”¹¹ “Race,” as well as other classifications that function to demarcate identities, serve to delineate difference from a constituted norm, thus engendering and enabling governmentality and other forms of control, whereby the state or other institutions “defend society.” Foucault acknowledges that it is precisely modern epistemological and ontological assumptions that undergird domination and control—it is a regulation of *bios*, of life itself.

Philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler builds on Foucault’s account of power and discourse, interrogating how this classificatory impulse impacts feminist discourse and politics. Exploring, in particular, the way these epistemological assumptions/ontological categorizations operate within discourses of sex, Butler explains:

The tactical production of the discrete and binary categorization of sex conceals the strategic aims of that very apparatus of production

6 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, First ed. (Vintage, 1994), 350. See also Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*, Reprint. (Vintage, 1982). Throughout this essay, I employ, and thus embrace, the language of poststructuralism. I recognize, however, that this is a term Foucault himself did not embrace, but use it—albeit with fear and trembling—regardless, if only because it is the most appropriate/least problematic linguistic signifier for the theoretical approach I am engaging with. For an explanation of Foucault’s skepticism of the term poststructuralist, see “Truth and Power” and “Interview with Michel Foucault,” Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley, 1st ed. (New Press, The, 2001), 111–133, 239–297.

7 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, First American Edition, Stained. (Vintage, 1980), 69.

8 Foucault’s discussion of discourse can be found primarily in *Archaeology of Knowledge*. See also his essay “Subject and Power,” in Foucault and Rabinow, *Power.*, 326–348.

9 “Do not ask me who I am and do not ask me to remain the same,” Foucault writes, “leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order, at least spare us their morality when we write.” Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*, 17.

10 For more on Foucault’s account of biopower, see Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975–1976*, trans. David Macey (Picador, 2003).

11 *Ibid.*, 255.

by postulating “sex” as “a cause” of sexual experience, behavior, and desire. Foucault’s genealogical inquiry exposes this ostensible “cause” as “an effect,” the production of a given regime of sexuality that seeks to regulate sexual experience by instating the discrete categories of sex as foundational and causal functions within any discursive account of sexuality.¹²

One of the key premises undergirding Butler’s work is that “feminism ought to be careful not to idealize certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion,” and a key task of her groundbreaking text *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* is to demonstrate how normative notions of gender, even when deployed towards liberative ends, problematically exclude, marginalize, and oppress—that “they establish the ontological field in which bodies may be given legitimate expression” and thus “show that the naturalized knowledge of gender operates as a preemptive and violent circumscription of reality.”¹³ Here, and throughout *Gender Trouble*, Butler demonstrates how liberative political aims (such as those found in various iterations of liberation theology) are often founded upon fictive constructions that regulate, delimit, and hinder the potential liberative outcomes they are working towards.

While neither Foucault nor Butler address liberation theology directly, the implications of their scholarship on the discipline is undeniable. In his book *Beyond Ontological Blackness*, Christian ethicist Victor Anderson relies on these insights to critique how ontology has operated within liberationist discourse to disconcerting ends. Anderson notes that, functioning as “the cult of European genius... ontological blackness signifies the blackness that whiteness created.”¹⁴ Operating within these ontological categories, Anderson’s analysis points out, not only reflects an embeddedness within a European, modernist framework, but also distorts the conditions of African American life and experience and keeps liberationist discourse trapped within a crisis of legitimation.¹⁵ Anderson interrogates how this has occurred within the scholarship of James Cone and other black liberation theologians.¹⁶ Anderson points out in this critique that

...black theology constructs its new being on the dialectical structures that categorical racism and white racial ideology bequeathed to African American intellectuals (notwithstanding its claims for privileging

12 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 31.

13 *Ibid.*, viii, xxiii.

14 Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: an Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 13.

15 *Ibid.*, 15ff., 87. Anderson also questions how survival tends to function as the ultimate telos in liberation discourse, and calls for something more. Anderson asks: “At what point do thriving and flourishing enter the equation of suffering and resistance? An existence that is bound existentially only by the dimensions of struggle and resistance or survival, it seems to me, constitutes a less than fulfilling human existence. We all want more than to survive...” (112).

16 See, in particular, Anderson’s critique in Chapter Three, “Ontological Blackness in Theology.” Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness*, 86–117.

black sources). However, the new being of black theology remains an alienated being whose mode of existence is determined by crisis, struggle, resistance, and survival—not thriving, flourishing, or fulfillment.... I suggest that as long as black theology remains determined by ontological blackness, it remains not only a crisis theology but also a theology in a crisis of legitimation.¹⁷

Anderson's intention, "to alert critics of the linguistic dangers of reifying the categories that govern their discourses in such a way as to mimic, represent, and mirror the discourses they want to reject," reflects and builds upon the concerns raised by poststructuralists, adding a theological dimension.¹⁸

These critiques have called for a response from liberation theology, which has, in turn, complied in multivariate and diverse ways. Some strands of liberation theology have retorted with compelling responses and critiques of poststructuralism and the broader philosophical frame of postmodernism in which it is situated.¹⁹ Others have ceded to postmodern critiques and suggested that liberation theology is a failed project.²⁰ Many, however, have sought a way to 'have their cake and eat it to,' and have attempted to explore how poststructuralism and liberation theology can coexist not only peacefully but constructively. While rooted firmly in the liberationist paradigm, the contributors of *Opting for the Margins: Postmodernity and Liberation in Christian Theology* by and large seek to explore and excavate the rich resources possible through conversation with poststructural philosophy. In her essay "Liberation Theology in the Twenty-First Century," Kwok

17 Ibid., 87.

18 Ibid., 144. In the final section of *Beyond Ontological Blackness*, Anderson turns to how an aesthetic consciousness circulating around the grotesque as opposed to the heroic can be a way to envision liberative space beyond ontological identity claims—a different, though not incommensurate, move than the one I make in this essay.

19 Whereas I suggest that *Opting for the Margins: Postmodernity and Liberation in Christian Theology*, as a whole, envisions poststructuralism and liberation theology as mutually-constructive discourses, the volume embodies a breadth of positions, and some contributors to the volume are critical of postmodernist and poststructuralist positions and aims. For instance, David Field's essay, "On (Re) Centering the Margins: A Euro-African Perspective on the Option for the Poor" is wary of the concomitant rise of interest in postmodern theory alongside post-Fordist, transnational, neoliberal capitalist economies. Similarly, Dwight Hopkins's essay "More Than Ever: The Preferential Option for the Poor," emphasizes the importance of tending to class and poverty, noting how postmodern scholarship has often obscured or ignored this crucial work. Rieger, *Opting for the Margins*, 45–70, 127–142.

20 As Kwok-Pui Lan notes in her essay, "Liberation Theology in the Twenty-First Century," Marcella Althaus-Reid writes "The flirtation of Systematic Theology with Liberation Theology may be coming to an end. It may be moving from a liberationist paradigm toward a postcolonial or postmodern paradigm." Ibid., 75; Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology* (Routledge, 2001), 91.

Pui-Lan names this desire to listen to the insights of postmodernism while also attending to the risks it poses, and seeks instead for "neither a wholesale rejection or an indiscriminate embrace" of its claims.²¹

In his essay that concludes the volume, "Theology and the Power of the Margins in a Postmodern World," Joerg Rieger, the editor of the volume, echoes Pui-Lan's assertion. On the one hand, he acknowledges the poststructuralist theoretical and theological critiques of liberation theology, pointing out that "postmodern thinkers have made us aware of a broader range of factors—many of them more hidden—that shape who we are. This critique of identity offers a major challenge to those in power."²² Moreover, he acknowledges not only the critiques, but the constructive potential, noting that "postmodern critiques of identity and of the modern middle-class self, as well as a sustained concern for otherness and difference, may be useful in developing new and more effective strategies of resistance."

²³ On the other hand however, Rieger, like Pui-Lan, questions the efficacy of a postmodern emphasis on difference and remains at least somewhat wary of how criticisms of "identity" can negatively impact attention to those on the margins. As both a critique and an invocation, Rieger asks, "does this postmodern revolution ever reach the margins?"²⁴ Pui-Lan, Rieger, and the other contributors in *Opting for the Margins* all seek to take seriously the critiques and correctives proffered by poststructuralism while remaining, to varying degrees, skeptical about what poststructuralism can offer in response to the material, embodied suffering of those on the margins.

PART 2: AGENCY AND LIBERATION? MATERIALITY BEYOND IDENTITY

What might it mean to take seriously, on the one hand, poststructural criticisms of liberation theology, and, on the other hand, the material and psychic realities of the marginalized? While acknowledging the critiques raised by Rieger and others, in this section I suggest that poststructuralism, while assuredly susceptible to the aforementioned critiques, also has resources for responding to these concerns and offering a space for attending to the material and psychic well-being of marginalized people seriously—that, specifically as it is taken up by queer theory, poststructuralism can function as/in the service of liberation theology. Whereas the contributors of *Opting for the Margins* critique poststructuralism for what it perhaps does *not* attend to, it is my argument that it is precisely what is left unsaid that provides a framework to speak to, for, and with those on the margins. The apophaticism in and of queer theology is central to its liberative potential, and this section will begin to explore this claim through an analysis of Butler's essay "Gender is Burning."

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler acknowledges these critiques of poststructuralist skepticisms of subjectivity. She explains that "it is no longer clear that feminist theory ought to try to settle the questions of primary identity in order to get on with

21 Rieger, *Opting for the Margins*, 77.

22 Ibid., 181.

23 Ibid., 187.

24 Ibid., 188.

the task of politics.”²⁵ Instead, situating her analysis within a recognition of the potentially pernicious power of categories of identity, she seeks to ask, “what political possibilities are the consequence of a radical critique of the categories of identity.”²⁶ In the preface to the 10th anniversary edition of the text, she emphasizes that the deconstructive and denaturalizing thrust of the text is in fact motivated by the political, that it “was done from a desire to live, to make life possible, and to rethink the possible as such.”²⁷ Moreover, as I examined in the first section of this essay, it is precisely Butler’s point that it is only from within the structures themselves that the margins can be reached. While this is evidenced in the epigraph at the beginning of this essay, it is perhaps most clear in Butler’s work *Bodies that Matter*, a text that attends specifically to the significance of materiality in poststructuralist discourse and its political ramifications.

In “Gender is Burning,” Butler extrapolates on the space (and contingency) of subversion through an analysis of *Paris is Burning*, the 1990 documentary that chronicles the culture surrounding drag ball competitions in New York City in the mid-80’s and the gay and transgender, as well as predominately African American and Latino, communities that were involved in the “balls.” Here, Butler raises questions about the totalizing critiques by bell hooks and Marilyn Frye of drag as misogynistic—that “there is nothing in the identification that is respectful or elevating.”²⁸ While Butler acknowledges that, “there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion,” she argues that *this ambivalence is precisely the space of resistance and resignification*. “It is this constitutive failure of the performative,” she explains, “this slippage between discursive command and its appropriated effect, which provides the linguistic occasion and index for a consequential disobedience.”²⁹ Relying on the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, she notes that this ambivalence, this “relation of misrecognition,” offers space for rupture—that “*Paris is Burning* documents neither an efficacious insurrection nor a painful resubordination, but an unstable existence of both,” and thus functions as “an appropriation that seeks to make over the terms of domination, a making over which is itself a kind of agency...”³⁰

Through the explication of the film, Butler expands on the claims of *Gender Trouble* and calls traditional feminist accounts of agency into question. Building again on Foucault, Butler points out that:

There is no subject prior to its constructions, and neither is the subject determined by those constructions; it is always the nexus, the non-space of cultural collision, in which the demand to resignify or

25 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxix.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., xx.

28 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: on the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 126.

29 Ibid., 122.

30 Ibid., 125, 137.

repeat the very terms which constitute the “we” cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience.³¹

This, she suggests, is evidenced *in* as well as exposed *through* drag—evidenced in the narrative arch of the film itself, as well as in the actual events of drag balls and the lived realities of two key characters, Venus Xtravaganza and Octavia St. Laurent. Xtravaganza and St. Laurent, *in their very bodies*, point to this ambivalence. While Xtravaganza’s performance undeniably hyperbolizes heterosexual gender norms, this reiteration of norms in her particular body is also undeniably subversive—as it results in her murder—and elucidates and enacts through embodied performance Butler’s point that the “replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but rather, as copy is to copy.”³²

Again, while Butler cedes that there is a level of appropriation of the norms of a masculinist, heterosexist economy, it is precisely this appropriation that elucidates and enables subversion because the truth of the norm, a “constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations,” is exposed—or, as she later puts it, the drag ball “contest (which we might read as a ‘contesting of realness’) involves the phantasmatic attempt to approximate realness, but it also exposes the norms of regular realness as *themselves* phantasmatically instituted and sustained.”³³ Or again, when she explains that “the subject is the incoherent and mobilized imbrication of identifications; it is constituted in and through the iterability of its performance, a repetition which works at once to legitimate and delegitimate the realness norms by which it is produced.”³⁴ In short, through an analysis of *Paris is Burning*, Butler suggests that agency is exercised in and through the consolidation of norms, within particular bodies and contexts—that it is ambivalent, and contingent, and because of those things, it is potentially complicit, but it is also potentially subversive. The materiality of the body and the space of political agency are enabled, as opposed to foreclosed, within Butler’s poststructuralist frame.

PART 3: A POTENTIAL POINT OF CONVERGENCE: QUEER THEORY AND APOPHATISM

Systematic theology is a difficult enterprise to describe. Van A. Harvey, whose *A Handbook of Theological Terms* appears on many a seminary syllabi, especially on introductory courses in theological studies, writes that “systematic theology is, as the name suggests, the systematic organization and discussion of the problems that arise in Christian faith.”³⁵ Liberation theology has, historically, both situated itself within systematic theological discourse, as well as pushed back

31 Ibid., 124.

32 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 41.

33 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 125, 130.

34 Ibid., 131.

35 Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms: Their Meaning and Background Exposed in Over 300 Articles* (Touchstone, 1997), 240.

against many of its attendant methodological and theoretical presuppositions—drawing attention to the contexts in which we construct meanings and seeking to ground theological reflection both in and from the place of the marginalized, of the poor.³⁶ In this essay, I have highlighted the value of liberation theology to the discipline, but have also sought to ask how it might be more faithful to its aims in light of a poststructuralist critique. Using Butler, I have tried to demonstrate how poststructuralism might provide resources wherein one can envision liberative aims without reifying problematic ontological and epistemological regimes of knowledge-power. In this final section, then, I want to explore how another component of the theological tradition—that of apophaticism, of negative theology—might serve as a rich resource for doing theology that is simultaneously poststructuralist and liberationist.

Apophatic theology, *Via Negativa*, is deeply embedded within the theological tradition, associated with the Cappadocian Fathers of the 4th century, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Thomas Aquinas. This tradition of “theology by way of negation” stresses the ineffability of God, the inadequacy of human language and concepts to describe Divinity.³⁷ As Mary Jane Rubenstein points out, “*apophasis* does not oppose *cataphasis*”—negation is not opposed to the organization and discussion of Christian faith, but rather, perhaps like liberation theology, provides a sort of epistemological frame through which to theologize.³⁸ This epistemological emphasis on the inadequacy of human knowledge and language to describe God shapes also how we speak about *ourselves*, the human that is made in the *imago dei*. Thus, one can begin to see how a queer theoretical position is an apophatic one, through its deconstruction and eschewal of categorization and assertion of incoherent subjectivity. Butler’s account of subversion through an explication of *Paris is Burning* offers one example of political agency that is enabled by a poststructuralist account of power-knowledge discourse. If knowledge, as Foucault and Butler claim, is key to control and domination, through a production of subjectivity bound to particular categories—then it is perhaps through an *unknowing*, a *silence*, that space for political transformation can be envisioned. Boesel and Keller, in their edited volume *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, echo Butler’s claim about epistemological imperialism and point out its theological inflections in their assertion that “mastery over divine mystery routinely results in a body count.”³⁹ What might political agency, liberation, and transformation look like when envisioned through an apophatic register?

36 For one good overview of this approach, see Mary Potter Engel, *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, ed. Mary Potter Engel and Susan B. Thistlethwaite, Rev Exp Su. (Orbis Books, 1998).

37 John Bowker, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, First ed. (Oxford University Press, USA, 1997), 81.

38 Mary-Jane Rubenstein, “Unknow Thyself: Apophaticism, Deconstruction, and Theology After Ontotheology,” *Modern Theology* 19, no. 3 (Jl 2003): 395.

39 Chris Boesel and Catherine Keller, eds., *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, 3rd ed. (Fordham University Press, 2009), 4.

Butler emphasizes this apophatic dimension of her approach to *gendered bodies* in greater detail in a later text, aptly titled *Undoing Gender*. Here, Butler points out that it is precisely this notion of an autonomous identity that poststructuralism resists (a notion, I might add, that is shared by liberation theology) that is reflected in the body itself. The body does not reify autonomy but evidences its failure. It does not assume independence, but rather signifies dependence. She explains:

Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. It may be that one wants to, or does, but it may also be that despite one’s best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel. And so when we speak about my sexuality or my gender, as we do (and as we must), we mean something complicated by it. Neither of these is precisely a possession, but both are to be understood as modes of being dispossessed, ways of being for another, or, indeed, by virtue of another.⁴⁰

Butler demonstrates that the body evidences and speaks to an apophasis, an unknowing, a dispossession. Rather than being the place where liberative aims are abandoned, however, they evidence themselves to be the place where resistance and subversion, and thus liberation, are most accessible.

Butler thus provides “an unsaying of the body in the name of the body.”⁴¹ In this way, a queer, apophatic account of the embodied self provided by poststructuralism provides a liberative space that resists the mastery and control that pervades an Enlightenment ethos. This is a theme that Chris Boesel and Catherine Keller take up in depth. “Apophaticism,” Boesel and Keller explain, “does not negate bodies as such. Rather it targets our false knowledge, the idols formed in our confusion of the finite with the infinite.”⁴² What Butler’s oeuvre both implicitly and explicitly elucidates is how one can recognize and affirm the lived, material, embodied existence of the marginalized and pursue the political aims of justice and liberation without falling prey to the claims of knowledge and mastery that are bound up with modernist epistemologies. This does not, however, negate or resist the aims of liberation theology—rather, it offers a space in which they can be more fully realized.

40 Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (Routledge, 2004), 19.

41 Boesel and Keller, *Apophatic Bodies*, 11.

42 Ibid., 5. Roland Faber also elucidates this point through an analysis of Nicholas of Cusa in his chapter “Bodies of the Void: Polyphilia and Theoplicity.” “Negativity,” Faber asserts, “does not negate bodying anymore; it negates the *presuppositions* that perform the becoming of the body; it frees the body in its bodying...” (203). See Boesel and Keller, *Apophatic Bodies*, 200–226.