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The purpose of this research is to explore unlikely intersections between the seemingly divergent streams of spirituality and queer theory in the discourses around education. When brought into conversation, the two produce creative tensions particularly in regards to constructions of knowledge and subjectivity.

In an interrogation of “spirituality” as a construct in education, I map a genealogy through Enlightenment and Transcendental thought arguing that “spirituality” in its popular usage cannot be understood apart from a larger explication of Western religious liberalism, and in particular liberal Christianity. I then turn towards a consideration of the utility of such a construct in light of the erosion of the foundational thought on which it depends. Having both levied my critiques of “spirituality” and argued a case for its usefulness, I consider what sort of theological framework is functional as an underpinning for a spirituality concerned with critical pedagogy.

My discussion takes shape in relation to three practices more commonly spoken of in Christian discourse: hospitality, embodiment, and testimony. I explore these three concepts as they support an understanding of queer pedagogy as spiritual practice, particularly in regards to my own teaching experience. Highlighting the investment of both queer pedagogy and spiritual practices in drawing attention to the limits of knowability, I demonstrate how framing queer pedagogy as spiritual practice might enrich both discourses.

QUEER PEDAGOGY AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

by

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Committee Chair

To Ron –
my partner, teacher, and friend.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PART ONE.....	1
Prologue	1
Introduction: A Nomadic Documentary	5
Incident: An Emerging Conversation	10
Incident: A Southern Story	15
Incident: A Call to Teach.....	19
Incident: The Dissertation.....	21
Plateaus	24
Epilogue	31
PART TWO	34
Spirituality in Education	34
Understanding “Spirituality” in Education	41
Spirituality and American Liberal Protestantism.....	49
The Case of Alcoholics Anonymous	53
Spirituality and Education.....	56
Critiques of Liberalism and Foundational Experience	62
Spirituality within Christian Theological Studies.....	72
Towards a Spirituality for Pedagogy	77
Epistemological Metaphors	81
Methodological Metaphors	85
Theology and Critical Pedagogy in a Melting Modernity	89
Spirituality, Pedagogy, and Liberation	90
The Subject and The Authentic Self	97
God’s and God’s Action in the World.....	103
God as Story.....	110

Christ as Embodied/Incarnate Story	114
An Eschatology for Story and Storied People	116
Imagining the Impossible.....	121
Sacred Ambiguity	127
 PART THREE	 128
Interjection	128
Queer, Pedagogy, and Practice	134
Queer Pedagogies.....	134
Spiritual Practice.....	139
Queer Pedagogy and Spiritual Practices.....	145
Embodiment.....	148
Hospitality.....	158
Testimony	165
Conclusion	176
 CODA	 177
 REFERENCES	 184
 APPENDIX A. A LOOSE GARMENT OF IDENTIFICATIONS	 194
 APPENDIX B. AN OPEN LETTER TO THE BISHOP.....	 210
 APPENDIX C. SEXUALITIES AND THE CHURCH	 225

PART ONE

Prologue

This may be my Nineveh.

Nineveh was the town to which God told Jonah to go and “cry out against” (Jonah 1:2, New Revised Standard Version). He ran the other way to “flee from the presence of the Lord” (1:3), eventually was thrown overboard (at his own request), and then spent a few days in the belly of a big fish before being spit up on Nineveh’s shore. It is not a perfect metaphor. I am not standing in judgment of the wicked ways of some depraved city, but nonetheless, I feel as if I am giving in to an assignment I have been avoiding. That is probably a common sentiment as one begins a dissertation, but there has been a back and forth around my willingness to engage this particular work – the intersection of sexuality, Christianity, and teaching – for most of my adult life. It feels so much like the expected dissertation for someone who has lived my life that I have worked fairly hard at resisting it as my work to do. And yet, I know that I have a unique perspective on the intersections of these topics, and I continue to find myself drawn into conversations about those intersections – so much so that when I have made earnest efforts towards writing in other directions I find myself constantly distracted by the questions I ask here.

Please do not hear in my referencing Jonah a bold assertion of any particular theological claim or serious analysis of agency. I do not mean to suggest that God

told me to write this dissertation. However, what I claim is that as I engaged in an active practice of paying attention to what discussions and readings excited me – to those moments when I come to the edge of my seat in dialogue with colleagues, students and friends – I recognized that the stuff of this project matters deeply to me. Despite my varied academic interests and sustained efforts in prioritizing other avenues of research, I continue to come back home to these conversations.

Thus, in large part, I approached the writing of this dissertation as a process of vocational discernment. My understanding of *vocation* as a concept owes much to Buechner's definition:

It comes from the Latin *vocare*, to call, and means the work a person is called to by God. There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of Society, say, or the Superego, or Self-Interest. By and large a good rule for finding out is this: The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done. If you really get a kick out of your work, you've presumably met requirement (a), but if your work is writing cigarette ads, the chances are you've missed requirement (b). On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you have probably met requirement (b), but if most of the time you're bored and depressed by it, the chances are you have not only bypassed (a), but probably aren't helping your patients much either. Neither the hair shirt nor the soft berth will do. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet (1993, p. 95).

I wrote this as a response to the question posed by poet Mary Oliver, “Tell me, what is it you plan to do | with your one wild and precious life?” (1992, p. 94). At least for now, this act of writing is the spiritual practice that shapes my days.

And yet, the implications of this project extend well beyond my personal

practices. Regardless of personal convictions, whether or not one claims identification within a confessing community, educators must grapple with the fact that faith and spirituality looms large for a significant portion of students. Inside and outside of the classroom, theologies inform epistemologies and vice versa. Further, I would argue that even *atheologies*, resistances to spiritually infused epistemological claims, are shaped by a history of ideas that is so culturally bound to the cosmological claims of religious discourses that their rejection still requires their acknowledgment. In a cultural context infused with religiosity and as the inheritors of an intellectual tradition historically bound to religious investments, ignoring the influence faith has on the institutions of education not only fails to disrupt violence emerging as a result of religious privilege, it reinscribes less critical approaches to spirituality and theology with the power to control the terms of the conversation by failing to engage openly.

Spirituality matters. It shapes the matrices through which students and scholars, pastors and activists make meaning of their lived experiences. For those readers, situated in the academy who perpetuate constructions of intellectual and critical engagement as necessarily oppositional to spiritual and theological investments, I invite you to reconsider. This is no altar call, no attempt to insist adherence to some faith tradition, but rather an insistence that the outright rejection of the significance of the claims of those who do choose identification within confessing communities is both violent and counterproductive. It is critical that challenges to the tendency towards substituting faith claims for critical engagement continue to be

challenged, but the work you hold in your hands is also about suggesting that an avoidance of critical engagement is not inherent to discourses invested in holding on to spirituality and theology as productive means of organizing knowledge.

At the same time, I recognize there are multiple audiences for this work. Some will come to this reading actively engaged in the practices of a religious tradition. Some may have even taken on leadership roles, entering into formal covenant with faith communities as clergy or members of religious orders. The fact that this work grows out of a course of study within a secular university are indicative of the assumption that the lines between secular and sacred are increasingly blurry and each may have much to learn from those who privilege other ways of knowing. Yet while I maintain that faith and spirituality still matter in public discourses, I also challenge adherents to engage the world beyond the churchyard. The theoretical lenses offered by the other intellectual projects have powerful and significant implications for those grappling with sacred Mystery.

I have entered into this work hesitantly, in part because I do not want to be perceived as calling for us all to join hands and sing Kumbaya. The agendas that shape the multiple communities who might be represented in this project's readership are not one and the same. And yet, there are points of intersection worth recognizing, perhaps more than one might notice at first glance. There are places in which different readers use different language, but similarly meet the limits of what can be understood and are left scratching heads and facing the choice to either stand with humility or chose denial and the illusions of certitude. Yes, I am personally

implicated in this research project; but no, this is not simply about me working out my inner conflicts. Regardless of what you bring with you into the reading of these pages – regardless of which of the discourses referenced feel familiar and which seem strange – you are invited to consider the implications of disparate and sometimes irreconcilable discourses juxtaposed on one another, to join in imagining new spaces opening up in holding them loosely side by side.

How might these multiple conversations so invested in pushing up against what we know and how we know it inform one another? Is there something to be gained in considering queer pedagogy alongside spirituality? What sort of epistemological and theological issues are raised in such a consideration, and how do those issues shape and inform pedagogical and spiritual practices? These are the questions that I keep bumping up against, and they are the questions that drive this research.

And so, I walk onto the shores of Nineveh, open to what comes.

Introduction: A Nomadic Documentary

Our entry point into this study is in large part grounded in the stories of recent events that led me to stand on this shore, though to call them *stories* imposes a narrative structure that may not quite fit. Perhaps *incidents* is a better choice – not quite *plateaus* or *fields of intensity*, “whose development” in Deleuze and Guattari’s conception, “avoid any orientation towards a culmination point or external end” (1987, p. 22), but working in that direction. There are four of these incidents

reflected in this introduction. They function less as a history than a *nomadaology*,¹ or

¹ Deleuze and Guattari call for a “Nomadology, the opposite of a history” that unlike a history, is not written from a “sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus” (trans. 1987, p. 23). The concept of a study of wandering appears in the context of their theorizing about the nature of knowledge production in relation to written text, and specifically books. Their primary metaphor, the rhizome, will be further explored as we progress, but they also employ the image of a map as opposed to a tracing. Whereas a tracing is simply reproducing the same “overcoding structure or supporting axis” (p. 12), a map “constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies with organs onto a plane of consistency” (p. 12). A Nomadology, then, might function as a meta-analysis, a study of the movement and the movers, of the terrain and the path charted through it.

The very structure of the text you are reading begins to play with this notion as it disproportionately locates the building of a theoretical framework in the footnotes, mapping a terrain, the concepts and their accompanying symbols, through which I as the author am exploring in the production of the written text. In bringing her own research into conversation with a wide range of postmodern textual practices, some of which intentionally push against the limits of intelligibility, Lather (1991) offers a sentiment that resonates with what I am doing in this project: “this text I have created feels more traditional than not, no radical departure from the tradition which it interrogates. As but one example, it clearly does not break with a profusion of references and footnotes in its creation of textual authority” (p. 10), and yet, my intent is in some ways to exaggerate the role of the footnote as textual convention so that the intentionality of the performance functions as parody. Consider this textual drag, employing a camp aesthetic to the authoritative structure of academic writing.

Lather goes on to suggest, however, “to write ‘postmodern’ is to write paradoxically aware of one’s complicity in that which one critiques...while I in many ways inscribe the conventional and provoke conditioned responses, I attempt, via making explicit my authorial agendas, to subvert those responses by foregrounding how they were induced” (1991, p. 10). As Lather works within prescribed conventions, at least within that particular book, she pushes up against those conventions by acknowledging her complicity with them and undercutting the assumptions they evoke. So, as I engage similar strategies, in some ways what I am about here is a sort of Dolly Parton shtick in which she jokingly acknowledges the amplified artifice of her image – but here it is the assumed authority as author that is acknowledged as textual performance, and you, the reader, like a Dolly fan, is in on the joke. That is not to suggest that these footnotes are less important than the text that hovers above them, if anything it is to suggest that the lines between what is primary and what superfluous are arbitrary and permeable. We all know Dolly is wearing a wig, she names it openly, but as she never appears in public without one it

map of my wonderings. The first three document academic/professional opportunities that have opened for me since the summer of 2008, with attention paid to the ways in which they have pushed my thinking and engagement around questions relevant to this project and the work that they have generated. The fourth draws from the previous three experiences – not so much as bases, but more as moments of crystallization,² bulbs or tubers giving way to their offshoots³ – as I articulate a vision

is fully incorporated in what we consider the “real” Dolly Parton. The superfluous is central.

In later work, Lather continues to challenge the ways written text functions on the page in order to produce or reinscribe assumptions about the linear nature of knowledge. In *Troubling the Angels* (1997) a book she coauthored with Chris Smithies about women living with HIV/AIDS, the authors employ text boxes, split-pages, and other textual arrangements as they present their research. Explaining their textual strategies, they suggest “While this book is not so much planned confusion as it at first may appear, it is, at some level, about what we see as a breakdown of clear interpretation and confidence of the ability/warrant to tell such stories in uncomplicated, non-messy ways” (p. xvi). Lather and Smithies make an epistemological claim by challenging the assumptions about how a written text functions in the production of certain ways of knowing. Though I make only occasional use of their specific strategies, elements of that kind of thinking about representations of knowledge may appear at other points in this work.

² My use of “crystallization” as a metaphor is intended to refer to the process of a solid forming from a supersaturated solution, the idea being that a fluid but densely constituted body of knowledge gathers into clusters and becomes stable under particular conditions. Richardson (2000) uses crystallization in a related manner, offering it as a more complex model for thinking about validity in research that utilizes a multiple methodologies, perspectives, or data than the more commonly used concept of triangulation. She posits the crystal as “the central imaginary for validity for postmodern texts,” because it “combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach” (p. 13). Richardson’s concept affirms the same sort of nonsynchronicity Villaverde (2008) describes as “a way to rethink time and elements as not occurring together yet connected. The structure for connection is closer to multiple networks or rhizomes that still affect each other despite the potential distance between elements or events” (p. 145).

³ Again, this image is drawn from Deleuze and Guattari’s (trans. 1987) metaphor of the rhizome. Unlike the logic imaged by the tree, whose roots are binary and ever

for this dissertation. In essence, the fourth part conceptualizes this dissertation as another in the series of academic/professional opportunities, another bulb or tuber, like a potato to be chopped up only to produce more vines and other potatoes.

I resist placing these in a chronological ordering, in part because it would be a reductive and linear rendering of what has been a complex and rhizomatic⁴ process, and in part because I am unsure of the dates and sequencing even over these past

splitting into smaller parts (much like a tree diagram of a sentence – split into two phrases, then ever smaller parts defined in opposition to one another until each term is coded), the rhizome “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive” (p. 7).

⁴ Deleuze and Guattari (trans. 1987) describe four characteristics of the rhizome: connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, and asignifying rupture (pp. 7-9). In describing a process as rhizomatic, I mean to suggest that it could be similarly characterized. Specifically in this case, I am making an epistemological claim in resisting a narrative structure in which events unfolded in simple cause/effect patterns in order to produce a clearly defined knowing. My experience of the incidents described in this introduction has been that they functioned as sites of performance in which multiple identifications, ways of knowing, and bodies of knowledge were assembled for particular purposes. These assemblages then produced offshoots, both new ways of knowing and new knowledge.

Building on Deleuze and Guattari, Gannon and Davies (2007) describe the rhizome as an “unseen, underground, creeping, multiplying growth that can strangle the tree or the root of conventional thought” (p. 87). While extending in multiple directions, rhizomatic plants both form points of crystallization or “knots of arborescence” (Deleuze and Guattari, trans. 1987, p. 20) like tubers and bulbs, and unpredictable patterns, “moving underground, splitting off, and springing up in anew in unexpected places” (Gannon and Davies, p. 87). Thought described as rhizomatic then similarly links unexpected texts and events, making surprising connections and disruptions. Ultimately, such analysis disrupts the concept of a unitary, rational subject – a discernable knower to do the knowing. In using the term to describe thinking about my own experiences over the last several months, I play in the tension suggested by my own subjectivity. In other words, I challenge the assumption that I could step outside of my experience and reflect back on it. Rather, I assume that I am produced as a subject by the discourses through which the telling of the stories find meaning, and I am simultaneously implicated in their production.

eighteen months. I also want to avoid the illusion that these few events documented below are discreet and occurred in isolation. They reflect ongoing dialogical processes built on conversation, writing, preaching, and teaching that happened both long before and during the half year before this writing. For example, one of the pieces explored in what follows contains work written a year earlier, which in turn contains work revised from my Master's project written five years before that.

For our purposes, what is particularly helpful in the case of the incidents explored here is their production of written documentation – a mapping of my reengagement of a larger discourse on sexualities and the church, informed not only by my own stories and theological convictions, but also by my academic engagement with the theoretical tools of curriculum and cultural studies. If, as mentioned before, they also point towards *plateaus*,⁵ significant not in their adherence to a narrative structure but rather each functioning as one field of intensity among many, then one could read the documents produced out of the first three incidents in any order and still find connections. Part of the frustration of a bookish writing project is the imposition of a linear form, one that may be pushed up against, but in the end one

⁵ Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of a "plateau" is based in Bateson's use of the word in designating "a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culminating point or external end" (trans. 1987, p. 22). They use the term to refer to "any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome" (p. 22). A plateau, they explain, "is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end" (p. 21), so for our purposes, the term refers to points in the theorizing or analysis that multiple and disparate strains of thought obtain some degree of arborescence. While not conforming to a narrative structure (with a clear point of initiation, gradual building to a climax, and subsequent release) the plateau functions as a field of sustained energy, a site in which the multiple offshoots entangle and engage.

page still precedes another. In many ways, this particular project functions more like a website in which the links are nearly as significant as the text itself – a website in which one’s route through the written text could take multiple forms. As a result those three documents, referred to as *appendices*, are far from peripheral and, in fact, make up the core of the work. They are the driving force behind these early pages.

While each of the documents that give shape to this introduction offers a glimpse into my thinking in response to an external stimulus, the larger mapping occurring within these pages is best read as a performance rather than an assertion of an alleged “competence”.⁶ So, I introduce my exploration of queer pedagogies as spiritual practice by inviting the reader to explore the terrain I traversed immediately preceding my current framing of the primary content of this dissertation. I know no other way to start from where I am than to explore how I came to be here. Yet, I know that no matter how rigorous my intent, any path through those fields of yesterday’s knowing is drawn somewhat arbitrarily – as is any portrait I draw of myself as knower – so please hold this text loosely as you read along. I suspect it may shift in your hands.

Incident: An Emerging Conversation

While I was supposed to be working one of my other academic projects into a dissertation proposal, I was invited to write a piece on “the inclusion of homosexuals in the church as a justice issue” (that is how it was presented to me in a conversation

⁶ In their explication of the map/tracing metaphors, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the more rhizomatic *map* has to do with performance, while the tree-like *tracing* “always involves an alleged ‘competence’” (p. 13), of which they are clearly skeptical.

over coffee) for an audience of Baptists interested in emerging church movements.⁷ I countered with an offer to write an essay reframing the initial request in a way that would allow me to have the conversation I have been longing to have with church folk about sexualities for years but have struggled to find a forum that could support it. What I experienced in the process of writing the essay was an unmistakable burst of energy that stood in stark contrast to the hours I had spent avoiding my initial dissertation proposal. I recognize three aspects of the invitation to write this essay that felt life-giving to me: first, it is a topic I know well and to which I am passionately committed; second, I was invited to draw from what I have learned in my formal education in order to write for an audience beyond the academy – quite different from spending a summer writing comprehensive exams for an audience of four professors; and third, the invitation came with a request to ground my thinking in

⁷ “Emerging church movements” refers to a loose network of collective actions ranging from online communities, to neo-monastic intentional communities, to congregations worshipping in new ways and new spaces, all primarily concerned with reconceptualizing Christianity in a “postmodern” era. In this regard, proponents of the movements tend to transgress modernist theological boundaries between liberalism and fundamentalism, orthodoxy and radicalism, in their attempts to navigate new ways of embodying Christian principles. While their influence has been significant in mainline denominations, the movements have often been critiqued for their failure to challenge a universalizing of middle-class, white, masculine experience in articulating their critique of the larger church. The term “Emergent church” is also frequently used, but has largely come to be specifically associated with the Emergent Village (www.emergentvillage.org), an organization born out of the work of Brian McLaren, one of the movements’ most well-known proponents. For more information about the emerging/Emergent church, I suggest Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), and Ian Mobsby, *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church*, (London: Moot Community Publishing, 2007).

my own story.⁸

⁸ Pinar and Grumet opened the door to the consideration of curriculum as autobiographical text with the publishing of their influential *Toward a Poor Curriculum* (1976). Using the term *Currere*, the Latin root curriculum, which translates as “the running of the course” (Pinar and Grumet, 1976, p. vii), they posited a method by which students of curriculum could sketch “the relations among school knowledge, life history, and intellectual development in ways that might function self-transformatively” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman, p. 514). As he further developed the method of *Currere* as curriculum research, Pinar proposed four movements in the process: regressive, progressive, analytical, and syncretical. In exploring the relationships between the knower and the known that structure the educational experience, *Currere* seeks “to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one’s understanding of his or her life” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman, p. 520). It is not my intent at this point to thoroughly explicate *Currere* and its development over the last three decades. What matters more is that within the field of curriculum studies, autobiography has emerged as a significant theme and research method.

Yet any autobiographical project, including my own (maybe especially my own), raises my suspicions. In her essay “The Evidence of Experience” (1991), Scott raises important questions about the ways in which personal experience is evoked in the writing of history. Her concern is that an appeal to experience buttresses claims of uncontested evidence, “what could be truer, after all, than a subject’s own account of what he or she has lived through?” (p. 777). Her concern is that the reliance on experience as foundational in writing “histories of difference,” histories that run outside of or in tension with hegemonic historical narratives, weakens the critical thrust of the analysis. Rather than offering interventions into the discourses that shape subjectivities in hegemonic terms, histories of difference assumed to be written from outside the orthodoxy ultimately reinscribe its discursive structures and exclusionary practices. In taking “as self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented and thus naturalize their difference. They locate resistance outside its discursive construction and reify agency as an inherent attribute of individuals, thus decontextualizing it” (p. 777). Lifting up experience as the origin of knowledge, she goes on to argue, privileges the subject (the knower – either the person who had the experience or the historian recounting it) as foundational to the analysis. The effect is to either ignore or silence questions about “the constructed nature of experience, about how about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one’s vision is structured-about language (or discourse)” (p. 777). Thus, the evidence of experience ultimately serves as the evidence for the fact of difference, rather than an analysis of how difference is discursively produced.

So what might Scott’s critique, brought into conversation with Pinar’s notion of *Currere*, have to offer this project? As one whose work includes queering the discourses about homosexualities and inclusion in the church, how might I be more

Appendix A is a version of that essay, which was written as a chapter for a book titled *Baptimergent: Baptist Stories from the Emergent Frontier* (Roberts, 2010).⁹ Writing the essay marked a shift in my focus that ultimately re-opened me to the larger work of this project I now engage. Though less traditionally academic in its style, it offers significant insight into how I situate myself within a larger conversation about sexualities and the church, and ultimately is a reflection of my pedagogical commitments in that regard.

A reader familiar with queer theories and curriculum studies can certainly see

attentive to the ways in which my drawing from my own experience reifies discourses of difference rather than analyzes their function?

Pinar's driving concern that the emphasis on the "individual" in educational research was reduced to an abstraction led to his working with Grummet to draw attention back to the lives of learners, to autobiographies (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman, 1995). For curriculum scholars, *Currere* can then blur the distinctions between student, researcher, teacher, and scholar. Theory and practice are informing one another as meaning is made, as knowledge is produced. I am reminded of Wilchins' conversation with her editor about writing *Queer Theory, Gender Theory* (2004). The editor remarks, "In school I used to know this stuff, but now I hardly use it." Wilchins responds that is "stuff I use practically every day." Wilchins moves in an out of storytelling, blending biography, autobiography and theory in attempts to educate for social change. The challenge for me, as scholar and researcher, is to live in a similar tension that acknowledges my life experiences as texts for theoretical analysis without falling into the trap of fetishizing the autobiographical impulse. The hard work of the this kind of project is to utilize my stories, as I read them from this vantage point, as means towards opening spaces for further interrogation rather than shutting down possibilities by playing experience as a trump card, self-evident and analysis resistant. The problematic temptation towards reducing myself to an easily discernable subject, somehow knowable and known, is real – and yet, if I am to engage this particular work with integrity, I must acknowledge that my experiences loom large and offer rich texts from which to draw. I hold those texts loosely, knowing that any claims towards expertise of my *self* as a subject are contestable, and dependant on the discourses I have access to as I participate in the constituting of my *self* as a subject to begin with.

⁹ Roberts' book went to print, though my chapter was excluded by the publisher's editorial board. See the *Interjection* (p.120-125).

my attempts to theorize my autobiography and use it as a springboard for a larger conversation. Despite a political choice to avoid the term “queer” (given that the initial invitation was to write about the “inclusion of homosexuals”),¹⁰ the essay reflects a queering¹¹ of my own positionality as well as the larger “inclusion” discourse that has shaped it. Similarly, I made a decision to forego a more in-depth and capillary analysis of power, yet still attempted to disrupt the cultural fiction of a presumed unitary and autonomous subject that drives a politics of difference propping up unidirectional constructs of power analysis. The initial autobiography also self-consciously plays on the Foucauldian notion of confession,¹² and brings it into

¹⁰ The word *queer*, in this context, is intended to point towards particular ways of critiquing and rethinking identity politics or politics among activists and scholars. Among the practices and strategies known as *queer theories* is, like the essay in *Appendix A*, a reconsideration of the “tendency to understand sexual identity on the basis of the gender of one’s sexual object choice” (Sullivan, 38). Queer theories and their implications for both critical pedagogies and spiritual practices will be further explored throughout the dissertation.

¹¹ Hall remarks on how *queer* functions in different contexts as an adjective, noun, or verb. The verb form, employed here (technically as a gerund), refers to processes that apply “pressure on simplistic notions of identity” and disturb “the value systems that underlie designations of normal and abnormal identity, sexual identity in particular” (p. 14).

¹² Foucault claims that the technologies of self-examination and confession are aspects of a kind of self-formation he calls a “hermeneutics of desire” (trans. 1978, p. 50). In the *History of Sexuality* Volume I, he describes self-examination as “an infinite extracting from the depths of oneself” (p. 59), through which one is supposed to come to an understanding of the truth of oneself. As a self-known subject, one is then compelled to make pronouncements about oneself, leading Foucault to name confession – growing out of the Christian tradition and permeating Western culture through legal, pedagogical, medical and other discourses – as being “at the heart of the procedures of individualization” (p. 59).

Foucault argues that the impulse towards confession has been so normalized that we no longer recognize the exercise of power implicit in its structure: that one confesses to another (priest, therapist, magistrate, teacher, etc.) who authoritatively acts (absolving, interpreting, judging, evaluating, etc.) to make meaning of that being

conversation with Pinar and Grummet's (1976) work on *Currere* as I seek to problematize my sense of self, even as I am participating in its constitution.

The *incident* in question here is the process of writing itself, from the invitation through the decision to include the essay here. The essay is useful in as much as it points to the incident, which is itself useful (like the other incidents I describe) as it becomes a site of performance framing the collision of several bodies of knowledge and ways of knowing.

Incident: A Southern Story

Also in the past several months, an opportunity emerged for me to write a chapter to submit to an upcoming book entitled *South to a Queer Place* (Whitlock, pending), which again led me back to theorizing my story as an entry point into

confessed. Rather, the act of confession has come to take on a libratory meaning, by which the confession of some moment of self-awareness one is assumed to be freeing from oppressive social systems functioning to repress a subjectivity assumed to be both autonomous and internal (p. 60). An example of this libratory confessional understanding is the notion of "coming out," or publicly confessing one's "sexual orientation." Rather than expressing a pre-existing truth found resting deep inside the self, Foucault understands such acts as producing knowledge and subjectivity. Confession, as a technology, functions within a network of power relations that identify, classify, and evaluate individuals according to normative values. Thus, a disjunction between the knowledge of self and the interpretation of that knowledge by others is generated (p. 61).

As I intentionally evoke the language of confession in the essay in *Appendix A*, I do so with a degree of irony. Situated as an ordained minister, writing about identity and religious experience, I make use of the phrase "I confess" as a refrain while entering into an analysis of Christian sexual discourse that disrupts the very subjectivity produced in those confessional acts. The confessions are themselves full of contradictions, challenging the interpretive structures through which they might be read. In the end, my intent is to question the libratory assumption of such confessional acts, and instead draw attention to the ways in which they function to produce particular subjectivities (while remaining accessible to readers less familiar with either Foucault or queer, post-structural thought).

reconsidering this larger discourse about sexualities and the church. For that project I drew from work I began a year earlier around the production of sexual subjects in Christian discourse, both through silence and an essentialism rooted in certain creation theologies. I connected that analysis to a consideration of the church's role in perpetuating systems of violence, particularly towards young people.

Reconsidering this work in conversation with Whitlock as I prepared the chapter led me to a greater attentiveness to the role *place* plays in my own thinking and the shaping of the discourses through which I make meaning of my life as a cultural text.¹³

¹³ In *The Autobiographical Demand of Place: Curriculum Inquiry in the American South* (2008), Casemore builds off Pinar's conception of Currere as he considers the South. "I want to understand the role of place in my experience," he begins, "Place indicates particular contexts in which I am immersed as well as my subjective interaction with these private, social, and aesthetic spaces" (p. 1). As he draws his attention to the American South, Casemore notes that traditionally a "sense of place" is "assumed to be a fundamental trait of authentic Southern identity" (p. 2). It is a trope, he contends, that functions to ensure adherence to dominant cultural values and silence conflict and dissent from the public sphere. Taking up "place" as a cultural text, destabilizing an assumed inherent centrality in the Southern imaginary, he considers the ways in which a romanticized sense of the South plays up the virtue of "rootedness" and obscures the conditions of social conflict (p. 3). Yet, the invocation of place in Southern writing even while romanticized, finds its meaning in relation to discourses of slavery and segregation, even in their post-1960s reiterations. For Casemore, this dominant fiction of the South provides a sense of proper position, even if it is one built on a collective belief in the "the adequacy of the male subject, the unity of the Oedipal family and the coherence of the patriarchal world" (p. 5).

Ultimately, Casemore suggests that the notion of the South, and the value of a "sense of place" to the Southern identity, function to resist analysis and protect dominant social orders. The ways in which these tropes are reiterated in wide ranging discourses then continues to create a sense of demand that plays a significant role in the constituting of the Southern subject. I recognize the value of his critique in looking back on the essay in *Appendix B*, as I made these first in-roads into an analysis of the ways "the South" functions to shape my own subjectivity and the engagements with the particular discourses that I am taking up in this larger research

My work around sexualities and the church occurs within the context of Southern Protestantism, and as we move through this dissertation the significance of that awareness becomes clearer, since so little of the work in queer theological and biblical studies is grounded in those particular expressions of Christianity. Within my own practice as an educator and pastor, the choice to remain in the South has not been insignificant. The demands of place have shaped my career trajectory and discourses that have constituted my subjectivities. The essay, found in *Appendix B*, draws from my academic experiences in conversation with other settings that have shaped my education. It contains a blending of voices and writing styles, reflecting my navigations of these various institutional identifications.

Clearly the content of *Appendix B* names other significant threads in my autobiography that shape both my passion for the larger content of this study and the frameworks through which I approach it.¹⁴ The work with the Lazarus story began as

project. My participation in reiterating some of the tropes of a romanticized South, even as I seek to disrupt them, merits further analysis. Much like Scott critiques the referencing of experience as a way of resisting analysis, Casemore suggests that referencing a sense of place in relation to the American South can function to mute difficult and contentious conversation. My challenge then is to honor the discursive power of the South, the demands it still places on me, as I navigate the sites of both adherence to and fissure from its dominant fictions within the ways I am constituted and constitute myself.

¹⁴ Again, I am aware of how the confessional element of the essay functions to produce a sexual subjectivity that is interpreted through a network of discourses and power relations over which I have little control (see Foucault, trans. 1978). Even in suggesting that I include it because the experiences contained within it shape my perspective, I acknowledge ways in which my speaking of experiences of sexual abuse produces a subjectivity that might be read as “victim” or “survivor,” depending on how the reader navigates those networks of discourses and accompanying power relations.

a portion of my final project for my Master's in Divinity, a thesis entitled "*You're Invited: A Queer Homiletic of Hospitality*" (Ammons, 2003), and it reflects some of my earliest attempts at queering scriptural texts.¹⁵ More importantly for our purposes,

Even further, I acknowledge that understanding a sexual relationship between an early-adolescent boy and a middle-aged man as abusive is not inherent, but likewise interpreted through webs of discursive productions of knowledge. Foucault (trans. 1978) and Rubin (1993) both raise questions about the regulation of childhood sexuality, and would likely critique my interpretation of those events in my life. I name this not so much because I agree with them, which as my essay makes clear I do not, but rather as a means of continuing to contest my own authority, even in interpreting my own experiences. I acknowledge that a tension could be identified between the poststructural logic I evoke in disrupting the hegemony of gender of partner choice as the primary means of organizing sexuality, while still adhering to what some would argue is an arbitrary construction of adolescence employed to regulate sexuality.

It is a critique I am willing to accept, as the interpretation of those experiences I offer in the essay continue to function in a way that coincides with my interpretations of later experiences. In effect, I am naming here my own complicity in reinscribing normative sexual values in my reading of these life experiences, while actively disrupting normativities in reading other experiences. In this way, as Pinar and Grumet (1976) suggest, autobiography is curriculum, in which the dissonances produced in the telling of one's story invite the learner into deeper engagements with the production of knowledge.

¹⁵ As already alluded to in footnote 11, Foucault offers a significant critique of problems with liberation inherent in the notion of "coming out." He suggests that the confessional act is an act of self-formation rather than the proclamation of some uncovered self-knowledge it is purported to be (trans. 1978). The tensions around this notion of liberation, expanded on by many and central to many theological and pedagogical projects, will continue to emerge throughout this work. Ultimately we will consider not so much whether or not liberation can actually occur in any meaningful way, but rather how liberation as a concept functions and whether or not that functioning is useful.

In its initial form, my exploiting the phrase "come out" in my reading of the Lazarus story occurred within a sermon with decidedly gay liberationist themes. The broadening of the call to come out of the tomb was intended to draw attention to the ways in which "out" queer preachers could open space for others to challenge the normativities that regulated their lives. Reworked into this context in which it also functions as a metaphor for healing from childhood trauma, the liberationist elements remain central. Again, I claim an awareness of this so that I might rest into the messiness. I know what is challenging about the idea of liberation – that it often

the chapter reflects a variety of pedagogical engagements in which storytelling, autobiography, textual analysis, and homiletics are woven into the educational process of destabilizing categorical assumptions. In other words, it is a reflection of my spiritual practice of queer pedagogy, and as such points to themes that are taken up in other ways later in the dissertation.

Incident: A Call to Teach

As was mentioned earlier, in the past several years I have often been called on to speak to classes and community groups about homosexualities and Christianity. My presentation has evolved over the years, incorporating more of the thinking reflected in the other two appendices. Last semester I had the opportunity to offer four such presentations at the University of North Carolina – Greensboro. Though they varied slightly depending on the audience, the central content was the same. I mention them because I recognized in those experiences both my own excitement about teaching this content, and what seemed to be a hunger on the part of students for a thoughtful engagement of these topics. I began to dream about the possibilities of a course, and even spoke with the Director of the Women's and Gender Studies Program about exploring the possibility of such an offering, aware that I would face some challenges in shaping it appropriately for a public university in which my identification as adjunct faculty would trump my identification as Baptist minister.

props up problematic notions of a coherent self, unified identity, and discernable community based on politics of difference – and I know that it can still be powerfully useful. As we proceed, I will continue to stand in the stream of curriculum theorists and theologians who see their work as defined by liberatory goals, and at the same time I will seek to critique the ways in which those discourses fail to deliver.

Near the end of the fall semester in 2008, I was invited to speak to a group of students at my alma mater, The Divinity School of Wake Forest University, about issues of language and sexual identities. In the context of that discussion, I gave a brief introduction to queer theories and use of “queer” in academic and political contexts. What came in a follow-up conversation with two of my former teachers was a much-welcomed (and totally unexpected) invitation to submit a proposal for a course that we eventually titled *Sexualities and the Church: A Que(e)ry*, to be taught in the fall semester of 2009, and which played a role in this dissertation (more on that later). *Appendix C* contains the proposal and syllabus for that course.

Initially, I was asked to prepare a proposal for a course on *Queer Spirituality*, though as school officials further assessed their needs the course focus shifted slightly. Still, that original concept led me to consider some significant questions. I was unsure as to what exactly “Queer Spirituality” referred, so I began to consider the notion of queering spiritualities, shifting the focus from subjects to practices. At the same time, I also recognized the reemergence of a conversation I have moved in and out of for several years (and that I have since learned is still ongoing at the Divinity School) about what exactly is meant by “spirituality” as a subject in and of itself, even without the fabulous complication of the queer. While the course I taught morphed in order to address a variety of disciplines considered traditional to theological education, the centrality of spirituality – or of approaching the entirety of the course as spiritual practice – remained intact for me. Which brings us back to this dissertation, my Nineveh.

Incident: The Dissertation

The invitation to submit a course proposal to Wake Forest University Divinity School nearly perfectly coincided with my decision to change dissertation topics to something that would focus my attention back on the discourses around sexualities and Christianity. The reemergence of spirituality as a central theme in that conversation drew me back to yet another conversation I have moved in and out of for several years around what is meant by “spirituality” as it is taken up in the discourses of critical pedagogies and curriculum studies. When I considered those questions alongside the pieces I had written in the months preceding my dissertation proposal and the preparation for the course at Wake Forest University, I was also drawn more deeply into their implications for *my* pedagogies and *my* spiritual practices. That I read all of these conversations through a queer critical lens added yet another dimension to the complexity. All of that, and how each part of it informed the others, is what writing this dissertation has been about for me.

While I am not sure that I could go so far as to label my work as a rhizoanalysis in the purest sense (I am not quite as limber as Deleuze and Guattari), I envisioned the remainder of this dissertation as a *rhizomatic* process of utilizing multiple strategies of textual analysis, theological reflection, and prayerful ruminations, in navigating the discursive production of knowledges. I expected such processes might lead to examinations of the ways text plays on the page, to questioning the structure of chapters, to the relationships between texts deemed primary and those deemed supplementary (as in this introduction, in which the

appendices and footnotes are more central to the argumentation than the primary texts, so much so that I considered locating the appendices in the front). While the specific nature of those examinations emerged in the writing process – and, as it turned out, led to much deeper considerations of style and tone than structure – what was clear from the beginning was that uncritically imposing a linear structure on such a multidirectional discourse would not adequately reflect the complexity of the research. So, the reader is invited to approach the text from a variety of angles, in a variety of orders, understanding the focus of this work as a series of intersections in multiple and pre-existing discourses, lacking clearly demarcated beginnings and ends, each extending beyond the scope of the project itself. Each section informs the other, and so while they are presented sequentially as a function of the written word, they also assume knowledge of one another as they construct their arguments.

While the rhizome and the plateau offer helpful metaphors for the dissertation and its components, still other metaphors are needed for the researcher/author. Deleuze and Guattari (trans. 1987) play with images of cartographer and nomad, both traversing the plateaus and mapping their terrain. Braidotti offers further insights into the nomad metaphor, employing it in positing a feminist subjectivity that emphasizes “flows of connection” and “becomings,” able to “sustain and generate interconnectedness” (2002, p. 8) in which the notion of individualism is challenged. So, considering this notion in terms of reflexivity, and bringing it back into conversation with Deleuze and Guattari, one might say that the researcher herself or himself functions as a rhizome, sustaining the unexpected sprouting up of multiple notions.

I am also drawn to considering the nomadic researcher in conversation with Anzaldúa's (1999) "*mestiza* consciousness" and Sandoval's (1991) "differential consciousness". Anzaldúa's images *mestiza* consciousness as born from the experience of living in the "borderlands/*la frontera*" (1999), embodying complex tensions and ambiguities produced by intersecting politics of identity and heritage. Sandoval (1991) describes a similar concept, offering the stick shift as a metaphor for what she calls "differential consciousness," which allows for fluid movement between identities and ideologies, shifting into different gears dependent on their usefulness as practices of resistance in a given context.

Finally, I am drawn to wondering about the nomadic researcher as border-dwelling trickster, borrowing from Villaverde's (2008) image in considering feminist theories, research analysis, and pedagogies. Described as a "mythic or folkloric figure who uses antagonism and uncertainty in breaking cultural codes," (p. 12) Villaverde's trickster "often stands, in fact revels, in the between spaces of reality, negotiation, intention, desire, and the unknown" (p. 105), a posture she calls on the researcher to embody. All of these images of researcher and researching – whose convergence results in something like a nomadic, border-dwelling, trickster, mapping a wilderness terrain in a manual transmission jeep – are characterized by an "intellectual flexibility" Villaverde describes as "the ability to contend with various, sometimes opposing, ideas simultaneously for the sake of increasing agency and critical analysis" (2008, p. 124). As I sit hunched over my keyboard, aware of the stiffness in my back and thighs from this morning's yoga class, I am reminded that

maintaining flexibility requires consistent practice, and what opens easily in the body one day may be a painful stretch the next. The texts included as appendices reflect my navigation of multiple identifications, ideologies, cultural contexts, and audiences. My role as researcher is to find the stretch, hold it, and breathe.

Plateaus

In what you have read thus far, I began playing with the metaphor of the *plateau* as a means of thinking about the production of knowledge as my energy and attention coalesced around particular professional opportunities and the documents produced therein. The same metaphor for ways of thinking about the production and ordering of knowledge shape the structure of the rest of dissertation. As indicated in the title, I choose to frame my analysis of multiple of concepts, or “bricks”¹⁶ (Massumi, 1987, p. xii), or “toolboxes”¹⁷ (Deleuze and Foucault, 1977, p. 208) as a

¹⁶ In the forward to his 1987 English translation of Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Massumi uses the brick as a metaphor as he explicates “nomad thought”

A concept is a brick. In can be used to build the courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window. What is the subject of the brick? The arm that throws it? The body connected to the arm? The brain encased in the body? The situation that brought brain and body to such a juncture? All and none of the above. What is its object? The window? The edifice? The laws the edifice shelters? The class and other power relations encrusted by the laws? All and none of the above. What interests us are the circumstances. Because the concept in its unrestrained usage is a set of circumstances, at a volatile juncture (p. xii-xiii).

¹⁷ Massumi notes the “toolbox” as the metaphor for *concept* Deleuze employed in discussion with Foucault (1977, p. 208). Massumi notes: “He calls his kind of philosophy ‘pragmatics’ because its goal is the invention of concepts that do not add

consideration of *queer pedagogies as spiritual practice*. The framing itself begs several questions, around which three plateaus making up the body of the work takes shape. As already mentioned, a central question for my consideration is “What is meant by *spirituality*?” and then immediately following, “What is a rationale for the choice to approach a conversation about spirituality through the frame of *spiritual practices*?” Necessarily accompanying those questions the title raises, are the similar inquiries into the meaning of both *queer* and *pedagogies*, and perhaps more significantly, “What is meant by their juxtaposition?” Each of these points of inquiry in turn sparks a multiplicity of other inquiries, some intersecting and some not. Another implication of my framing of this research is the suggestion of a subject – a pedagogue and practitioner – and at least in part that subject can rightfully be presumed to be me.

So, what might one expect from an interrogation of the notion of queer pedagogies as spiritual practice? In my understanding of them, queer theories, pedagogies, and spiritualities are similar in their emphasis on *practices* over *positionalities* – strategies for making meaning are at least as privileged as the meaning being made (whose stability is somewhat suspect and mysterious) – and yet, none of those three can be reduced to a simple list of procedural guidelines. What I mean by *practices* in these contexts is an ongoing theme in the dissertation,¹⁸ but for now, we might say that practices are intentional performances of epistemological

up to a system of belief or an architecture of propositions that you either enter or you don't, but instead pack a potential in the way a crow bar in a willing hand envelops an energy of prying” (1987, p. xv).

¹⁸ The notion of *practices* is particularly explored in Part III, beginning on page 131.

claims repeated in our efforts to navigate encounters with our unknowing.

Following the lead of Deleuze and Guattari (trans. 1987), I was hesitant to rely on chapters as the primary organizational structure for the dissertation. As has already been demonstrated, the research I am engaging focuses on surprising juxtapositions and intersections more befitting a rhizomatic analysis. Ultimately, this is itself an epistemological claim – an attempt, albeit sometimes awkward, to better reflect my understandings of knowledge production. As previously indicated, I am drawn to “fields of intensity” as a metaphor, one of the ways Deleuze and Guattari describe their notion of plateaus (1987). With that in mind, I originally envisioned this dissertation as a navigation of four such fields, though through the writing process it became clear that a three-plateau structure better reflected my thinking.¹⁹ The first plateau, this introduction, lays out epistemological claims, methodology, and sets up the framework for the rest of the dissertation. The second is an exploration of the notion of *spirituality*, considering both the way it has been taken up in popular and academic education discourses, and the challenges in constituting it as a proper subject or sub-discipline within theological studies. My task in this field is to develop and defend a workable definition of spirituality (as I have already indicated, my understanding privileges *practices*), and then bring it into conversation with questions around the erosion of modernist certainties and dualisms, the relationship to other traditional theological disciplines, and philosophical considerations of the existence/nature of God. Ultimately, in an apology of sorts, I argue that

¹⁹ The *Interjection* on pages 120-125, further articulates the rationale for the revision in structure.

(thoughtfully) leading with spirituality in the framing of an intellectual project still matters. While I work primarily within the Christian frameworks in which I am academically trained and which primarily form my theology and practice, I also consider more secularized articulations of spirituality and engage scholars from other faith traditions.

What became clear as my argument developed is that if I argue that spirituality can still be a useful construct in pedagogical discourse as long as it is transparent about the theological presuppositions on which it depends, I would have to engage that work myself. The result is a second section within that plateau, one in which I articulate the theological understandings that underlie my spirituality and thus frame my understanding of queer pedagogy as spiritual practice.

In my original conception, what is now the Part III was to be two separate plateaus: the first focusing on navigating the notion of *queer pedagogies*, bringing queer theories into conversation with curriculum studies; and the second to navigate the field of intensity coalescing in the Divinity School course and all that surrounded it. As my research progressed, much of the content of the Divinity School course found its way into the second section of the first plateau. Since the preparation for the course occurred alongside the writing of the dissertation, the interplay between course content and the theorizing occurring in the dissertation research was significant. Therefore, my research considered such material as preparatory class notes regarding assigned readings, particularly as they have implications for the other fields of inquiry.

For example, while I as a scholar am not offering extensive interventions into the queering of liberation theologies per se, the work done by others (Goss, 2002; Althaus-Reid, 2003; etc.) was included in the course content, but also has implications for how I regard my own work, considering such themes of liberation as presented in the reading of the resurrection of Lazarus in *Appendix B*. Even further, a critique of liberation projects is a major theme in queer theories, while simultaneously liberation remains a significant theme in critical pedagogies. All of this is to say that the interplay between the themes included in the course content and the rest of the dissertation were central to my research, both as intellectual constructs and as embodied practices in the classroom.

Part III begins with an *Interjection* reflecting the mid-stream shifts in my thinking and the resulting changes in organizational structure. The remainder of my reflections around the Wake Forest Course were so intertwined with my discussion of queer pedagogy that it did not make sense to separate them, rather both are integrated and considered in relation to specific spiritual practices. As a field of inquiry, queer pedagogy, is still rather young and contested. Questions of what makes “queer pedagogy” *queer* is a point of contention (Britzman, 1998; Luhman, 1998; Rodriguez, 2007). Is it the content? Is it the “identity” or “social location” of the educator? Is it the ways in which the educator is read by the learner? Is it the blurring of the distinctions between educator and learner? Is it a set of methods? Is it primarily a deconstructive project, and if so how is different from other pedagogies in that same vein? Is it about positionalities, or (as I argue) performances and practices? Through

both an analysis of literature directly addressing *queer pedagogies*, and other highlighted points of intersection in queer theories and curriculum studies, I propose a working understanding of the term and its implications. Further, in my navigation of this field I consider what I carry with me from travels through other fields of intensity, sojourns to other plateaus, particularly the intersections between queer pedagogical practices and spiritual practices that disrupt seemingly stable groundings.

The interspersed reflections from my teaching of the Wake Forest Divinity School course reflect an understanding of the course as a context in which I drew attention to the multiplicity of questions emerging from the rest of my research. As it relates to this larger project, teaching the course did not function primarily as an intervention or training strategy in order to generate a cadre of more sensitive ministers (though I hope some of that happened), but more as a cultural text or performance in which the ideas explored in the other fields came into play. Occurring alongside my writing and as a component of my research, the course provided fodder for theorizing my pedagogical practice, which in this case took the shape of a teacher in a classroom but has for me at other points been enacted as preacher, counselor, spiritual director, and a multitude of other roles. A rich complexity was contained within my teaching the Divinity School course in that all of the following were true: I was teaching about practices; I was teaching practices; and I was engaging practices as I taught. While, as we will explore further, queer pedagogies may not be dependent on queer course content (whatever that might mean), the course at the Wake Forest University Divinity School (whose content

could be read as pretty queer) served as a site for reflection in the performance of these intersecting discourses.

I was teaching about practices. The course was about applying queer theories to discourses around sexuality and the church. Much of this work is being done in the realms of theology, biblical studies, and Christian sexual ethics. Some part of my job was to teach the cultural texts already queered – to study and evaluate the work of those already queering these discourses and the practices (reading strategies) they engage in their analyses.

I was teaching practices. Building on those examples from other scholars, I was also teaching the practices themselves. This course assumed that engagement in theological reflection, reading scripture, discernment, and having sex are all “spiritual practices” in as much as they are practices that draw our attention to our encounters with what we might call Sacred Mystery, with that which cannot easily be explained. Students were expected to develop a firm enough grasp on the theoretical frameworks to consider how they might shape their understanding of their own practices. So, I was teaching how to “queer,” or “read queerly,” and doing so in a context that considers reading queerly a spiritual practice.

I was engaging practices as I teach. As I “read” the class itself as text, or as I engage queer pedagogical theorizing into my own teaching, I engaged in queer practices. In maintaining a reflexive posture towards the act of teaching itself and drawing my awareness to my encounters with mystery therein, I engaged in spiritual

practice. My consideration ultimately is then about queer pedagogy as queer spirituality.

Epilogue

I am not sure Jonah is really a character to whom I want to compare myself. Of the twelve minor prophets whose stories are chronicled in the Hebrew Bible, he is the only one not called to speak to the Israelites or Hebrew peoples, and he seems to particularly resent being sent by a God, who he believes to have chosen his people, to speak to those beyond the realm of what he understands to be his community. He resents further that his warnings of God's wrath are heralded and the Ninevites change their ways. But most of all Jonah resents God mercifully sparing the Ninevites their promised destruction, crying out "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." (4:2b-3).

He retreats to the edge of the city to pout, and God "appoints" (4:6) a bush to grow up and offer him shade – which seems to make Jonah happier. However, that night God sends a worm to destroy the bush, so the next day Jonah is left to sit in the sun once again. Jonah does not like that very much at all, and demonstrating a tendency towards melodrama, he cries out a second time, "It is better for me to die

than to live!” (4:8). God asks, “Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?” and in his best Joan Crawford voice he responds, “Yes, angry enough to die!” (4:9).

God then compares Jonah’s investment in a bush to God’s investment in a city of more than one hundred and twenty thousand – and though that is ultimately the point of the story, since God is trying to get Jonah to understand more about God and God’s choices, it is not what interests me in this moment. What interests me is Jonah’s investment in the bush, the little Deleuzian tree. Jonah pouts because God withers the tree, worms away at the binary root structure, the “us and them” thinking through which Jonah orders his world. Our protagonist takes comfort in a system of thought that splits the world into clearly discernable categories, yet he must somehow know the limitations of that thought given his assumption that God would show mercy on those whom Jonah deemed unworthy.

God offers the security and shade of the bush, granting Jonah some comfort, then demonstrates its lack of sustainability. The bush withers, leaving Jonah despondent. The worm functions much like a rhizome, shooting up unexpectedly from underground and threatening the foundational logic of Jonah’s arboristic knowledge. It is as if God says, “Yeah, that can work for awhile, but don’t count on it lasting.” Though it does not represent my best self, I resonate with Jonah’s anger. I concede to having liked the security of a world read through neatly constructed categories and simplistic analyses of power. The order made sense, and I knew where to direct my anger – an anger which that order ultimately served to legitimate. But also like Jonah, I trust in a more boundless grace that disrupts my understanding of

the other, which in turn disrupts my understanding of who I am, which necessitated an other in order to make sense.

It still is not a perfect metaphor for what I am about here, but Jonah's journey is marked by encounters with a Mystery that transgresses the structure of Jonah's reality. Jonah sees this coming, he knows from the time he tries to run away that his ordered world will give way to the Mystery's grace. We do not know how Jonah comes out in the end, only his initial anguish when faced with what he feared: God's failure to adhere to his righteous judgment. If I am to claim a comparison to Jonah – and this tree-withering, rhizomatic project is to be my Nineveh – then I am choosing to believe that Jonah's anger dissipated and he began to hold what he knew of himself, his others, and God much more lightly.

PART TWO

Spirituality in Education

I begin with some clarifications about how I approach this conversation, where I stand in relation to the material, and what I am not interested in attempting to do. My initial concern here is to consider the usefulness of “spirituality” as a construct in contemporary pedagogical discourses. In so doing, I challenge the ways in which spirituality is often evoked as a transhistorical and universal concept, and suggest locating it instead within a particular stream of Western thought influenced by both philosophy and theology. Mapping a genealogy through Enlightenment and Transcendental thought, I argue that “spirituality” in its popular usage cannot be understood apart from a larger explication of Western religious liberalism, and in particular liberal Christianity. Having explored the foundational claims of religious liberalism, and thus popular spirituality, I turn towards a consideration of the utility of such a construct in light of the erosion of the foundational thought on which it depends. From there I return to our consideration of issues of spirituality in education with particular attention to two distinct conversations: first, the broad use of spirituality as a construct in popular and academic discourses around school leadership and reform; and second, the contested usefulness of spirituality as a sub-discipline in Christian theological studies. Having both levied my critiques of “spirituality” and argued a case for its usefulness, I revisit the historical linkages

between critical pedagogies and Christian Liberation Theology on my way towards finally proposing a workable way forward in the conversation.

As this larger project progresses and evolves, the reader undoubtedly becomes clear that ultimately I am grappling not only with my sense of subjectivity as scholar and teacher, but also with a sense of my agency. However, what is at first glance understood as a primarily political nature to this work I would argue might be more accurately understood as *eschatological*. Whereas the dominant political narratives of modernity have been exposed as deeply flawed, and a rational claim to hold onto them is at best suspect; an eschatological narrative makes no claim of rationality. It is “hope against hope” (Romans 4:18). While I can join in a critique of the myths of progress, the limits of liberation, and the politics of identity, I hold out hope beyond reason for “another possible world” (Althaus Reid, 2007). I am deeply invested in working towards that possible world’s realization. I claim these commitments as more eschatological than political because they are most tenable as leaps of faith. The mythic and the mystical are central to my knowing, and rather than shutting down my encounters with the limits of knowledge by dismissing them with trite responses, I experience the epistemologies of my faith as beckoning me deeper into a humble engagement with Mystery.

Thus, as I consider spirituality in education, my investment is personal. Slattery (2006), Noddings (2005), Pinar, (1995) and others have taken on the complicated tasks of considering a theological curriculum in a postmodern context. While my task here is overlapping and related, drawing from many of the same

resources and traditions, my work is distinct in its final goal. Slattery (2006) moves in and out of “understanding the curriculum as theological text” (p. 93) and proposing a “theological curriculum that is not theocratic” (112), often with somewhat slippery fluidity. In contrast, I am not so much concerned with positing a *theological curriculum* as I am with articulating a *pedagogical spirituality* useful in furthering my engagement with education discourses, a spirituality unapologetically shaped by the particular constellations of influences that constitute my positionality.

The distinctions in terms are subtle but significant. Much like the terms “spirituality”, “theology”, and “religion”; “curriculum”, “pedagogy”, and “education” are often used interchangeably. Let me elucidate some distinctions, at least in my particular usage. “Curriculum,” as a field of study, is described by Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman as “the field interested in the relationships among the school subjects themselves and with the relationships between the curriculum and the world” (p. 6). The field has undergone a significant reconceptualization in the last half-century. No longer are curriculum specialists primarily understood as technicians, preoccupied with issues of “curriculum development”; rather the field has shifted its focus to the *understanding* of curriculum. They argue that a shift has occurred “from curriculum as exclusively school materials to curriculum as symbolic representation” (p.16). This shift towards symbolic representation as the definition of curriculum “refers to those institutional and discursive practices structures, images, and experiences that can be identified and analyzed in various ways, i.e. politically, racially, autobiographically, phenomenologically, theologically, internationally, and

in terms of gender and deconstruction” (p. 16). And yet, the continued institutionalized function of “curriculum” understood as *curriculum development* persists. While the internal movement within the field is towards an emphasis on *understanding curriculum* the remnants of an older model are often still bureaucratically perpetuated.

Thus, when Slattery takes up similar content (2006), his aim of understanding curriculum as a theological text is first to interpret curriculum through a theological lens, though in his propositional stance he does not discount the need for curriculum development. By his own admission, he uses “theology”, “spirituality”, and “religion” interchangeably, which (though somewhat confusing) is possible for him because he is more invested in using the lens to analyze curriculum than analyzing the lens itself. In other words, while we share influences, the construction of our conversations differs in that we focus our attention on different texts, Slattery on the construct of “curriculum” itself, and I on the construct of “spirituality” in curriculum and related discourses.

“Pedagogy”, in my usage, more specifically refers to the theories and practices engaged in the processes of teaching and learning. That is not to suggest that the term is only limited to the formal roles of teacher/student within a classroom context (though I am particularly invested in those dynamics), but with the larger ways in which knowledges are both produced and transmitted. Pedagogy, when used in this manner, implies both agency and intentionality, though certainly poststructuralist thought keeps us humble in facing the limits of either. Therefore,

included in a consideration of pedagogy must be some critical reflection on the nature and exercise of power. A traditional understanding of pedagogy as the art of teaching, focused on what the teacher does to/with the student, may be matched with a traditional analysis of power as unidirectional and repressive. While such considerations remain important, a more complex and nuanced understanding of both concepts is called for and is pursued through this work. For now, let it be acknowledged that my intentions around using the term “pedagogical” are primarily in conversation with the understandings championed by the field of *critical pedagogy*.

In *Empowering Education* (1992), Ira Shor defines “critical pedagogy” as "Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse." (p.129). Kincheloe (2008) articulates the core principles of critical pedagogy saying:

Advocates of critical pedagogy are aware that every minute of every hour that teachers teach, they are faced with complex decisions concerning justice, democracy, and competing ethical claims. While they have to make individual determinations of what to do in these particular circumstances, they must concurrently deal with what John Goodlad (1994) calls the surrounding institutional morality. A central tenet of critical pedagogy maintains that the classroom, curricular, school structures teachers enter are not neutral sites waiting to be shaped by educational professionals. While such professionals do possess agency, this prerogative is not completely free and independent of decisions made previously by people operating with

different values and shaped by the ideologies and cultural assumptions of their historical contexts. These contexts are shaped in the same ways language and knowledge are constructed, as historical power makes particular practices seem natural—as if they could have been constructed in no other way (pp. 1-2).

So at the risk of being reductive in my summation, if “curriculum” is interested in what is being done, then “pedagogy” is interested in the doing. Or stated another way, “curriculum” is what is *being understood*, and “pedagogy” is the *understanding*.

Lastly, my use of “education” is intended to refer to a broader construct including, but not limited to, the overlapping concepts I distinguish as *curriculum* and *pedagogy*. Given these working definitions, my analysis of “spirituality in education” can be understood as taking its first lead from curriculum studies, in the assertion that *understanding curriculum* requires understanding the language of the field. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (1996), acknowledge “a field of study is a field of study *is a field of study*, a tradition of language or discourse” (p. 7). Thus, they understand the study of curriculum to be the study of the discourse as text, as “a particular discursive practice, or a form of articulation that follows certain rules and which constructs the very objects it studies” (p.7). When I engage a study of “spirituality in education” I begin with a study of language, in this case the term “spirituality”, and how it functions. While I am interested particularly in the term’s functioning in education discourses, I contextualize that usage within an analysis of the concept as it functions more widely. Yet this move towards understanding the curriculum, while significant in itself, is ultimately the precursor for my primary

interest in positing a workable spirituality, mapping a way through the terrain of multiple discourses that shape both my identity and practice as an educator.

At times in this argument I also make the uncomfortable, but conscious, choice to privilege Christian spiritualities. There are two primary reasons, each of which becomes clearer later in the chapter. First, though in its popular usage the term “spirituality” generally encompasses a scope much broader than Christianity, it is a term with a genealogy unmistakably intertwined with Christianity, and particularly with Western Protestantisms. So, while the construct has been read back onto other traditions, it is a language-drenched notion and cannot be divorced from other particular liberal discourses which play a role in its production. Secondly, my own theological and spiritual practices are grounded in Christianity, so my convictions (held loosely) are also at stake. I acknowledge both the possibilities they bring with them as well as the limitations they bear.

I walk tentatively here, knowing that I stand within a faith tradition whose dominance has had tremendous influence in the discourses of Western cultures, and whose often violent conviction of its exclusive rightness has been, and continues to be, a source of oppression, pain, and conflict the world over. Thus, my claiming Christianity carries with it an act of confession in acknowledging my participation in, and ongoing receipt of, privilege garnished by the sins of the church. And yet, I still claim it. For me to speak of encounters with mystery without referencing Christianity would be akin to my writing this dissertation in a foreign tongue, denying that the vocabularies and rhythms of the English language (particularly as spoken in the

Southern United States) infused the very structures of my knowing. Christianity offers me rituals, symbols, and stories – all metaphors that point towards meaning in the face of the mystery of unknowing. Though I often push up against them, stretch them until they nearly break, and even turn them back on the institutions that handed them to me, I still find the structures of Christianity useful. And besides, I am convinced that my grounding and fluency in the dominant faith language of my cultural context leaves me well situated to function as an agent of change in that same context.

Understanding “Spirituality” in Education

What is “spirituality”? My sense is that “spirituality” is one of those words that is often tossed about carelessly with an often unacknowledged silencing effect. It is assumed to be pointing to something significant and obvious, but somehow vague and not accessible to all. I hear it spoken often and defined rarely, and at times have sensed it being evoked as some unquestionable notion about which anyone lacking clarity must be stupid, insensitive, or heretical. Even after years of both formal and informal study on the topic my experience remains that often when “spirituality” comes up in discussion I am unclear as to what is being referenced. The effect is often to shut down conversation rather than invite dialogue.

Despite a flourishing body of academic work around spirituality, little consensus or clarity in definition seems to have emerged. Spilka calls it a “fuzzy” concept that “embraces obscurity with a passion” (1993). In a survey of current social sciences research, Zinnbauer et al. (1997) observe, “spirituality has been

defined by theorists as ‘the human response of God’s gracious call to a relationship with himself’ (Brenner 1989: 20), ‘a subjective experience of the sacred’ (Vaughn 1991: 105), and ‘that vast realm of human potential dealing with ultimate purpose’ (Tart 1983: 4).” Sheldrake (1995) argues that spirituality “seeks to express...the conscious human response to God that is both personal and ecclesial” (p.45). In her assertion that women need a feminist spirituality, Martin suggests the term can “be described as the way in which we come to experience and express the Divine in our relationships with our neighbor, with nature, and with ourselves” (1993). Carr (1986) defines it “as the whole of our deepest religious beliefs, convictions, and patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior in respect to what is ultimate” (p. 49). Bove (2003) suggests, “*spirituality* is the human response to transcendent reality, regardless of how we might name or experience that reality” (p. 11). With differing degrees of attachment to a notion of God/Ultimate/Divine; with differing articulations of relationship to (or free from) religion; with differing notions of whether it is a matter of beliefs or actions; and with sociologists, theologians, and educators weighing in, “spirituality” as a construct is at best amorphous and tied to frequently unstated presuppositions.

Sheldrake’s (2007) etymology of the word “spirituality” roots its origins in the Latin *spiritualitas*, “deriving from the Greek *pneuma*, spirit, and the adjective *pneumatikos* as they appear in Paul’s letters in the New Testament” (p. 3). He goes on to argue that the Pauline use of “spiritual” (in reference to moral or dwelling in the Spirit of God, and in opposition to flesh or everything contrary to the Spirit of God)

was the dominant usage through the twelfth century, when Greek influenced scholasticism began to use the term to distinguish “intelligent humanity from non-rational creation” (p. 3). The two usages co-existed for some time and both appear in the influential thirteenth century writings of Thomas Aquinas. Through the middle ages, the noun “spirituality” came to refer to the clergy or clerical state. It was not until seventeenth century in France that the spirituality came to refer to “the spiritual life,” and then with some derision towards religious emotionalism. After virtually disappearing from theological discourse until the nineteenth century, “spirituality” reemerged again in France as referring to “the spiritual life,” but without the derisive tone. From there it was passed into English translations of French writings (Sheldrake, 2007).

While Sheldrake’s etymology is helpful in destabilizing an assumption that spirituality is a universal concept free from context or history, it does little to help clarify the term as it currently functions. American religious historian Leigh Eric Schmidt (2005) offers a critical perspective on the “origins of the current boom in spirituality” (xiii) as he “probes the ways in which the very development of ‘spirituality’ in American culture was inextricably tied to the rise and flourishing of the liberal progressivism and a religious left.” While his concern is primarily the emergence and dominance of a “seeker” spirituality, which he argues is a particularly American phenomenon that predates the typical assertion of baby boom spiritual innovation by more than a century, the Transcendentalists he credits with this shift in American religious culture (precursors to contemporary “spiritual but not religious”

rhetoric) are themselves situated within larger philosophical and theological traditions.

Any attempt to trace a history of thought is inherently reductive and thus problematic. The question is whether or not a particular rendering might be useful in furthering another discussion, so for the sake of this argument, which seeks both to clarify the current usages of “spirituality” and to contextualize them in larger cultural discourses, it is necessary to at least draw attention to some major themes which created productive dissonances, points of crystallization, around which other thought flourished. Here we turn to Murphey (1996), who makes “strong claims for the role of philosophy in theological development” (p. 3). In making her case she argues:

a central task of philosophy is to expose those often invisible assumptions, to criticize them, to suggest improvements or replacements; these new theories often become the assumptions upon which the next era of scholarship is based. Thus, philosophy helps us sum up the most basic characteristics of an era past and foreshadows features of the era to come (p. 4).

In part, Murphey is concerned with explicating the eroding foundationalism of modern Protestant Christianity, characterized by a bifurcating tension between liberalism and fundamentalism. She argues that in order to for theologians to makes sense in the modern world they worked with the philosophical options available to them, and that these limited philosophical options are largely responsible for the bifurcation of Protestant Christian thought. Thus, Murphey offers a sketch of modernist thought as it informs these two threads, in which her attention to the rise of liberalism (given Schmidt’s argument) is particularly helpful for us.

Acknowledging that the marking of periods is notoriously difficult (as there are always continuities as well as change, and differing points of change in different discourses, regions, etc.), Murphey follows convention in looking to Descartes as the first modern philosopher, thus dating the period to the mid-seventeenth century. “The modern period”, she asserts, “in scientific discourse could be dated twenty years earlier with Galileo, or in theological discourse 150 years later with Schleiermacher” (p. 22). The point is that somewhere around the seventeenth century, several overlapping discourses crystallized in a way that resulted in significant epistemological shifts. In sketching out her framework, Murphey looks to explore the “intellectual dependencies” of five Western philosophers of the era: Descartes (1596-1650), Locke (1632-1704), Hume (1711-1776), Reid (1710-1796), and Kant (1724-1804). Her argument is as follows: Locke builds on Descartes’ foundationalist view of knowledge and adapts it for religious knowledge. Hume then questions Locke’s positive theories of religious and scientific knowledge. Kant and Reid subsequently both respond to the skepticism of Hume, but in different ways, marking the split that characterizes the bifurcation. Both Kant and Reid provide the basic resources for development of theological traditions; Reid for fundamentalists (through his influence on Hodge, Warfield, and others), and Kant for liberals (through his influence on Schleiermacher and other nineteenth century liberal theologians)(p. 5-6).

What emerge are two primary theological schools in Protestant Christianity, alike in their dependence on irrefutable foundations, but different in which theological sources serve as those foundations. In broad brushstrokes, liberals came

to focus on God's immanence and relational nature, understanding revelation as continuous and not in tension with human discovery, and religious experience as verifiable and comparable to scientific data. The Bible, in this school, functions as a document of religious experience, and derives its authority thus from the experiences that resulted in its production, canonization, and subsequent interpretation.

Fundamentalists, in contrast, emphasized God's power to intervene in creation, with God's self-revelation through scripture as the primary example of such intervention. As the direct, primary, and unique revelation of God, the Bible, not experience, is thus the central source for theology. For Murphey, the tension between scripture and experience centrally defines the binarism in Protestant Christianity (Murphey p. 6-7). It is this centrality of *experience* as the primary source for theological reasoning that opens the way for the emergence of "spirituality" as a modern construct.

This sort of bifurcated understanding of theological knowledge is indicative of the Deleuzian metaphor of the tree, roots splitting as knowledge is categorically divided into linearly constructed sets. Murphey's depiction of modernist Protestantism is itself such a tracing. Undoubtedly her history is homogenizing and attentive to big names as reflections of universalizing thought. It is ultimately that sort of linearity that she comes to critique, but she first invests in understanding the influence of modernist reasoning on the theological project. Stated another way, Murphey offers a modernist telling of the story of modernism, one useful in understanding the discourses later moderns use to justify their positioning. There is a tension then between her rearticulation of modernist historical tropes, and her reading

from a postmodern perspective, but it is from this perspective (working backwards in looking for difference) that Murphey argues Descartes reflects a shift in theories of the justification of knowledge claims.

For Descartes, authority could not be granted simply on the station of the author, but must rather be tied to other knowledge claims available to each individual. A belief is justified if it is linked to another established belief, justified by attachment to another justified belief, forming a chain that must end somewhere (a circular chain is deemed unjustifiable), in a foundation that cannot be called into question. The assumption that any knowledge system must include a class of universal, indubitable, unchallengeable beliefs, and the assumption that all reasoning in the system proceeded unidirectionally from the foundation and never in reverse, were so imbedded in modernist epistemologies that they shaped the very possibilities of the discourse (p. 12-13).

Murphey argues that Locke maintained Descartes' foundationalism, but his articulation of different types of knowledge allows for an easier coexistence of science and religion (p. 13-20). In establishing a separate structure of knowledge founded on scriptural revelation, Locke allowed for multiple and parallel systems of knowing, though he ultimately links the reasonableness of theological claims to the deductive argument for the existence of God. Thus the structures are independent, but not unrelated. Where Locke struggled, as have others operating out of Biblical foundationalism in his time and since, was in shoring up the argument that the written texts of the Bible were indeed the direct revelation of God, and thus qualified as an

indisputable foundation. Locke's reasoning comes to be undermined by several, but particularly significant are Hume's critiques, which Murphey identifies as twofold: the undercutting of the necessity of an intelligent designer to the universe as only one possibility and based on the presupposition that the universe is construed as a machine or mechanism, and the impossibility of gathering enough evidence in order to justify a miracle as a violation of the laws of nature. Both the challenge to the nature and existence of God and Locke's justification for scriptural authority based on the accounting of miracles marked a shift towards other means of justifying scriptural truth claims (p.21).

Reid and others then respond to the critiques of Locke returning to the existence of God based on the scriptural revelation. The resultant reasoning leads to the need for developing dogmatic assertions of biblical inerrancy in order to claim scriptural authority as the indisputable foundation for theological reasoning, helping to give rise to Christian fundamentalism (p. 15-19). In contrast, Schleiermacher put forward that the essence of all religions, not just Christianity, was a "certain sort of feeling or awareness," or an "intuition of the infinite" (Murphey, 22). His work centered on establishing a systematic theology that argued all legitimate doctrines emanated from this foundational experience. Murphey argues that Schleiermacher represents a foundationalist epistemology in that he argues for the universality of this human experience of the divine. While he holds that Christianity is but one system of response, he claims human religious self-consciousness as the starting point for all theology (p. 22-23). Murphey traces this school of thought through prominent

twentieth century American theologians such as Mathews and Fosdick, who privilege experience as a the primary source for theological reasoning, and base scriptural authority in its evidence of a transhistorical experience of God (p. 24).

Spirituality and American Liberal Protestantism

While Murphey only offers a limited sketch, it is useful as a backdrop. After all, the primary purpose of this work is not a detailed history of “spirituality”, but rather an exploration of its function and usefulness in its contemporary form. These historical explorations are thus intended to be contextualizing rather than exhaustive. It also seems important here to note again the privileging of Protestant thought in establishing the context for our larger conversation. As we shift to a more explicitly American conversation about the construct of spirituality, the dominance of what is typically referred to as “mainline” Protestant thought in the historical public discourses loom large. That is not to say that other discourses are not significant or influential, but again, my attempt is to be representative more than exhaustive. Certainly similar streams of liberalism and fundamentalism can be seen emerging in Catholicism (though tradition may overshadow scripture as foundational in that particular fundamentalism), and in Judaism (broadly represented in distinctions between orthodox and reform movements) in the same eras. Certainly other religious traditions beyond Judeo-Christian play a role in the shaping of this conversation as well. However, for the sake of this research, and with the acknowledged risk of participation in reinscribing the dominance of a Protestant discourse, we continue with a somewhat limited focus.

Murphey's analysis dovetails with Schmidt's more complex genealogical mapping of American spirituality. Schmidt characterizes the American popular spirituality as a "seeker spirituality" (p. 2), marked by a search for meaning that emphasizes personal experience and often transgresses established religious demarcations. Beginning with noting that "the act of journeying across the bounds of traditions, denominations, and institutions has emerged as a familiar, if still creative, course of exploration for many Americans: "From Jewish-Buddhist contemplatives to yoga-performing Methodists, more and more seekers have been finding insight through a medley of practices and pieties" (p. 2). He frames his study by challenging the watershed view of baby boomers as the great inventors of a new spiritual trend in America, unhinged from the church-going generation of their parents. Instead, he asks, "How over the longer term did the United States become a land of spiritual questing? How was it that so many Americans became so intensely absorbed in something amorphously called 'spirituality'?" (p. 2).

Schmidt is equally dubious of the assertion that spiritual questing is somehow inherent in the founding of America, arguing that contemporary spiritualities could not be read as predictable outgrowths of the heavily Protestant religious expressions of either British colonialism or a post-revolution America. Despite the chaotic nature of Protestant assertions of the individual prerogative to read and interpret scripture, scripture was firmly in place as the foundation of theological and social thought; "Debates were everywhere, but the authority and sufficiency of biblical revelation were not up for grabs in early American Protestantism. Sure, pilgrims wandered

ceaselessly into new interpretations of Christianity – with their Bibles firmly in hand” (p.3).

Schmidt’s argument is that American “spirituality,” as the term is broadly configured, “was invented through a gradual disentanglement from...model Protestant practices [Sabbath observance, private prayer, sacramental meditation, Bible reading, etc.] or, at minimum, through a significant redefinition of them” (p. 3). “Spirituality”, he argues, only comes to be distinguished from “religion” in the American imaginary through some dissociation with those habits, “only a step removed from evangelical Christianity does *spirituality* begin to refer to ‘direct mystical experience’ and ‘an individual’s solitary search’ for ‘the absolute or the divine’” (p. 4). And thus, even in our exploration of spirituality as a broader construct, Protestant Christianity remains a central point of reference.

“I once heard a preacher who sorely tempted me to say, I would go to church no more,” (1838), Emerson comments in his infamous address to the Harvard Divinity School. Schmidt argues that the Transcendentalism of public voices such as Emerson and Whitman marks the most significant cultural shifts around which a contemporary notion of spirituality coalesces. Certainly the Enlightenment era thought of early American leaders was significant in the articulation of religious privatism and voluntaristic freedom, but ultimately, Schmidt posits, the deists’ assumption of God’s detachment from creation served to minimize any substantial attentiveness to things spiritual. “Only when Enlightenment freedom, happiness, and

autonomy were refracted through a romantic prism did the life of the spirit come to matter experientially to rational souls” (p. 5).

For Schmidt, the contemporary boom in seeker spirituality “is an artifact of religious liberalism, especially in its more radical stripes. Included in that company of nonconformists were Transcendentalists, romantic Unitarians, Reform Jews, progressive Quakers, devout disciples of Emerson and Whitman, Spiritualists, questing psychologists, New Thought optimists, Vedantists, and Theosophists, among sundry wayfarers” (p. 7). Many of these spiritual seekers, he notes, traveled more than one path simultaneously or many in succession. Some envisioned themselves as architects of a future religion based in a universalized spirituality. Their commonality is their move from the authoritative structures of older religious expressions towards a more democratic idealism in “religions of the spirit” (p. 7).

Our current seeker spirituality, “spiritual but not religious”, cultural trend cannot be so easily be divorced from Indian mystic Hazrat Inayat Kahn’s 1925 “One Religion for All” lecture tour, or Unitarian minister Martin Kellogg Schermerhorn’s “universal worship” services of the same era. He argues both grow out of a distinct liberal religious and political ideology invented in the nineteenth century. Broadly diffused, it was “always as much a religious vision of emancipated souls as a political theory of individual rights and civil liberties” (p. 11). He points to the 1820s as a period in which a radical form of Christian Protestantism cohered into an articulation of liberalism in the United States. Over the next few decades the trend gradually edged over the bounds of Christianity itself. With its popular articulations voiced by

the likes of Emerson and Whitman, liberalism emerged as powerful cultural force in the religious, political and academic thought of nineteenth century America.

Schmidt looks to Harvard scholar Horatio Dresser, writing in 1900 as a primary architect of American progressivism for a description of central characteristics of liberalism. His determination of key points include:

individual aspiration after mystical experience of religious feeling; the valuing of silence, solitude, and serene meditation; the immanence of the transcendent -- in each person and in nature; the cosmopolitan appreciation of religious variety as well as unity in diversity; ethical earnestness in pursuit of justice-producing reforms or 'social salvation'; and emphasis on creative self-expression and adventuresome seeking (p. 12).

Increasingly disenchanted with the dogmatism of Protestant Christianity, the new American pilgrim, traversing increasingly divided terrain, sought a vision of unity through a universalized religion of the spirit.

The Case of Alcoholics Anonymous

I choose Alcoholics Anonymous as a case study for illustrating the phenomenon of which I am speaking in part because of its cultural influence, but also because it is a well documented and somewhat systematized movement. In looking at Alcoholics Anonymous, we can see clear evidence of the appeal to this liberal religious discourse. In her study of emergence in Christianity, Tickle (2008) notes, "When speaking of which sociocultural events in the twentieth century most affected North American Christianity and its shifting relationships with spirituality, many sociologists of religion will cite the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous as the first in

a list of prime movers” (p. 91). For our purposes, the location of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) as “first” chronologically (which is debatable) is less important than its primacy in systematizing an articulation of “spiritual but not religious” thinking in a manner that has been wildly influential both in the growth of AA itself and related twelve step movements (Al-Anon, Narcotics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, etc), but also as a framework for the larger cultural manifestations of popular spiritualities growing out of the religious liberal tradition.

AA officially dates its founding in 1935, when Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith (referred to in AA literature and discourse as Bill W. and Dr. Bob) began to formalize a method of recovery from addiction based on their *experience*. AA built on the work of previous movements, particularly the early-twentieth century Oxford Group, which in contrast to AA was marked by a strong evangelical zeal (Tickle, p. 92). Part of AA’s unique contribution rests in its claiming a place alongside Emerson, Whitman and others in rejecting the dogmatism of evangelical Christianity, while still embracing the possibility of radical transformation. “Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path” (Anonymous, p. 58) begins the chapter entitled “How it Works” from the central text *Alcoholics Anonymous* which outlines the twelve steps and is still read at the beginning of AA meetings across the globe.

The steps themselves go on to repeatedly make the case that the suffering alcoholic can only find serenity through admission of powerlessness and intervention of a loving God. However, that God is not confined to the constraints of a particular

religious articulation, but rather referred to as “God as we understood Him”

(Anonymous, p.59). “Choose your own concept of God,” Tickle observes,

was to be one of the early principles that liberated Wilson from his own torment, and he would remain true to it throughout his life. God could even be addressed not as God, but as a/the Higher Power. In fact, health itself seemed to depend upon one’s having the power or facility to make just such a leap from the doctrinal to the *experiential* [emphasis added], and who could argue with that, especially given the increasingly obvious success rate AA was producing? (p. 92).

The “choose your own God” concept was significant, but its real genius was in its pairing with a second defining characteristic of AA spirituality: the authority of experience. From the start, AA assumed that other alcoholics were better-equipped and more effective carriers of a message of hope than were “non-addicted (non-confessing) experts and authorities, including most particularly pastors and clerics” (Tickle, p.92). In a move born of the same impulse to relocate authority that Descartes articulated three centuries earlier, twelve-step spirituality delivered a, perhaps unintentional but nevertheless substantial, blow to the authority of clergy. In its almost sacramental emphasis on one alcoholic sharing the experience of addiction and radical transformation upon “having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps” (Anonymous, p. 60), AA stood within the radically democratizing and anti-clerical tradition of religious liberalism. Experience was codified as the central justification and source for theology. The whole system was built from a pragmatic decision to work from the premise that other alcoholics’ experiences of recovery proved the existence and power of God to “restore us to sanity” (Anonymous, p. 59).

The “abc’s” of AA’s twelve steps, the closing of the passage from “How it Works” read ritually at the beginning of each meeting, sums up the liberal tenets underpinning its core spirituality:

Our description of the alcoholic, the chapter to the agnostic, and our personal adventures before and after made clear three pertinent ideas:

- (a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives.
- (b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism.
- (c) That God could and would if he were sought (p. 60).

The emphasis on both experience and the *seeking* of God are direct manifestations of the liberal tradition Schmidt explicates. The chapter titled “We Agnostics” in *Alcoholics Anonymous*, immediately preceding “How it Works”, essentially has as its primary focus an argument for the shift from the secular modernist reasoning that grounds truth in the rationality of science to a liberal religious foundationalism of experience which could function alongside scientific discovery. Schmidt contends, “For religious liberals, unlike their secular cousins, a deepened and diversified spirituality was part of modernity’s promise. Materialism and scientism might challenge this unfolding religion of the spirit...but to its proponents those perils only made the inward dimension of liberalism more important” (p.12).

Spirituality and Education

Thus far we have explored the relationship between the contemporary notion of “spirituality” and the liberal religious tradition, particularly as it relates to modernist thought and Protestant theologies. Claiming experience as its foundational principle, this amorphous and post-religious notion of spirituality has found its way

into the larger discourse around education. Undoubtedly, several routes to this place could be mapped. The interplay between the religious and educational dimensions of public life is complex and multifaceted. My choosing to highlight this notion of “spirituality” through its theological development is a to highlight particular knowledge relationships that current discourses tend to obscure. My intent here is to build this connection so that I might consider the implications of critiques of religious liberalism for the notion of spirituality in education, ultimately with the desire to invite new conversations and consider my own investments in these intersecting discourses.

Charting a way through the vast terrain of recent research in spirituality in education is a daunting task at best. This is nowhere close to a comprehensive survey. My purpose here is primarily to offer samples of a few scholars’ work in order to support my characterizing the larger discourse as related to the seeker spirituality that has already been established in relationship to the liberal religious tradition. I pay attention here to three voices in this conversation around spirituality in education: Miller, Palmer, and Dantley. I choose these three largely because theirs are voices that I have encountered repeatedly in my academic and professional life. While there are certainly countless others who could be brought into this conversation, these three offer a glimpse into the discursive trends that are the larger focus of my analysis.

John (Jack) P. Miller, Professor of Education at Ontario Institute for Education, has written widely in the field he refers to as “holistic education,” which

he describes as providing “a broader vision of education and human development” based on three key elements: “balance, inclusion, and connection” (1998, p. 46). He argues that schools are largely set up to focus on learning that happens through transmission (a one-way flow of information from teacher to student), or sometimes transaction (a more interactive flow of information between teacher and student). He posits a third mode of learning which he dubs *transformational*, focusing “not just on intellectual development, but also on physical, emotional, aesthetic, moral, and spiritual growth” (p.46). While he argues holistic educators should balance all three, Miller clearly suggests that the transformational is largely absent and in desperate need of further development in schools. He argues that this broadened educational vision “is a return to basics. It asks us to focus on what is ultimately important in life” (p. 47). This notion of *ultimate importance* points to Miller’s assumed universal experience of the sacred in relation to the self, others, and nature – experiences which he argues schooling too often fail to nurture. “If we are to build a less violent and more compassionate world,” he asserts, “we need to nurture this deeper sense of self in our children” (p. 48).

Miller is in fact quite clear that his educational vision towards the “whole child” is grounded in the Emersonian tradition. He bases his assertion that education should “help each person find their own destiny or calling” (p. 194) on Emerson’s assertion of the same principle. He similarly argues for “a curriculum for the inner life which nurtures contemplation” based on Emerson’s call for education to nurture the soul, which Miller contends grows out of Emerson’s belief that the individual is a

reflection of the “universal spirit” (p. 194). Miller similarly evokes Whitman, Thoreau, and Alcott, ultimately concluding that the Transcendentalists made key contributions to the education discourse to which we should return, including: 1) that within each individual is a soul that needs to be nurtured by the teacher and educational environment, 2) the teacher should respect the child, 3) experience is central to learning, and 4) the teacher should work from his or her spiritual center. This last point he argues, is “essential for contacting the intuitive wisdom of children” (p. 201). Ultimately, Miller’s evocation of these major transcendentalist thinkers is an act of justification for his spirituality-infused approach to education he dubs “holistic” (not to be confused with a more nuanced use of this term later in this dissertation). Following the same line of reasoning that Schmidt argues, Miller defends “Sometimes holistic educators are seen as ‘new age’ with no roots in the past. The work of these transcendentalists strongly counters that notion” (p. 202).

Similarly committed to education as a “spiritual journey” (1993), Parker Palmer’s books *To Know as We Are Known* (1983), and the *Courage to Teach* (1997) have been wildly popular and are often included in teacher education curriculum. Working out of his own his own Quaker spirituality, Palmer has written several books about teaching, learning, vocation, and spiritual journey. The Center for Courage and Renewal, which he founded, uses the tag line “reconnecting who you are with what you do” (2010). “What are we seeking when we seek ‘spirituality’ in education?” Palmer asks; “I think, at heart, that we are seeking to find life-giving forces and sources in the midst of an enterprise which is too-often death dealing: education”

(1999, p.164). Drawing from Merton's language of "true self," Palmer assumes an understanding of selfhood that is Platonist and essential, a foundational assumption of the created self based in a universal experience of the divine. His is a cosmology in which each has place in the larger order, and the task is to discover and live out of that place. He argues for a reclaiming of the "sacred at the heart of knowing, teaching, and learning", a notion he describes as "that which is worthy of respect" (p. 166).

Palmer critiques education on the basis that fear drives a curriculum that fragments the self and disconnects one person from another. He posits a counter move towards a spirituality of education based on love and compassion, noting that such a curriculum carries with it the potential for radical transformation. Ultimately, most of Palmer's work point towards this notion of "living divided no more," (p. 172) of our passions and our values being brought into conversation towards a sense of wholeness that calls us into action for social change. For Palmer, to educate is to invite knowledge of the true self, and in so doing empower the individual to act in community towards a more just world. For him this is a universal journey of the spirit: "I suspect that your journey, like mine, is towards trying to come into a deeper understanding of what it means to live divided no more. If we can come to a deeper understanding of what this decision might mean for us in the context of education, we will have done something worth doing" (p. 172).

Finally, Dantley (2003) grounds his work on spirituality in education leadership in a notion of "critical spirituality" which he describes as a construct

infusing “two radical perspectives, namely critical theory and prophetic, African American spirituality” (p. 5). He argues that blending the critique and deconstruction of power systems that undercut democratic relations “with reflection grounded in an African American sense of moralism, prophetic resistance, and hope” can make for transformative leadership. For Dantley, “spirituality” and “morality” are closely linked if not interchangeable. The centrality of moral change to the traditional notions of transformative leadership in education literature is his basis for the assertion of his *critical spirituality* construct.

Dantley argues that African American spirituality is an integral part of Black life, a “mechanism through which African Americans have shaped their consciousness and understanding of themselves as well as who they are in relationship to others” (p. 6). “Spirit,” he argues, “animates human life. It is that intangible dimension of ourselves that connects us with something greater than ourselves. It literally becomes the nexus of inspiration, motivation, and meaning-making in our lives” (p.6). Dantley goes on to link African American spirituality to the capacity for resilience, forgiveness, and survival. He looks to Cornel West’s notion of “prophetic spirituality” as a nuanced construction in which one critically perceives one’s “situationality in its unpolished context as the ‘as is,’ while transcending one’s political and social realities to project a different and in fact better ‘not yet’” (p. 8).

If we read each of these three scholars alongside Dresser’s century-old assessment of religious liberalism, the parallels are clear. Particularly in Miller and

Palmer, there is an emphasis on the individual “mystical experience of religious feeling,” though Dantley also grounds his notion of African American spirituality in a blended sense of self-understanding and inspiration. The contemplative traditions of silence and meditation are central to Palmer and Miller’s work, while all three are deeply invested in “ethical earnestness in pursuit of justice-producing reforms or ‘social salvation’” (Schmidt, p. 12). Each also claims a sort of universality of experience, as central to Murphey’s characterization of liberalism (p. 24), though Dantley presents a variation on this theme as he speaks to a universal African American spirituality. While his contextualized spirituality in some ways challenges the assumptions of a universal experience of the sacred which is central to the, notably white, liberal tradition; the broadness of his characterization of African American spirituality and its relationship to a common Black experience functions similarly in its assumption of universality, even if it is a limited universalism.

Each of these scholars avoids making the kind of specific theological claims that may be seen as more “religious” than “spiritual,” yet each holds transformational experience as foundational to their construction. In short, acknowledged or not, the “spirituality” or even “spiritualities” evoked here as part of a public discourse are much indebted to their nineteenth century precursors.

Critiques of Liberalism and Foundational Experience

Alcoholics Anonymous is helpful for us to the extent that it is illustrative in its articulation and communal practice of a pragmatic spirituality beyond religion, but it is not unique in its general aesthetic and guiding principles. The cultural trend

towards experiential spiritualities over against organized religious systems continues and permeates our broader discourses, as demonstrated by Miller, Palmer, and Dantley. Yet, the foundational logic of religious liberalism on which these spiritualities rest has found itself under attack. If, “spirituality” as it is commonly used is located somewhere on the upper floors of this tower of religious liberalism, stacked upon assumption after assumption that leads back to the irrefutable claims of a universal experience of the divine, then the crumbling of those claims destabilizes the entire structure of thought.

The most common attacks on “spirituality” as we have been using the term and its liberal religious leanings come from religious conservatives growing out of more fundamentalist leaning traditions. Those traditional attacks largely attempt to displace an experiential foundation and supplant it with a scriptural one. In my estimation, the more intriguing and potentially disruptive challenges, then, are not those concerned with which foundation to build from, but rather those which challenge the nature of foundational thought altogether.

Murphey (2002), utilizing the metaphor of a building, argues that within the liberal tradition experience lies as a foundation on which other “floors” or propositions are built, one resting on the other. Fundamentalists built a neighboring tower on the foundation of scripture, a foundation that liberals have challenged around historicism, hermeneutics, and the politics of canonization. Though quick to disrupt their neighbors’ stability, liberalism has been slow to reckon with the challenges to its own foundation. Murphey identifies three threats to liberalism that

are significant for our discussion. The first is the problem of God's existence, which if it is to be answered with a claim to personal experience reasonably invites skepticism. The second, and related critique, is that liberal theologies extend unidirectionally out of a universal, core inner experience of the divine, an experience presumably that can be differentiated from other religious experiences, yet there is little consensus on what exactly that experience *is*. Thus, it becomes self-referential. The acceptance of the theory that such an experience exists, and that it is a revelation of the divine, informs the assignment of such significance to the experience itself (p. 93).

The third challenge is related to this self-referential problem, and while it poses a particular problem to Murphey, who writes as a Christian theologian, may actually rest comfortably with Schmidt and other proponents of "spirituality" as other than religion. Murphey argues, that the same self-referential nature of the spiritual experience is then read through the theological lenses of those who have those experiences. "Thus," she argues, "Catholics have visions of Christ and of Mary; Protestants have experiences of repentance and reconciliation; Hindus have experiences of Krishna" (p. 94). What for Murphey functions as a problem because it erodes the ability to assert the particularity of Christianity, is ultimately the same feature of the liberal religious tradition that predicated a broader embrace of religious diversity and multiple articulations of the divine – exactly the move that Emerson and friends made. Still Murphey's, observation that the interpretation of the supposed universal experience through a matrix that assumes the nature and existence of the

experience to begin with, and then illuminated by the specific theological assumptions of the one having the experience, is compelling. The result, to use her metaphor, is that the foundation turns out to be “hanging from the balcony” (p. 92).

For those of us who, like the Transcendentalists, are less invested in forwarding one particular faith tradition over others than is reflected in Murphey’s concern regarding theological relativism, the third aspect of her critique still has significant implications. In fact, it reflects my central concern in the ways “spirituality” is evoked in broad brushstrokes, particularly in regards to education. Beyond the problematics of assuming the universality of a rather ill-defined experience of something grander than oneself, which I am inclined to forgive (or at least suspend for the moment) the notion of “spirituality” functions to obscure the second tier of assumptions through which the experience is interpreted. Thus, even if we chose to overlook that a universal experience of the sacred presupposes itself (which is a big if), the problem remains that such experiences are defined through inherited systems of theological assumptions.

Even in what is often assumed to be a uniquely postmodern accommodation of religious pluralism, an assumption which Schmidt compellingly if not intentionally debunks, the popular construction of “spirituality” simply decentralizes the narratives of particular religious expressions and replaces them with a larger and more encompassing metanarrative. Therefore, the problem with the “spiritual but not religious” trend which I find most disturbing is that those assumptions, the stuff of creeds and dogmas, avoid articulation and thus *avoid critical analysis*. My concern is

that too often these unarticulated, elusive theological claims allow amorphous articulations of spirituality to be played like a trump card having one or both of the following effects: an epistemological block on the part of those who play the card in order to avoid uncomfortable challenges to what they can stand knowing, or a complete dismissal of *all* articulations of spirituality (including undifferentiated constructs of religion and theology) by others in the game because of its claims to transcend the rules of regular play, in this case being rigorous critique.

It is my conviction that if spirituality is to be useful as a construct, then it must not be removed from the realm of critical analysis. In that vein, if for the sake of discussion, we continue to hold stable the possibility of a common experience of the divine, I observe two primary theological issues in which the examples of “spirituality” discourses we have considered thus far fail to own up to their assumptions: “What is the nature of humanity (i.e., subjectivity and the soul)?”, and “How does God (or Universal Spirit, or whatever language one uses) interact with the world?” Obviously, a third question could be raised about the existence of God, but one’s answer to the second, about the nature of God, implicates one’s assumptions about God’s existence.

Again, Alcoholics Anonymous provides a helpful example in that it is a more thoroughly articulated example of the “spiritual but not religious” path than most. The AA view of humanity, at least of Alcoholics, is characterized by powerlessness. In fact, it is this experience of powerlessness, the gift of desperation that results in a humility through which a “higher power” can “restore us to sanity” (Anonymous,

p.55). Yet, the AA literature also asserts that within each person is the spark of God consciousness, a seed of divine grace. While brokenness and powerlessness are understood as the universal human condition, experienced in a particularly acute manner for alcoholics, there is a tricky dichotomy at work in the transformational experience. The gift of desperation is granted externally from a benevolent higher power, a transforming grace that is enough to start one on the spiritual path by an admission of powerless and unmanageability. However, the practices that follow, in the form of the other eleven steps, promise a “spiritual awakening” – thus the transformative process is initiated by God, but requires the active participation of (in this case) the alcoholic. The alcoholic, trusting in the experiences of other alcoholics that have adopted these same practices and holding the principle of “progress not perfection” as central, maintains the spiritual condition through the working of the steps.

It is simple enough to see a parallel between the theology of grace laid out in these assumptions about humanity and God and John Wesley’s (1872) three tiered conception of grace, prevenient (preparing and present from birth), justifying (in the form of some conversion experience of repentance and forgiveness), and sanctifying (sustaining continued growth and practice through attention to God’s active presence). My point here is not to suggest that Alcoholics Anonymous is secretly a Methodist movement, but rather to suggest that there is a systematic theology and creed, with its own complex and formative history, underscoring even the claims towards the freedom to conceptualize “God *as we understood him*” (Anonymous, p.

59) (not to mention the theistic, anthropomorphic, and gendered assumptions in the use of a masculine pronoun in reference to God). In essence, the functioning of the steps is dependent on a conception of God that can and does deliver grace to a humanity that is ultimately loved, though spiritually sick and thus disconnected from the grace so freely given. There is a specific theology present and working in Alcoholics Anonymous, one based on the frameworks through which those who have experienced the transformation of recovery have interpreted their experiences, which is then offered as an interpretive lens for others. The existence of a higher power is evidenced by the recovery experience itself, and having made that justification, the experience is further described through (a remarkably Wesleyan) theology of grace and redemption. Though the intent may be towards a spirituality free of religious dogma, the effect is really more of a distilling religion (particularly liberal Protestantism) down to a few theological assumptions deemed pragmatic and useful to describing and facilitating the recovery experience.

I would argue a similar principle functions in *most* of the discourse around spirituality. Though in his earlier work Palmer more explicitly grounds his theological claims in a Quaker Christianity (1983), the work I explored earlier represents his move towards an increasingly obscured religious underpinning in an expression of universal spirituality. He, Miller (1998), and Dantley (2003) all make use of some construction of universal or ultimate truth/reality and the soul/spirit of the individual in relation to it. The unexamined claims here, as I briefly alluded to earlier, are towards a Platonist cosmology in which there is an ultimate “good” –

Christianized to God by the scholastics (Sheldrake, 2007), and then resecularized here back to “good” – and a cosmology in which all of creation has a specific place in the grand scheme. The goal of “holistic” (Miller, 1998) education, or “education as a spiritual journey” (Palmer, 1983), or “critical spirituality” (Dantley, 2003), could be understood then as a transformative experience towards a more moral order in which the value of each person is understood as it fits into a larger order; in Palmer’s words, “living divided no more” (p.172). But do not mistake these aims as purely individualistic, like their Liberal Religious precursors, these spiritualities are equally concerned with social transformation. The implication is that the process of individuals finding their place, living more fully into their created selves, leads to social action of the prophetic nature Dantley speaks of; the examples of Parks, King, and Gandhi Palmer points to, and the “less violent and more compassionate world” Miller envisions.

So, for these spiritual educators, there are a few theological assumptions functioning: there is a sacred goodness to each individual, something which might be called a “soul”; that soul exists as a part of an “ultimate reality” which abusive systems of power and oppression stand in the way of being fully realized on both the individual and communal level; and finally, that through some series of communal practices and collective choices individuals can progress towards realizing their true-selves and thus transform the world. While lacking in a clear articulation of God’s providence, and flavored with hints of radical transformation as the inner light of each is revealed through some blended enactment of external grace and hard work, this

hopeful narrative of progress is more akin to Protestant salvation than, say, Buddhist enlightenment. Where teachers are prophets and students are seekers, the journey towards a promise land seems the realization of destiny, and thus the divine decree is at least implied – even if the details of God’s potential for intervention are a bit fuzzy.

If the universal experience of God is problematic both in its very claims to universality and in its presumption of God in defining the universal experience on which its justification of God depends, then a de-religionized spirituality is equally problematic in its assertion of unexamined theological claims, not the least of which is the notion of a unified subject – a soul. I offer two major critiques of this notion (at least as it assumedly functions given a lack of expansion or interrogation). Looking to Butler (1990), the essentialist notion of a “true self,” or soul, created for a particular place and purpose breaks down in that the categories for understanding the self are discursively produced. “Identity” is thus performative, a repetition of gestures which are copies of other performances, which are copies of other performances, which lack any immutable foundation. The result is the appearance of a category (like gender) as “natural”. If the language and categories through which we understand and construct a self are produced discursively, then it becomes difficult to argue for the kind of Platonist cosmology that we have seen evoked. If the assumed placeholders for selfhood are destabilized, the notion of a true-self waiting to be freed is as problematic as the identity politics propping up the gay liberation “coming out” narrative.

Further, the libratory claims of self-discovery are themselves suspicious. To be a *subject*, Foucault claims (1982) has two interpretations: “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (p. 216). Foucault would thus read the notion of the true-self in the spirituality discourse, this notion of an inner and inward self, functioning as a means of subjugation that leads to constant surveillance of the self in an effort to be “normal.” Thus, the modern construction of the self ultimately closes off possibilities.

The second critique of this construction of self is more embodied. Though it is not explicitly clear in the examples of Miller, Palmer, and Dentley, the privileging of the soul as a the central category for selfhood can fall easily into a Cartesian dualism that denies the material body. This is a critique that can also be levied against some queer theorists and other poststructuralists, whose blank canvas approach maintains the body functions only as a text to be read and interpreted, rather than an integral part of the knowing itself. Murphey (1996) challenges this kind of disembodied notion of the soul with a simple, but compelling example. She tells the story of hearing philosopher of religion Richard Swinburne deliver a paper in which he stated “it was conceivable that he should change into a crocodile and still remain himself” (p. 92). Swinburne is a dualist, operating from a theory of the nature of the person through which he identifies with his immaterial soul; “thus, he can easily imagine waking up one morning and finding that his soul, the seat of his

consciousness, personality, emotions, has transmigrated into the body of a crocodile – possible, though surely inconvenient” (p.93). On the other hand, Murphey presupposes a “nonreductive physicalism” in her conception of the person, “according to which human mental and spiritual capacities arise out of the complex ordering of our physical selves in their social environment,” thus in regards to the philosopher/crocodile, “no neo-cortex, no capacity for philosophical thought, no Swinburne” (p.93).

Spirituality within Christian Theological Studies

Having demonstrated that “spirituality” largely takes its meaning in popular discourse in its distinguishing itself from a dogmatic construction of “religion”, and then having problematized the use of “spirituality” as a broadly universal construct in education discourses, we turn now to those seeking to claim “spirituality” *within* a tradition. Because “spirituality” emerges as construct in particular relation to Christianity, the current debate over the construction of spirituality as a legitimate field of study within Christian theological education has much to offer our larger project. Free from the critique that other uses of the term “spirituality” obscure theological assumptions, Christian Spirituality, as a field of study attempts to explicitly situate itself within an established theological tradition. Therefore this debate can help us further understand “spirituality” as a construct by removing some of the problematic variables and instead locating it not in opposition to religion in general, or Christianity in particular, but in relationship to other sub-disciplines of theological study. I look here to two established scholars, Roberts and Sheldrake,

who write from opposing positions, both responding to the increased demands for theological schools to address “spirituality”.

In his scathing critique of the responses to a rise in student requests and institutional pressures for seminaries to offer more in the way of “spirituality” and “spiritual formation”, Roberts (2002) characterizes the “fixes” as ranging from “incoherent” to “flakey” (p. 44). He argues that the protestant (particularly Presbyterian in his case) adoption of Roman Catholic modes of spiritual practice such as spending time in Benedictine monasteries, or training spiritual directors are decontextualized from theological and cultural realities that gave them significance. Similarly he suggests a “fad” such as labyrinth walking, promoted as a profound reclamation of ancient practices, is elevated beyond its significance, as the practice is neither particularly ancient nor is there evidence that it was particularly important even in its original context (p. 44).

“Spirituality,” for Roberts, “is one of those amorphous words that can mean anything in general and nothing in particular” (p. 46). His fear regarding the cries from students for more attentiveness to spirituality is that they grow from a desire for a “totally integrated, un-conflicted Christian identity” that can make them feel secure that they will remain faithful in their future ministries, a surety he suggests is untenable and impossible. Roberts raises questions about the role of the academy in supporting the Christian life, which he argues is at its core communal and that community rests in the congregation rather than the seminary. It is this tension, in part, which makes this thread about “spirituality” as a field of study in theological

schools relevant to our larger conversation. Two questions strike me in reading Roberts' critique: "Is 'spirituality' a legitimate construct or body of knowledge?", and "If it is, is it the role of the school to nurture it?"

Sheldrake (2001) offers a counter argument, beginning with a clear definition of "spirituality" within a Christian context saying the term "describes how people relate their beliefs about God in Jesus Christ to their core values and then express these beliefs in spiritual practices and also in how they form social and religious communities and relate to social and cultural realities" (p. 53). Other than his circular use of "spiritual" in describing practices, it is a definition I find generally workable. It is consistent with Bowe's (2003) simple assertion about the *doing* nature of spirituality: "Spirituality is theology on two feet" (p. 11). Sheldrake is a Roman Catholic historian and writes predominantly about the precursors to "spirituality," through pre-Vatican II terms such as "ascetical" or "mystical" theology, noting that within theological studies the term has only been actively used since the 1960's. He argues five reasons for the shift in language and the direction of the emerging field of study: 1) it counters outmoded distinctions between a supernatural, spiritual life and the everyday experience; 2) it recovers a sense of the collective rather than individualistic nature of Christian discipleship; 3) it is not limited to interiority, but integrated all aspects of human existence; 4) it re-engages with mainstream theology and biblical studies; and 5) it serves as an area of reflection that crossed lines of denominations and eventually faith traditions (2007, p. 4). Still, as modernism

loosens its grip on theological studies, questions of context, experience, collective engagement, and ecumenism are increasingly commonplace in other sub-disciplines.

Sheldrake positions spirituality as an interdisciplinary field of study, taking up other historical theological sub-disciplines in light of their application to lived experiences, both contemporary and historic. In my estimation, Sheldrake's most compelling case for the perpetuation of the field (beyond my pre-existing bent towards interdisciplinary approaches) is the claim, "Spirituality of its very nature is a 'self-implicating field'. That is to say that some kind of transformation is implied by the search for knowledge" (p. 61). He goes on to argue that "spirituality" functions to hold the larger enterprise of theological education accountable to this self-implication. "This does not imply" he purports "a lack of rigor or a dumbing down of critical analysis. It does, however suggest that 'to do theology' implies *becoming a theological person* rather than simply using theological tools effectively" (p. 61). Thus, the construct of "spirituality" within theological education makes a unique contribution in its transformational intent. While he is quick to assert that his courses are academic and not a form of personal spiritual formation, he grounds his study and teaching in the belief that "all interpretation is inescapably an act of commitment" (p. 62). It is in the response to the question "why study this?" that spirituality as a field takes its meaning. Rather than studying texts, traditions, and practices for purely literary or historical purposes, spirituality unapologetically suggests a claim that such study can be personally and culturally transformative.

I find the debate about “spirituality” within Christian theological education helpful not simply because it is articulated within a tradition which I claim as informing my personal and communal commitments, but because it emphasizes a *need for that kind of articulation*. Until this point, our attention has been focused on understanding “spirituality” not as a universal given, but rather as a discursively produced construct functioning to produce and support specific, though often unstated, worldviews. Yet, in this historic era that is being depicted as demonstrating an increase and marked interest all things spiritual (if not religious), these worldviews remain overwhelmingly modernist. In my estimation, while the inventiveness of spiritual seekers in blending and questioning religious structures has tremendous potential for the emergence of broadening spectrums of engagement, unless they are accompanied by rigorous, critical inquiry they are more problematic than useful. In essence, I am arguing that spirituality cannot escape the discourse of religion, even if it seeks “liberation” from institutional expressions. There is no spirituality without theology, and so to assert a vision for spirituality in education without reflecting on the theological claims it presupposes, without attention to its cosmological and epistemological infrastructure, is simply irresponsible.

Yet, Sheldrake’s compelling defense of “spirituality” as a field of study on the basis of its uniquely transformative claim, articulated in relationship to a broader theological framework, offers a keystone in the archway towards my own proposals. Yes, “spirituality” matters. It can be a useful concept in our discourses around education, because it not only takes seriously the search for meaning in light of

experiences with that which we do not fully understand, its self-implicating nature uniquely speaks of those experiences as transformative. The best of what Palmer, Miller, and Dantley have to offer us is the same sort of accountability that Sheldrake suggests spirituality offers theological sub-disciplines, a call to be about something more transformational, more life-giving, than training individuals in the effective use of tools.

Thus, I retain the centrality of spirituality within pedagogy, though with the caveat that it take seriously the critiques I have laid out and thus open itself to challenge. Further, I cannot comprehend a useful theological framework for spirituality that does not engage the challenges of postmodern thought. Therefore in order for my work to claim any cohesion, the next section *Towards a Spirituality for Pedagogy* must not only take seriously the transformative claims and self-implicating nature of spirituality itself, it must be evaluated in light of my own critiques of how “spirituality” is frequently utilized in education discourses.

Towards a Spirituality for Pedagogy

Sheldrake’s (2001) emphasis on self-implication as a distinctive characteristic of spirituality as a field of study suggests that it may be well positioned as a significant aspect of postmodern pedagogical discourse, but only if it emerges from nonfoundationalist theological assertions. Spirituality can offer a mode of discourse comfortable with the tension between agency and subjectivity, in which we produce and are produced, while avoiding the mires of cynicism. Yet if we are to speak of

spirituality in postmodernity, we must remember that postmodernity is exactly that: *post-modernity*. Modernity is its reference point, and thus suggesting a sharp break from it would be a dubious move.

It is in this vein that Bauman proposes the term “liquid modernity” (2000), arguing that modernity is not over, but rather that we have moved into a phase marked by its fluidity and inability to hold shape. But, he argues, “was not modernity a process of ‘liquefaction’ from the start? Was not ‘melting down solids’ its major pastime and prime accomplishment all along?” (p. 2). Modernist epistemologies geared towards dethroning the past in narratives of progress and liberation were always about the melting process, however until recently they were about “melting the solids” – to borrow a Marxist refrain – in order to replace them with new and improved solids. For Bauman, the “melting powers” of modernity have moved from the institutional level to the individual, as “it is the patterns of dependency and interaction whose turn it is to be liquefied” (p. 8). He suggests that modernity is not over, but it is breaking down; the projects and aims of the era have turned in on themselves. The structures making meaning of other structures are collapsing, and he wonders “whether their resurrection, albeit in a new shape or incarnation, is feasible; or – if it is not – how to arrange for their decent and effective burial” (p. 8). Thus, my articulation of a postmodern theology that can support a spirituality for pedagogical vision must respond to the critiques I have previously levied, but is born out of the late modern, liquefaction of those discourses. The ice has melted, but I still swim in these waters.

If, as I have contended, our liberal religious tradition undergirds a contemporary construction of “spirituality” in its “spiritual but not religious” context; if that “spirituality” has become an accepted (if amorphous) aspect of the educational discourse; and if, rather than being free from religious thought, “spirituality” asserts both the circular reasoning of experience as the foundational claim for the nature of God, and the problematic claim of the existence of a unified self (in the form of a “soul”); how can “spirituality” still function as a useful construct in education discourses? While it has been my intent to remove “spirituality” from the rather idolatrous category of the unchallengeable, ultimately, I am still invested in keeping it alive. While I have raised critiques of the liberal religious tradition, both in its Christian theological and more amorphous “spiritual” forms, it is a tradition that has been formative in my own life and one with which I am still associated. Perhaps then, I am something of a *postliberal* (Lindbeck, 1984), one who claims a nonfoundationalist theology, but whose theological antecedents are largely of the liberal type.

Here then, in positing spirituality for pedagogy that I find workable, I return to my Christian heritage. Since my attempt is to construct an alternative in light of the limits of the dominant usage of “spirituality” I just explicated, I must first challenge assumptions of universality by claiming the particular theological contexts through which I operate, the language that both produces the possibility of my propositions and in which my propositions are produced as possible. The distinctive centrality of salvation, whether interpreted individually or communally, marks my tradition and

the spirituality that emerges from it. Not unlike the earlier discussion of Wesleyan theology and Alcoholics Anonymous, grace is a central theme and must be worked out through theologies of God's action in the world – issues of imminence and intervention.

So, what is being documented here, at this point in my research, is a reflexive move in which I am breaking from the claim of experience as the irrefutable justification of God's existence, while acknowledging the epistemological quandary in which I locate myself by still professing Christianity after the foundation of the liberal version that informed me has been shown to be hanging out on the balcony. This is a pragmatic move. As I began "mapping this plateau", I claimed Christianity as the tradition shaping the theological framework for a spirituality I find workable. It is a deeply contextual claim, specific to my embodied experience of a particular cultural milieu. Thus, as in the previous chapter, and as a function of locating myself within Christian discourse, I work with the assumption of the existence of God. However, I do not use that presupposition as means of dodging a more critical conversation about the *nature* of God, or how God functions as a construct in the production of other knowledge.

Let me also be clear that in articulating a spirituality for pedagogical purposes I am in no way advocating a collapse of the distinctions between church and state. Much has been written on both the need for a more robust conversation about faith and religion in schools and the need to do that in a democratically responsible manner (Slattery, 2006). I work in both secular and religious learning communities, and

understand the differences of my role in each; but I also recognize that I carry the same history and self-understandings into either setting. My interest is in an articulation of the spiritual life in as much as it informs my understanding of how and why I teach, the ways in which my identity as an educator is constructed by a spiritual discourse, and how that identity might be utilized in effecting positive cultural change. However, this is not primarily an autobiographical venture. I am not (at this point) leading with a telling of my life story; I am simply making the conscious decision to privilege particular discourses that shape the language through which I make meaning of my life story. These are the discourses that have significant resonance for me, and so I accept and claim that criteria as a delimiting factor in my research.

Epistemological Metaphors

In the introduction to this dissertation I make much use of Deleuze and Guattari's (1985) challenge to thinking about knowledge as a tree, and their favoring a conceptualization of knowledge as a rhizome. I find their critique of the linear representation of knowledge on the written page intriguing, and their parallel metaphor of mapping plateaus helpful. However, in turning to a more constructive or propositional phase of this project, the rather unwieldy aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's radically playful metaphor becomes cumbersome. Their idealization of a schizophrenic construction of reality that pushes beyond a critical suspicion of authoritative claims can be, well, maddening.

In a move borrowed from Murphey (2002), perhaps a more useful metaphor for our purposes at this point is Quine's (1953) depiction of knowledge as a web or a net. This Quinian holism, like the rhizome, challenges the epistemological claims of foundationalism. However, where it is helpful for our purposes is in its implications for justification. For Quine, boundaries of the web are experiential. That is not to say that they are foundational, as in the assumption of a singular universal experience grounding modern liberalism; but rather experience, itself, is variable and changing. He writes specifically of science, so his interest here is in a web constructed by a particular epistemological system. There is room within his construction for multiple and competing webs, each with their own, potentially impinging, boundaries. For Quine, "Conflict with experience at the periphery" necessitates readjustments to the internal logic of the web, so "re-valuation of some statements entails revaluation of others, because of their logical interconnections – the logical laws being in turn simply certain further statements of the system" (p. 42).

Murphey (2002) highlights two dogmas that Quine disrupts. First, he calls into question the notion that a given belief could be traced in a linear and unidirectional way to a foundational belief derived directly from experience. The conception of a web of knowledge, in which all beliefs are justified in relation to other beliefs, means that an experiential disruption implicates the whole of knowledge. Second, he argues that attempts to maintain a special category of indubitable knowledge based on core concepts collapses under our ability (and occasional willingness) to adjust the meanings of the terms to maintain the truth of

the claims. Stated another way, “concepts themselves have a history, and their meaning shifts under the pressure of new discoveries and theoretical changes” (p.95).

Thiemann (1985) is one of several theologians making use of Quine’s conception of knowledge in thinking about justification of religious belief. He argues that holist justification requires situating a disputed belief within the web of accepted and interrelated beliefs on which it depends. Using the example of God’s prevenience, Theimann argues that the disputed belief is logically tied to both practices and beliefs not under dispute among Christians. He suggests that the very nature of the web of Christianity is so tied to those beliefs, that their disruption would cause such a radical shift that the web would no longer be Christianity. Thus, he is able to reason backwards towards a justification of the belief held in contention by arguing it is presupposed by its relationship to more widely accepted beliefs and practices. It is worthy of note that Theimann includes *practices* in his construction, acknowledging, in Murphey’s (2002) words “the intrinsic relationship between human knowing and doing” (p. 97) that I return to later in my argument.

Because holism offers an epistemology in which threads of logic are mutually supportive and running multi-directionally, it resists the traditional function of a unified and singular foundation. Still, as Theimann argues, claims can be justified within their multi-relational context to other claims. The challenge is that those other claims have to be presupposed, that the viability of a belief lies within the believing community. Thus, in contrast to attempts to defend Christian truth-claims in relation to general principles of rationality, validity for a nonfoundational Christian theology

is located within the authority the community exercises on itself as the tradition continually seeks to redescribe its internal logic. In my consideration of Theimann's holistic, nonfoundationalist theology, I would maintain the construction works only if we consider multiple Christianities, multiple communities within which the internal logic is redescribed in relation not to a common, unifying, and foundational *experience*, but rather in relation to multiple and varied boundary *experiences*.

By employing this epistemological method in the context of working towards a spirituality shaped by the Christian discourses that animate my selfhood, I can begin with the presupposition of the existence of God (and the significance of God's revelation in the figure Jesus Christ), and the continued relevance of Christian scripture (inasmuch as they proclaim that revelation). Rather than these being understood as foundational, indubitable beliefs, they are understood as beliefs with complex and interrelated histories that are so central to the nature of Christianity that they can be held relatively stable in a discourse defined as Christian. Since the experiential boundaries of the epistemological system are defined by the practicing community, the parameters and viability of what may be taken for a given within the system depends on who is included in the definition of community. Functionally, though, it allows the possibility of moving pragmatically forward in our discussion with an acknowledgment of the presuppositions as just that, presuppositions. They mark the structure of the conversation. Thus, the measure of the validity of my spirituality will be its adherence to an internal logic within the fabric of the tradition it rests upon. Yet, the privileging of shared experience in the ongoing process of a

community negotiating the boundaries of a thought system (even with the acknowledgement that the same thought system gives articulation to the experience itself), allows me to claim some of the best of what I seek to retain from the liberal tradition. This post-liberal positioning rejects the notion of a single universalizing experience of God, and yet maintains that interpretations of experiences through a God-shaped lens, over time and in dialogue, produce valuable knowledge.

A second challenge emerges with holistic justification in that, as I alluded to already, it fails to address the problem of relativism. If justification is dependent on the community's redescribing its own logic, and there are multiple communities functioning simultaneously, are all of these internally coherent systems equally valid? MacIntyre (1989), using a complex analysis of history of the Thomist tradition and its significant rivals, counters the assumption that when judged by its own terms every tradition will always appear to be justified. More important for us than the details of his analysis, is that he demonstrates that this is not the case. A tradition fails when it cannot, within the construct of its own terms, resolve an epistemological crisis within the community of its adherents. Not that it is an easy task, or even possible in the present, but a tradition or paradigm can thusly be judged if it can continue to readjust and progress while its competitors fail.

Methodological Metaphors

Adopting this articulation of a holistic approach, my proposal may be judged on its adherence to the internal claims of traditions within which it stands. But just as multiple, yet related, epistemological metaphors are helpful in moving from critique

to justification; other metaphors may be useful in describing the methodology of the creative process. Villaverde's (2008) trickster, the fluidity of consciousness suggested by a border-dwelling Anzaldua (1999), and a stick-shift driving Sandoval (1991) remain active, and describe my stance as a researcher. Similarly, Segovia and Talbot's (1995) theological application of Ricoeur's (1985) "hermeneutic of suspicion," questioning the uses of power in the production of knowledges that serve as sources, is still at play in this cartography (Deleuze and Guattari, trans. 1987) of a theological framework I undertake. However, these feminist and poststructural influences suggest techniques of navigation more than generation. Perhaps my draw to them sheds light on why I find this more propositional task I am undertaking here to be such a challenge.

Not unlike Murphey's articulation of the theologian's task as "contributing to the reweaving of the doctrinal web as it has been handed on to her, whether this means minor repairs or a radical reformulation to meet an epistemological crisis in her tradition" (p.106), I am working with the discourses I have inherited. The challenge I face is that these discourses are multiple and the communities reconfigure as I move in and out of different webs of relationships when engaging different aspects of this work. Her metaphor breaks for me at the point that it assumes navigating a singular community, a scholar clear about which Quinian web she is tasked with mending. Murphey assumes an intelligible and stable community context, an audience to which she writes who shares her investment in the tropes that characterize her web. She is a Christian theologian, and thus she works within the

established discourse of Christian theology, which she assumes offers enough internal cohesion and self-definition to provide functional boundaries to the net.

On the other hand, the production of my scholarly identity situates me in the field of Education, perhaps more specifically Critical Pedagogy (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 2008) – which is in itself interdisciplinary, and thus renders me suspicious in claiming participation in the theological community, at least to those functioning as academic border patrol. Further, having found myself on more than one occasion living in tension with the church’s exclusionary practices, I get more than a little bit nervous about where the boundaries around the community called “Christian” fall. There remain many in the larger Christian discursive community, in the academy and well beyond, for whom my membership is questionable despite my profession of faith. While I welcome the task of reweaving the web of the Christian theology given to me, in as much as it is necessary to continue in this current project, my conversation partners – my communities – are multiple, and not necessarily made up of other Christian theologians. I can claim some basic tenants as definitive of the Christian tradition and thus shaping the parameters of the discourse, but I do so with the acknowledgement that I stand at the experiential edges of more than one web, at the surprising intersection of disparate discourses, and (because of a thankfully flexible department) with only tenuous demands placed on me by institutional disciplinarity. That is not to suggest that I stand apart from the discursive traditions that shape me, but rather to acknowledge that the cartography is complex.

The result is that I function something like a DJ or dubmaster, deconstructing sounds, isolating rhythms and looping snippets to produce new compositions. The database of my music collection is organized by genre (or as Murphey would see it, by Quinian web or net) so that I may more easily find what I am looking for, but I know the boundaries of the genres are tenuous at best. Like any creative DJ, I may pull from classical recordings and African drum circles, from jazz improvisations and classic rock, from gospel tracks and spoken word rants. For the DJ, the art is in juxtaposing multiple sources while maintaining a danceable rhythm. As DJ Spooky, aka That Subliminal Kid, aka Paul D. Miller suggests, “After all, it’s all just data. Map one metaphor onto the other, remix, and press play. The sampling machine can handle any sound, and any expression. You just have to find the right edit points in the sound envelope” (2008, p. 6). In theorizing the production of electronic music through the sampling of digitized audio files, he continues:

Blurring the lines between forms of thought echoes in the aftereffects of their actions and things generated by those thoughts, and well, in this day and age, that’s something to give one – pause...Music of floating signifiers – software as editing environment, dematerialization of the studio at a bit rate that can only accelerate. This is the end result: An incidental drift across definitions takes the place of any fixed meaning – like slang, we look at sounds as a vernacular process. They’re a syntax of the ‘what-if’ – how will these sounds appear in this mix when we place them over another sound, in another file, in another program? (p.17).

Davis (2008), exploring the roots of the hip hop tradition observes that early dubmasters stripped music down to pure drums and bass, then “introduced extended counter-rhythms by multiplying chunks of sound (voices, guitars, drums) through

echo and reverb, producing stuttered pulses which split off from the main beat and generate cross-rhythms as they stray and fade into the virtual void” (p. 65). He argues that in rarely sustaining staggered apart playing for very long, it is not strictly polymetric, yet by dropping other sound elements in and out of the mix, the dubmaster “teased the rug out from the listener’s habitual rhythmic orientation toward the 4/4, creating a subtle virtual analog of the tripping, constantly shifting conversations of West African drums” (p. 65).

Similarly, as an educator/theologian, I seek to emphasize the rhythms of complex discourses by stripping them down and exposing them. Then, layering other elements from both similar and disparate discourses on top of them, I will play with multiple drumbeats, sometimes dissonant, sometimes destabilizing, not so much with the aim of bringing them into synchronicity as with the hope to find in their layering a compelling conversation.

Theology and Critical Pedagogy in a Melting Modernity

As already acknowledged, I am certainly not the first to explore the relationships between the fields of Theology and Critical Pedagogy (see Slattery, 2006; Pinar, 1995; and Kincheloe, 1992). Curriculum theorists have particularly drawn from two theological trends emerging in late modernity and sharing similar aims with critical pedagogies: Liberation Theology, and to a lesser degree Process Theology. Both of these trends took shape in the twentieth century alongside the deteriorating foundations of modernity. A shared emphasis on *contextualizing* theologies, challenging universalisms across lines of political culture (in the case of

Liberation Theology) and time in history (in the case of Process Theology), has made both schools well situated for postmodernity, and thus common sources for the projects of postmodern theologians. At the same time, their relative accessibility and commitment to social change have made these two theological schools popular among those seeking theological grounding for other movements, thus the relationship to Critical Pedagogies.

It makes sense then that the next step in this research should be revisiting the work of those who shaped the history of the intersecting discourses of critical pedagogies and Christian spirituality. Having identified the primary genres for the sources I draw from, each of which is further explained in context, what follows is a theological remix. Holding the steady rhythms of a Christian base line, I sample and juxtapose from these two theological camps and the other critical pedagogues who employ them. In a holistic fashion, I consider the internal critiques of those who seek to reweave these theologies and claim participation in their justifying communities, particularly the critiques voiced by feminists and womanists. The remixes I produce are not purist representations, but borrow from what I find useful and aesthetically pleasing. I critique them in juxtaposition, and use their conceptual bricks to produce new models.

Spirituality, Pedagogy, and Liberation

Having joined Sheldrake in asserting the claim that the explicitly self-implicating and transformational intent of “spirituality” makes a unique contribution to theological studies, let me further suggest that a similar claim can be made about

its significance in critical pedagogies. In fact, I would argue that this transformational claim lies at the heart of critical pedagogies, and though those salvific aims have been articulated through several theological and cultural matrices, the field has remarkable overlap with Christian, Latin American Liberation Theology, particularly through their common relationship to Paulo Freire. Though Freire is not the only important voice in the emergence of critical pedagogy as a field of study, his influence is tremendous. Peter McLaren (2003) refers to him as the “inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy” (p.1). Kincheloe (2008) argues that his influence is so significant at this point all work in critical pedagogy after him has to refer to his work, and suggests that the notion of critical pedagogy as we understand it today emerges in Friere’s scholarship and activism.

Born in Brazil in 1921, Friere’s work with the peasant farmworkers around him was seen as a threat by the wealthy landowners and the Brazilian military (Kincheloe, 2008). In 1964, following a military overthrow of Brazilian reform government, his work was shut down, he was jailed for seventy days, then deported. The World Council of Churches sponsored the continuation of Freire’s work in Chile and then throughout the world. Friere’s emphasis on liberatory action, students intervening in the dehumanizing processes of schooling which served to validate the privilege of the wealthy, necessitated both inward change and action in the world. “Freirean liberation,” Kincheloe observes, “is a social dynamic that involves working with and engaging other people in a power-conscious process” (p. 71).

The Liberation Theology movement that spread throughout Latin American and has now influenced Christian theological discourse throughout the world began in the 1960s and has been closely associated with, perhaps indebted to, Friere's work (Pinar, et. all, 1996). Professing a preferential option for the poor, Liberation Theology grew in response to massive socioeconomic oppression in the region. With the publication of Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* in (1973) and the subsequent condemnation of his and other theologian's work by right-wing governments and elements of the Roman curia, the movement drew international attention and further influenced the development of anti-oppressive theologies globally.

Liberation Theology is characterized by its understanding of theology as a *second moment* in the life of the Christian person or community. There is an assertion that *life* comes first; daily life in community "has chronological, logical, and pastoral precedence over theological reflection" (Maduro, 1992). Liberation theologies challenge the assumption that there can be any other theological method, arguing that *all* theologies grow out of specific life experiences and time and culture bound praxis, whether or not they acknowledge their contextualization. Therefore, all theologies stem from and respond to specific and singular experiences rather than a universal experience. Finally, Liberation Theology emphasizes that even though it is prone to claiming otherwise, theology is not "an individual, intellectual, or specialized task," rather it is "the fruit of life in community, of shared faith, and of multiple efforts (often invisible and unrecognized)" (p. 288). This radical

contextualization and disruption of the universal experience is in large part what makes Liberation Theology a still viable option.

Liberation Theology articulates a commitment to addressing the social issues of the poor and marginalized within a Christian vision, arguing that the central Gospel message is one of justice understood as liberation from political and economic oppression. Growing out of a communal commitment to respond to the economic and political oppression of the Latin American poor, as a *second movement* the central concept in Liberation Theology is God's call to for the liberation of the oppressed, rather than a call to the production and reification of a theology of liberation itself. The theology functions to describe the experience (as it argues all theologies do) rather than the other way around (Maduro, 1992). Christ thus is envisioned as liberator, not in an ethereal metaphysical notion of salvation, but in the radically incarnational and embodied experiences of poor. In its critique of social structures, Liberation Theology reconceptualizes sin to emphasize its systemic nature over issues of individual holiness. Particularly in its emphasis on *praxis*, the reflective blending of theory and practice; and the centrality of *comunidades de base*, small groups which ground the movement's hermeneutical authority in the lived experiences of the poor and function as active sites of spiritual, epistemological, and political resistance, Liberation Theology echoes Friere's vision of education articulated in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970).

While Friere's work has emerged as central to North American curriculum theorists, the continued influence of the theological aspects of his work are largely

deemphasized in traditional schools of education. Despite his close affiliation with the World Council of Churches as he articulated his vision internationally (Kincheloe, 2008), a North American anxiety about the blurring of boundaries between theological and educational discourses, distinctions which did not seem to be important to Friere himself, have limited interplay between the two. While the theological underpinnings of Liberation Theology are intertwined in contemporary articulations of critical pedagogy, they are more often than not obscured in the same manner that our broad, popular use of “spirituality” obscures the theologies on which it depends for meaning.

Yet the significance of the interrelationship between the two is not lost on theorists such as Kincheloe (1992) and Slattery (1992) who more directly acknowledge their shared influences with Liberation Theologians, and actively consider the implications of their work for critical pedagogy. Kincheloe argues that Liberation Theology offers a model for disrupting objectivism which has significant implications for emancipatory research methodologies in curriculum studies. He suggests:

In its refusal to accept history as a record of what has prevailed, i.e. the record of the established and successful – Liberation Theology exposes the fact that the conquered and defeated have received the short end of the stick, that the unfulfilled dreams of the commoners have not found their way into the ‘official story’. Pedagogically, this exclusion contributes to oppression when students from subjected groups are taught the science and culture of the dominant society without this knowledge passing through a filter constructed by a historically grounded self-consciousness (p.1).

In a similar move, Slattery (1992) links Pinar's autobiographical methodologies in curriculum study (*currere*) with Gutierrez's articulation of Liberation Theology, underscoring the common reliance on Freire:

It is interesting that Pinar, like Gutierrez, begins his commentary on *currere* paraphrasing Friere's (1968) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The human vocation, Freire, Pinar, and Gutierrez insist, is humanization; the vision of pedagogy is a dialogical relationship with students; the goal of pedagogy is to cultivate thought and action in praxis... In Liberation Theology, human life in its entirety is seen as an encounter with God's salvific grace. There is a regressive moment in this encounter: a baptism in the death of the historical Jesus, where one enters into the past, meditates on it, submerges oneself in its waters, but does not succumb to its despair. In the progressive movement, the future enters into the historical present revealing the glory of resurrection. The analytical movement is the awareness that religious praxis is also my praxis. Thus, eternity (past, present, and future) become embedded in human existence through grace. Finally, in the synthetical moment, the fullness of times is recognized and celebrated. Thus, spirituality becomes an autobiographical movement which allows the individual to become present to shared experiences of humanity (p. 20-21).

In a claim that anticipates work like this very project's critique and reassertion of the role of spirituality in pedagogical discourse; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman make the case that Liberation Theology, "can expand the dialogue with those who believe that critical pedagogy has appropriated the language of empowerment, hope, and eschatology from theology, stripped it of its spiritual, cosmological, and autobiographical imperatives, and converted critical theory into an empty political ideology" (p. 646). Thus, when I situate myself as researcher in critical pedagogies and take on a holistic approach, Liberation Theology is the web to whose reweaving I can contribute as I articulate a spirituality applicable to pedagogical discourse.

Furthering this holistic approach, the critiques of Liberation Theology I privilege come from those who claim participation within its community. Since I am not attempting to construct a full systematic theology (but rather sample and remix), I continue to pay attention primarily to the two issues that framed my critique of spirituality in the first place: the nature of humanity, and the nature of God's action in the world. In the construction of my spirituality I acknowledge that Liberation Theology is not a unified and singular pattern of thought, but rather a fluid movement maintaining general themes while situated in multiple contexts; yet the commitment to hope and the call to praxis function as common themes. Though Liberation Theology is not the only theological influence I will draw from, its linkages to the epistemological net that defines the relevant themes of Christianity for work in critical pedagogy loom large. It is also significant that though it emerged from a Latin American movement, Liberation Theology's influence on contemporary North American situated theologies (particularly feminist and queer) has played deeply influential roles in both my adult church life and theological education. A theology that can offer meaning to my spirituality, particularly as it informs my pedagogy, must therefore take Liberation Theology seriously while also tending to its limitations and bringing it into conversation with other webs of knowing I find formative.

While I privilege internal critiques in this holist methodology, it would be painfully difficult to move forward without mentioning poststructuralist challenges to the very notion of "liberation". Butler (1990) articulates a cynicism towards liberation in keeping with poststructuralist thought as she asserts that liberation is not

possible because there is no way out of the discourse through which meaning is produced. Essentially, one just moves from one regulatory discourse into another. There is also in her work a significant critique of the tyranny of “community” in the regulation of normativities, further challenging the identity politics underlying much of the claims of Liberation Theology. While I take up these concepts with greater depth in Part III, I mention them here as an acknowledgement that I carry them with me into this next phase of the conversation. While my proposals may be somewhat more hopeful in regards to both liberation and community, I maintain a hermeneutic of suspicion not completely at odds with these critiques.

Liberation Theology has traditionally concerned itself with analyses of repressive power more than discursive or productive power. However, in more recent permutations analysis of the productive power of Liberation Theology itself has grown in prevalence, particularly in the work of theologians like Marcella Althaus-Reid, Ivan Petrella, and Luiz Carlos Susin (2007). These later theologians offer a discursive analysis of the movement that holds multiple understandings of power in productive tension while still insisting on a message of radical hope. If this web of Liberation Theology is a genre from which I might sample, the thumping bass line driving it is a revolutionary rhythm, though the sounds layered on top of it are playfully complex.

The Subject and The Authentic Self

The salvific claims of Liberation Theology, and much of critical pedagogy for that matter, like popular uses of “spirituality” presume a self in need of saving. For

Liberation Theologians, the specific emphasis on the poor and marginalized is levied as a critique of dualistic and future-oriented notions of salvation that privilege the soul while failing to address the immediate needs of the body. Placing the emphasis of salvation in the context of the immediate lived experience addresses the embodied, incarnational critique I raised of much of the broader spirituality discourse. However, there remain problems in the conceptualization of poor bodies. Althaus-Reid (2004, 2007, 2008), queer/feminist theologian, calls for greater attention in Liberation Theology to issues of gender, sex and class. The “poor” in her analysis, has serious limitations in its formal articulation. Because the privileging of the poor and the marginalized in the Liberationist construct, based in the assertion that “in Jesus himself is the historical option of a God who became human by becoming a marginal, vulnerable Jew in a country under an economic, cultural and religious foreign occupation” (2007, p. 26), requires the powerful to vacate positions of authority, inclusivity is not an immediate aim but rather a subsequent intent of Liberation Theology. For Althaus-Reid, the key for appraisal of the Liberation Theology discourse is to consider liberation praxis as related not to inclusion, but rather to power struggle.

Althaus-Reid, in reflecting on her participation in churches informed by Liberation Theology in the 1970’s and 1980’s, argues that inclusivity within Liberation Theology can only be talked about after first acknowledging that

the militant churches have never been neutral, but took options (even unconsciously) supporting colonial, theoretical constructions in Latin America such as the ideologies of gender, race, and sexuality.

Therefore, liberation theology did not set out chairs for poor women, or poor gays – at least it never did so willingly. The inclusive project affirmed itself by exclusion policies which determined the identity of the poor. The poor who were included were conceived of as male, generally peasant, vaguely indigenous, Christian and heterosexual. In fact, militant churches would not have needed many chairs around the table of the Lord if these criteria had been applied. It describes the identity of only a minority of the poor. The poor in Latin America cannot be stereotyped so easily and they include poor urban women, transvestites in poor street neighborhoods, and gays everywhere (p. 27).

Thus, while Liberation theologies reject a dualistic salvation in which the promise of life after death can breed a more immediate complacency, the embodied and incarnational evocation of Jesus as the model of the poor has at times been too literalized, thus failing to grapple with intersecting systems of sin and oppression. The privileging of some subjects over others, while intended to be a radical reversal based in a hermeneutical claim of the Gospel witness privileging the poor, fails to disrupt other systems of power in its narrowly romanticized notion of poor subject.

Still, like Althaus-Reid, who identifies herself as a Liberation Theologian, I see the project as more in need of revision than abandonment. While I can hear Foucault's questioning of the possibility of liberation, I am willing for this to be one of those points of shifting consciousness that Sandoval (1991) points towards. I subscribe to a call for an analysis of systemic sin and action towards dismantling it, so while discourses of liberation may be problematic, poverty still needs to be addressed. Part of the genius of Althaus-Reid is her ability to move with fluidity between the most useful elements of the analysis that Liberation Theology offers of repressive power, while simultaneously critiquing its discursive power in the construction of

proper theological subjects, particularly disrupting the category of “the poor” by privileging the irruption of the sexual subject (Althaus-Reid, 2008). While identities may be social constructions, they are social constructions that function with choices. Here I look towards Rorty for a way towards constructing an understanding of the self more complex and nuanced than the identity politics on which that much of Liberation Theology historically relies, but not incompatible with its bent towards justice.

How might we address this challenge of the destabilized subject in a theological project, when after all, as Althaus-Reid suggests, “The problem is that theology is not used to having an unstable subject: instead, it behaves as a constitutional, judicial system where exceptions are not viable, unless they become recognized exceptions” (2008, p. 90)? The need for a working model of subjectivity then emerges in order to compose a danceable theological remix, so here we consider some options. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty (1989) argues that complex intersections of historical events, each of which could have unfolded differently, function to produce the language we speak, the communities we claim, and our sense of self. The very possibilities of our choices are products of previously chosen metaphors, shifts in the use of words, or other linguistic patterns and occurrences. In a move more optimistic than Foucault’s analysis of the double meaning of subjectivity, Rorty suggests that upon recognizing that our identities are constituted from the pool of possibilities set out by history, and that these identities are contingent and non-binding, we can exercise the agency to construct and

reconstruct our “self” from the options available to us. He further suggests that acknowledging the arbitrary construction of all self-evaluation and self-description, lacking foundation beyond what has emerged through historical repetition, also leads to the ironic awareness that even one’s own most basic commitments and defining ideals are negotiable, or as Guignon (2004) describes his argument, “temporary resting places on a road of self-creation” (p. 116). Within Rorty’s understanding, the self is constrained only by the limits of what culture offers and one’s own imagination.

While Rorty’s conception may seem rather privileged and idealistic in its assumption of one’s ability to exercise enough power to manipulate those discursively produced options (particularly when read against Althaus-Reid’s Liberation Theologies), the pragmatic blending of social construction and agency is appealing. The narrativist approaches proposed by MacIntyre (2007) and Taylor (1989) expand on what works best about these previous two. MacIntyre’s position articulated in *After Virtue* (2007) makes the case for thinking of “human action in general as enacted narratives” (p. 211). Locating the possibilities available within a narrative context, acknowledging the storied structure of our lives, offers a matrix through which actions become intelligible. Actions find meaning only in a larger narrative or set of narratives about the agents involved in which the actions can find context. MacIntyre makes two important claims in his narrativist account. First, we all live out narratives, so rather than stories simply being something we created after the fact in the telling of an event, they are enacted as we undertake various actions.

Second, he argues that stories are imbedded in any individual life and only find meaning in a set of interlocking narratives unfolding in the context of a wider culture. Thus, any given “self” can only be understood as their story dovetails with the stories of others, and how those stories are contextualized in social settings that give various actions their meaning.

Taylor’s (1989) contribution is a notion of selfhood that is dependent on experiencing one’s life as an unfolding story in which the subject both can understand how it came to be at a given point in the narrative and can have a sense of where it is going. Taylor emphasizes that selfhood depends on the embedded nature of life stories and is defined by commitments and identifications that orient the subject within the stories’ contexts. The commitments of an individual self are only intelligible within the context of a community dialogue. Thus the story-shaped self is accountable to the community in two ways: it can give a response to where it stands in relation to issues of importance for the community that shapes the context in which the story has meaning; and it can be counted on to act in addressing those issues. For Taylor, where there is a lack of ability to do either of those things, there is only a mutilated or partial self, unable to effectively function as an agent in the world.

Thus, Rorty offers us a way to address the challenges encountered by the decentering of the subject in postmodernity, while still retaining a sense of agency – an issue with which Foucault is not particularly concerned. However, his optimistic view of choosing from possibilities functions best in conversation with MacIntyre and Taylor, who situate the available possibilities within the narrative construct which

gives them meaning. Both locate that structure within a communal context, with MacIntyre emphasizing the role of tradition and Taylor the roles of commitment and accountability, which brings us back to Althaus-Reid and the Liberation Theologians, for whom the salvation of the soul is not a transcendent, theoretical act, but rather an incarnational act embedded in a specific cultural context.

So give me two turntables and a microphone, and I will begin mixing a theological jam so that spirituality and pedagogy can take to the dance floor. On top of the Frierean beat I assert a story-shaped self, which only exists in the context of a body located within a culture and in conversation with other stories. The becoming of that storied body-self occurs in the navigating of choices and possibilities presented in contexts shaped by communities, and the making of those choices is driven by commitments whose meaning is produced in by the language and traditions of the culture.

God and God's Action in the World

I have held that by locating myself within Christianity, the holistic web I claim presumes the existence of God. Yet, the nature of God remains a point of speculation even within that web, as multiple models of God exist within Christian tradition and scripture. Feminist theologians have particularly asserted this point, noting the impropriety of models that never change. Johnson's critique of masculine pronouns and male images of God in *She Who Is* (1992) makes the case that when analogies like "father" become literalized, they cease to function descriptively and take on the idolatrous role of absolute identities. In her classic *Models of God*:

Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age (1987), McFague suggests, “Theological constructions are ‘houses’ to live in for a while, with windows partly open and doors ajar” (p. 27). In my own devotional practices, for precisely these reasons, I am drawn to models that emphasize God as Mystery, and challenge me to humbly embrace the limits of my knowledge, language, and experience in the process of their construction.

And yet, more fully articulated models are useful in that they illuminate our theological presumptions. To stop with Mystery fails to acknowledge that like those who profess to be “spiritual but not religious,” there are deeper theological claims that shape the choices I make and the web through which I interpret my very selfhood, the rhythms that animate my dance. Liberation Theology’s conversations about God tend to be focused on Christological concerns, focusing on the centrality of Jesus. In his work on a spirituality of Liberation Theologies, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, Gutierrez (1984) says:

In this following of Jesus the central drama is played out in the dialectic of *death followed by life*. In this dialectic and in the victory of the risen Jesus, the God of our hope is revealed...The following of Jesus feeds upon the witness given by the resurrection, which means the death of death, and upon the liberating efforts of the poor to assert their unquestionable right to life. The relationship between an oppressive system and the God who liberates, between death that seems to have the upper hand and the God of life, adumbrates a way of following Jesus and being his disciples under the conditions now prevailing in Latin America (p. 30).

For Gutierrez, the issue is not so much a new model of God, but the application of the model to a particular socio-political context that characterizes his reconceptualization.

Althaus-Reid in *The Queer God* (2003) continues Liberationist tradition of playing with traditional models but locating them in radical contexts. She conceptualizes the trinity as an orgy, reaching even beyond polyfidelity in the triune relationship asking if there “are more than three in this triad because as in real life and relationships many other friends and lovers may be hidden in the closets of each person of the Trinity” (p. 58). Althaus-Reid’s intent in her larger queering project is to liberate God from heteronormative assumptions. She works with the divine models of her Roman Catholic tradition, particularly the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Virgin Mary, and saints, relocating them in contexts that not only privilege the poor (like other Liberation Theologies), but also confront heteronormativity as a function of the same systemic sin.

Generally, Liberation Theology tends to favor what Murphey (2003) describes as the liberal tradition’s preference for God’s immanence. In contrast to the Deist view of God’s absence in the created world, and the interventionist view of conservative theologians that God performs special miraculous acts; immanentism emphasizes God’s universal presence in the world and “God’s continual, creative, and purposive activity in and through all the processes of natural history” (p. 71). This view of immanence makes possible an understanding of God’s purpose functioning in the claims of both evolutionary science and social progress. The great problem is then is that such assumptions about the driving force of God’s intent make every event equally intentional, “devastating earthquakes and the Holocaust as well as the growth of crops and the birth of Jesus” (p. 81). The call to action inherent in

Liberation Theologies claims a slightly different sort of role for humanity in the realization of God's intent, claiming greater responsibility for confronting systemic sin and thus taking a more active role in the in-breaking of the Kingdom.

Here we turn to Process Theology to offer us another set of theological tools helpful in the face of modernity's liquefaction, a theological beat to mix alongside Liberation Theology. The nature of God and subsequent role of humanity in relationship to God's action in the world are central themes in Process Theology, which are particularly indebted to the work of early twentieth century philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1929). The unique challenge Process Theology offers to traditional Christian theologies is its insistence on disrupting the concept of God as immutable and unchanging. Theologians look to the biblical narratives of God's changing God's mind in conversation with humans (such as the Genesis and Exodus stories around Abraham, Noah, and Moses) as evidence that this assertion of Whitehead's can be woven into the Judeo-Christian tradition. Whitehead offers a dipolar conception of God, in which God contains both a primordial and consequent nature. The primordial nature of God functions as the principle of "concretation", in which God is the basis of order in the world. God holds all the possibilities of the world in this primordial nature. The parallel consequent nature of God, is characterized by God's temporality and responsiveness. God is concretized, or made real so to speak, in the actual world. All events in the world come into being and then become objectified as they are incorporated into God's being, and in this way God receives the world. So God is both the actualizing of the present moment, the range

of possibilities for the future, and the keeper of the past. Thus, God is intimately connected with all that happens in the world, experiencing both joy and suffering with creation (Griffin, 1994).

This doctrine of God's consequent nature allows for a particularly helpful conceptualization of suffering and evil, one standing in direct contrast to interventionism. In Process Theology, evil exists because all creatures have the capacity (to some degree) to determine themselves and affect others, which God can influence but not control. God's dipolar nature, simultaneously primordial and consequent, could have created no other world. The agency of humans, in their high level of self-consciousness, necessarily indicates the freedom to act in contradiction to God's desire. Griffin (1994) explains, "Contingency in the world in general, and freedom in humans in particular, are therefore not due to a divine self-limitation that could in principle be revoked now and then to prevent especially horrible evils," a position he argues makes Process Theologians better able to assert God's perfect goodness than any system in which God either controls evil or could act against it but chooses not to. Young (1989) further suggests that Process Theology deals with the problem of suffering, "by God's perceiving of the creative advance in a manner that retains mutual immediacy. This mutual immediacy consists of God's eternal presence which forever participates in the world of perpetual flux. It is what Whitehead means by 'everlasting.' Through this mutual immediacy God prehends or feels every experience in the world, including the sufferings, sorrows, failures, triumphs, and brings them into a universal harmony of experience" (p. 262).

Process metaphysics holds that God initiates the aim for every finite occasion, that is to say, that the possibilities towards self-actualization in the concretization of a given moment are at God's initiative. However, in Whitehead's articulation, it is not in God's nature to coerce or impose. God does not force God's hope for what becomes real into being, but rather beckons. God's nature is described as a persuasive agency functioning through rationality, allowing for self-determination in each emerging creature in the world. Thus, humanity functions as co-creators with God, not in acting out a divine plan but in navigating an eternal network of possibilities in which each occasion precipitates another set of possibilities. God's beckoning, God's hope, is contingent on the action of creation in the actualizing of any given possibility. So to return to the problem of suffering, Whitehead argues that suffering is overcome in the realm of possibilities: "God's role is not the combat of productive force with productive force; of destructive force with destructive force, it lies in the patient operation of the overpowering rationality of his conceptual harmonization" (1929, pp. 525-6).

Whitehead's metaphysics are not without problems for the theologians who claim it. They assume a coherent and rational reality, the "ultimately real", exists beyond its interpretation through language, which can be understood as either a resolution to an anti-materialist tendency in post-structuralism or a reassertion of Platonist ontology. In its Platonist grounding, it also assumes the power of rationality to turn humanity toward a transcendent good, not to mention a "rationality" that similarly transcends context and culture. Young (1989), in his considering the limits

of rationality in what Process Theology can contribute to a Black theology of liberation asks:

Isn't it necessary to integrate within process metaphysics the notion that the transforming power of God which comes as the result of salvation, regeneration, and sanctification is essential for humanity to deal effectively with the problems of suffering? If we use the overpowering rationality of God alone as the clue to resolving the problem of suffering in the world, then, we miss a fundamental element which has always been basic to Christian theology, namely, the recognition that both reason and faith are essential for salvation and liberation (p. 265).

While our concerns are not exactly the same, I share Young's critique of Whitehead's optimistic devotion to reason. However, the notion of God as holding hopefully the reservoir of all possible outcomes, ever evolving and in flux in conversation with our collective and individual choices is compelling.

A common, and helpful, thread in the constructions of God as articulated by Liberation and Process Theologies is their emphasis on the co-creative role of humanity. Neither looks to God as a means of escaping the painful experiences of human existence, but rather both take responsibility for humanity's role in structures that function in suffering's production. I am reminded here of the comments of North American Buddhist nun, Pema Chodron (1997):

The difference between theism and nontheism is not whether one does or does not believe in God. It is an issue that applies to everyone...Theism is a deep-seated conviction that there's some hand to hold: if we just do the right things, someone will appreciate and take care of us...We all are inclined to abdicate our responsibilities and delegate our authority to something outside ourselves. Nontheism is

relaxing with the ambiguity and uncertainty of the present moment without reaching for anything to protect ourselves (p. 39).

In the co-creative emphases of Liberation and Process Theologies, in which salvation is brought about or hindered through the choices and actions made by people, we see a move away from abdication of responsibility Chodron warns against. While salvation and enlightenment are not one in the same, her Buddhist insights have resonance for the articulation of spirituality I am proposing.

God as Story

While both Liberation and Process Theologies offer challenges to modernist constructions of God in that they contextualize knowledge of the Divine and locate constructions within a historical narrative, they still have significant limitations. Though my proposal reaches beyond her initial conception, I find Broadhurst's (2003) model of God as *Story* to have great potential in moving towards a workable construct. It is important to note that I am not proposing God as *a story* in an isolated manner transcendent of discursive production, or *the story* in a universalizing, metanarrative sense, but rather I am drawing from Broadhurst's notion of God as *Story itself*. Stories then, our stories, in Broadhurst's estimation,

are a part of Story, and Story is revealed through them – if only partially. In fact, it is the hiddenness of God that keeps our stories rolling. 'I Am' [God's self description to Moses at the burning bush, Exodus 3:14] does not provide us with a direct object. 'I Am' does not require a subordinate clause. 'I Am' is a complete sentence, revelatory of being yet without conclusion – ready for us to frolic in the possibilities. It is, then, the multiplicity of stories flowing from any introduction to God that is part of the generativity of Story (p. 7).

Story then contains and functions through stories, both individual and communal. God therefore is not simply *in* the narrative, but is the narrative *itself*; exists not simply as the reservoir of all possibilities, but in the very possibilities themselves.

To consider God as Story is to move towards compatibility with discursive theories of knowledge production. It is to suggest that if all we are and all we know is a function of the discourses through which we can make meaning, then that generative shaping, the production of knowledge itself, is God. Just as we participate in the production and propulsion of discourses, we participate as co-creators in the stories that make up Story. Just as we cannot step outside of discourse, we cannot escape Story. Story is the matrices of meaning-making available, based on the inherited traditions and practices that structure the possibilities we see in making any choice along any narrative arc. Even the DJ's remix, pulling from genres of music, from sound-stories, is only possible within the larger context of Story structuring the meaning and aesthetic value through which the composition exists.

However, where a conception of God as Story stands in tension with poststructural theories of discourse is in that it maintains a hope for directionality in the narrative. Here, my model of God as Story takes on the Process Theology concept of a hopeful God (in God's primordial nature) beckoning us towards a future, not planned, but preferred. In the language of Suchoki (1989), Story's narrative arch might be understood as *God's aim* realized as each occasion unfolds to another occasion. Said another way, in conversation with notion of the story-shaped (now *Story-shaped*) body-self, Story includes tradition, commitment, and accountability.

Story is produced and producing, intimately tied to a co-creating creation, as stories form in conversation with other stories against the backdrops of the previous stories which make them possible. Thus, Story contains Christianity, a produced and producing construct through which Story might be revealed and understood, but Story is larger than Christianity.

The challenge to all models of God, much like the challenge Young (1989) raises in regard to Process Theology, is in regards to their ability to deal with suffering. Whereas Whitehead assumes God persuades through rationality, and thus suffering can somehow be rationally understood, I suggest that Story beckons through tradition, commitment, accountability, and beauty. Suffering ultimately transcends rationality, and thus can only evoke an aesthetic response. However, that still does not adequately address the problem of relativism – the possibility of asserting that within Story, as a narrative matrix through which meaning is produced, all stories, or navigations through that matrix, are equal. Certainly multiple stories exist – my model does not rest on a metanarrative – however, in Broadhurst’s words, stories “which intentionally seek to erase, suppress, exclude, destroy or make mute are intentional distortions of the Divine” (p. 9).

Storied body-selves, as co-creators of and with Story, can exercise agency within Story’s narrative structure, and thus have the power to inflict suffering. As we are not able to step outside of Story, and thus can only evaluate choices from within what is revealed in the interactions with other stories, often that which our traditions and commitments lead us to do has harmful implications we do not see. Our stories

produce what Liberation Theologians might call structures of sin, themes that limit the access of other storied body-selves to the range of possibilities that is Story, that is God. Broadhurst suggests, “In this case, the argument would be much like Augustine’s – there is no evil story, there is only the perversion of the good” (p. 9). However, I would argue this only works if “the good” is understood as a co-created construction produced within the context of Story itself; “the good” cannot be as Aristotle assumed an external, universal concept, but rather points to those beliefs held stable in a given holistic web of knowing while other beliefs are considered in relation to it. Thus, while distortions of the divine or perversions of the good find meaning in the narrative structure of Story, Story itself does not demand them but rather offers a means (fluid and contextual as it may be) through which a “good” is produced, and by which it can be understood as distortions or perversions to begin with.

Still, if Story is assumed to have some goodness or virtue, the single characteristic within my model that distinguishes it from discourse (which I understand a morally neutral concept), the reconciliation of evil stories within Story remains a challenge. One could argue that evil stories are ripe with possibilities for grace to break in, in the form of possibilities for Story to structure stories of suffering into the tradition, and thus shape the range or allure of future possibilities as stories retold either preclude or open way for available options. This seems optimistic at best and difficult to reconcile with a reflection on the collapse of the narratives of progress in light of the atrocities of the last century. And yet, my commitment to a

tradition that asserts the possibility of goodness through the inexplicable transformation of storied body-selves will not let me abandon it completely. I return to eschatological claims, based in faith, tied to a web of Christian tradition and aware of the tyranny exercised in the name of community, and yet humbly shaped by the awe of Story and the outrageous hope for the liberationist trust in “a way out of no way” (Young, 1996). Story produces the subject within a context; the subject co-creates in the further production of Story; Story continues producing the subject and its context; and sometimes, Story and subject come together in a (mysterious and grace-filled) manner in which the subject and/or its context is radically transformed.

Christ as Embodied/Incarnate Story

If I claim this web of Christianity as my own, I must deal with the centrality of Christ and the Gospel texts to any theological framework. If Christ is a particular and unique revelation of God through radical incarnation, then Christ as a storied-self can be understood as a clarification of the aims of Story itself. In other words, if I am to distinguish Story from discourse based on an assertion (chosen freely and in spite of its limitations, as an act of faith) that there is some positive directionality we are beckoned towards, then the Jesus stories are Christian’s primary indication of the values driving those aims. Certainly, this task is complicated by the multiple and competing interpretations of the Jesus stories, which is why I speak of them in plural rather than suggesting that even within the Biblical record a cohesive and unified portrait of Christ exists. The Jesus stories provide reference points for conversation, a

means by which those claiming the Christian tradition can engage one another in the articulation of a theology and accompanying spiritual practices.

I have already made mention of the Liberation Theology understanding of Jesus as liberator (Sobrino, 1994), advocate for the poor and suffering. The image is easy enough to understand, Jesus is read as a radical in an impoverished, occupied territory. What Sobrino offers to Liberation Christologies is an emphasis on the crucifixion as revelatory of God's common suffering with humanity (1976). Whereas the resurrection has been central to much of Christian theology, he argues the significance of the crucifixion has been often avoided. For Sobrino, oppressed "or crucified" people can find in the crucifixion an image of deep intimacy with the suffering Jesus. Only in the death of the divine, God incarnate in Christ, is resurrection possible. "The present situation," he argues in reference to his home country, El Salvador, "rules out any merely romantic conception of Jesus' resurrection. It forces us to reflect theologically on the death of Jesus, and ultimately on the crucified God. Without the cross the resurrection is idealistic. The utopia of Christian resurrection becomes real only in terms of the cross" (Sobrino, 1976, p.180). For Sobrino, God is found in the suffering, and the call of the way of Jesus is to suffer with the oppressed, to take radical action in opposition to the abuses of power is the path to the cross. He argues, "The path to the cross is nothing else but a questioning search for the true God and for the true essence of power. Is power meant to oppress people or to liberate them?" (p.180).

While I favor the notions of a suffering God revealed in stories of Jesus' experience – of a Story structure in which meaning is made through relationality, of a queerly influenced, narrativist remixing of Liberation and Process Theologies – I am acutely aware of the ambiguities in all I put forward. Born from a claim that spirituality matters as a concept within pedagogical discourse, and having argued that spirituality without an articulated theology is problematic, I find myself now with this Story/storied concept that defies certainty and functions more as art than science. Monro speaks to this process as “erotic transgression” (2006), and claims it as theological method. She moves fluidly back and forth between deconstruction and reconstruction, death and resurrection, with particular attention paid to the moment between the two elements; the moment in which “loss of meaning is confronted fully, and the unfulfilled possibility of reconstructing genuinely alternative meanings emerges briefly. That space is the moment of *jouissance*” (p.178). For Monro, and for me, Christ is ambiguous, but in that ambiguity is an invitation for engagement, for encountering one another in the possibilities. In the ambiguity and complexity of the Jesus stories is the troubling of metanarratives of power and domination, stories to be revisited and troubled over with others who claim them as significant.

An Eschatology for Story and Storied People

we are the manifestation of our thinking patterns. and we think in terms of terms. words. sooner or later we must realize that we are liable for what and how we think and say and thus must alter (altar) our use of language. sentence structures predate pyramids and are as complex. realize, even in asking me to describe the future of language, i am simply playing my part in determining it by helping those who read this to become more

aware of the importance of what they say. and that (this) is how the future comes about.

word. (Saul Williams, 2008, p. 24).

Did you think I had forgotten Deleuze and Guatarri? Has it been too long since they were looped into this remix? Does a theological model that understands subjectivity as the stories we tell of ourselves and then posits God as Story itself necessitate the very sort of linearity in knowledge production that I looked to Deleuze and Guatarri to disrupt in the introduction? While a linear structure may be implied in invoking story as a metaphor, it is not required. The notion of subjectivity as the loosely stabilized intersection of stories is not a far cry from a rhizomatic point of crystallization, a tuber, in which multiple thought comes together. The narrative structure of story – the implication of a beginning, middle and end; of characters, plot, theme, and setting; conflict, resolution, and dénouement – have been challenged and disrupted in postmodern film and literature. Terrentino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) comes to mind as a widely accessible example. The opening and closing scenes of the film depict the same moment, which connects multiple narrative arcs, though not playing the same role in each arc. It is simultaneously a beginning and an ending, as story functions to produce meaning through the interwoven events in the lives of a network of characters. The effect for the viewer is that the past, present, and future collide in a single moment, and in that moment the larger story finds meaning and cohesion, even if only momentarily. Though the characters experience their own narratives in a linear fashion, the story itself is more complex.

I admit it is difficult to hold steady this notion of God as Story without falling into a proclamation of a metanarrative. Though problematic, it is tempting in an explication of suffering to offer a unified story in which all will be reconciled. If God is Story – a narrative structure through which meaning is made, one transcending individual experiences and yet dependent on them as they form the collective traditions that dictate the ways in which future can unfold – then God contains the elements of Story, but synergistically is greater than the sum of those elements. God as Story presumes a sense of eschatological redemption in which the possibilities break open, but the location of that redemption within Story’s structure is not a given.

Slattery (2006) is helpful here in his characterization of three primary forms of Christian eschatology: realized, futuristic, and proleptic. A realized eschatology recognizes hope fully come into being in the present. Slattery critiques the notion on the grounds that it leads to pursuing self-absorbed instant gratification. If a theology of hope for the future is reduced simply to a concern for the present than it leaves no room for critiques of violence, greed, lust, and consumption. On the other hand, a futuristic eschatology that delays hope until after death, leads to a living “in fear, resignation, or the paralysis of delayed expectations and constant anticipation” (p. 81). Slattery argues that in subscribing to futuristic theologies, “we are more likely to become intolerant and vengeful and less likely to take action for justice and peace” (p.81). Thus a third option in which future and present both play a role is needed.

In keeping with our models of storied subjects and God as Story, it is fitting that we adopt an eschatology tied to a literary construct. While “proleptic” may be

unfamiliar to some, Slattery notes, “Literary scholars and English teachers will recognize this word as describing the moment in a short story or novel when the reader becomes fully cognizant of past, present, and future events all in one instant. It is the moment when all the events of the narrative coalesce” (p. 84). In *Pulp Fiction* (1994), it is the final scene, a continuation of the first, in which all storylines intersect in the stick up of a diner. Within Christian theology, “proleptic” has been adopted as a way of speaking of the fullness of time uniquely embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. The proleptic is that which transcends the fragmentary, episodic nature of linear time and “nurtures holistic understanding” (Slattery, p. 84). It describes a moment, a crystallization if you would, in which one experiences clarity regarding what has been, what is, and what is unfolding. It is a mystical experience, a moment of deep intimacy with Story which Christians might refer to as grace. In the words of folk singer Utah Phillips, it is in part recognizing that “The past didn’t go anywhere, did it?” (1996). It is simultaneously recognizing that our future is equally active in our present, as in the last scene of the original *Planet of the Apes* (1968) in which the protagonist wanders into the wilderness of what he thinks is another planet, only to discover the ruins of the Statue of Liberty in the sand. In a proleptic experience, his entire construction of reality transforms in the awareness that his present is his future.

Whitehead (and subsequently the Process Theology from which my conception of Story derives) posits that the present holds the sum of existence, all that is past and all that is yet to be. Thus, all of eternity is experienced in each moment as each moment is the realization of some past possibility and dictates the possibilities

from which the future takes shape. Moltmann (2007), noted Lutheran theologian, similarly argues that a proleptic eschatology means that all of eternity is imminent in time. Thus, the goal of the believer is to be fully present to the moment, a notion not unrelated to Chodron's notion of non-theism mentioned earlier. Living into an affirmation of a proleptic eschatology might look like what Guignon refers to as "releasement" (2004, p. 166), a letting go of self-aggrandizement and the need for singular control in a move towards, "participating" (I would say co-creating) "in a shared event that is greater than ourselves" (p.166). It is an orientation away from what is to be gained from life and towards what can be contributed. For Guignon, "The idea of releasement proposes not passive quietism in which one does nothing, but an activism that operates with a heightened sensitivity to what is called for by the entire situation" (p.167). In the proleptic is a calling forth, a beckoning towards what is becoming.

In considering the implications of spirituality on pedagogy, the notion of proleptic experience – what I would call the transformative, grace-filled, in-breaking of Story into our stories – is central. It speaks to a primary purpose of education, which Slattery names as "to fold within each present moment the past, the present, and the future so that our lives will be illuminated with deep understanding" (2006, p. 87). It points to the same self-implicating nature of spirituality that Sheldrake (2001) makes use of in justifying Christian Spirituality as a field of study. While I remain somewhat dubious of claiming an essential nature to this proleptic experience outside of the language we use to describe it, or better stated, while I do not dispute the

proleptic experience's discursive production, I still find it a useful concept. My decision to hold on to the proleptic experience only makes sense if it is articulated within a theology that is not dependent on it as its foundation. A co-creative process in which we as individuals are shaping our own stories and the stories of each other – within the structure and context of Story, which precedes us and extends beyond us – is the theological grounding for my spirituality. It is not inherently exclusive to traditions other than Christianity, but it is shaped by Christian thought, the holistic net into which it is woven. When I speak of my spirituality it is Christ-tinted, as Christ bears witness to the embodiment of Story's proleptic hope, manifest in creation, which beckons me on beyond the collapse of reason.

Imagining the Impossible

Clearly, I am invested in the notion of prolepsis as a description of encounters with mystery. Yet, I recognize that the question of future invading the present opens possibilities for a Platonist cosmology, in that it could be understood as assuming too much about a universal order. While Slattery's critique of futuristic eschatologies is compelling, it ultimately falls short in grappling with the problem of the role future plays in proleptic models. I have spoken of "proleptic hope" as a way to point towards uncertainty in a future characterized by infinite possibilities. The proleptic experience, at least in my estimation, is an in-breaking of a *possible* future into the present. Its radically transformative power lies in its potential for opening the consciousness to possibilities unimagined. Thus, the imagination is central to its eschatological power.

Caputo offers us a way into this notion of eschatological imagination, a move beyond possibility, in his essay “The Poetics of the Impossible and the Kingdom of God” (2005). In Caputo’s claiming the Kingdom of God not as simply impossible, but rather *the* impossible, he proposes a poetics that offers cohesion to my storied/Story/proleptic model. “By a poetics,” he explains, “I mean a constellation of strategies, arguments, tropes, paradigms, and metaphors, a style and a tone, as well as a grammar and a vocabulary, all of which, collectively, like a great army on the move, is aimed at making a point. We might say that poetics is logic with a heart...logic with *pathos*” (p. 470). A poetics of *the* impossible, then:

describes the movements of a desire beyond desire, a desire beyond reason and what is reasonably possible, a desire to know what we cannot know or to love what we dare not love, like a beggar in love with a princess, whose desire is not extinguished but fired *by* the impossibility of his plight. For our hearts are burning with a desire to go where we cannot go, praying and weeping for what no eye has seen nor ear heard, hoping against hope (Rom. 4:18). To desire what is merely possible, to curb our passion so that it remains confined by the parameters of a carefully calculated probability – what would that amount to if not a lover without passion? (p. 471).

In Caputo, we find room for the impossibility of liberation, an acknowledgement of the post-structural critique without a collapse of agency, a pragmatic ridiculousness that defies logic and history, but functions still. It is an honest admission that the Kingdom of God is not possible, and yet it is a passionate embrace of committing to *the* impossible.

In his analysis of the discourse of the kingdom of God, Caputo is quick to point out that this poetics of the impossible does not emerge from authors who

disregard logic and rationality. It cannot be dismissed as impish and playful, but on the contrary, “it is a discourse with a deadly serious concern, a *prophetic* concern to *contradict* the ‘world,’ to confound its calculations, and to interdict its hardness of heart, its cold-blooded logic, and heartless economics” (p. 471). Thus, Paul and the authors of the gospels present an image of the kingdom of God in which the very structures and possibilities of the world are contradicted. “The poetics of the kingdom,” he argues, “moves about in the distance between logic and passion, truth and justice, concepts and desire, strategizing and praying, astute points and mad stories, for it can never be merely the one or the other, can never occupy a spot that is simply exterior to one or the other” (p.472).

Kingdom rhetoric tends to disrupt predictable order, the last becomes first, sinners are deemed righteous, the lines between neighbor and stranger are blurred. The kingdom is described by the gospel depictions of Jesus in metaphors and similes. Matthew 13 alone offers five such devices, good soil (13:3-9), a mustard seed (13:31-32), a wheat crop (13:37-43), a hidden treasure (13:44-46), and a net full of good fish (13:47-50). It is a storied construction, poetic, and beyond conceivable possibility. A poetics of the impossible flies in the face of the rational possibility of Process Theology, and yet has much in common with it. Process Theology is driven by logic, grounded in the assertion that philosophical constructs shape and reshape how God can be understood. Where God is understood as unfolding in the possibilities – and those possibilities are dictated by God’s nature, which is constructed in conversation with what can be experienced and understood – we are held captive by the limits of

our imaginations. This is not to suggest a wild abandon of reason, but rather a radical leap of faith. Where reason ends, I engage in what Sandoval (1991) might call a shifting of gears, to recognize that the kingdom is not just realized in the impossible, it is *the impossible*. Thus, a kingdom poetics of the impossible, in which a way opens where no way exists, imagines the infinite.

Story's conclusion is no conclusion at all, it is the impossibility of intelligibility, the erosion of what can be comprehended; in Caputo's words, it is "raising holy hell" (p. 477). In the dubmaster analogy, it is the collapse of genre, the erosion of the cohesion of concepts like *musician*, *instrument*, and even *song*. Caputo argues that the kingdom confounds philosophers, accustomed to arranging things according to the principles of "being, reason, order, possibility, presence, sense, and meaning" (p. 477). The coming of the anarchic kingdom, in which all authority is disrupted and assumed meaning called into question, counters the possible with its very impossibility. Caputo carries us back to Derrida, suggesting the in-breaking of the kingdom is an event, *l'invention de l'autre*, the incoming of something wholly other, shattering the horizon of our expectations. Or returning to Deleuze, he suggests that the kingdom has much in common with *Alice in Wonderland*, "packed with stories of most astonishing transformations and transfigurations, of paradoxes and aporias, of wedding feasts as mad as any hatter's party, of eventualities that confound the time of the philosophers, who do not have nearly as good a time" (p. 477). Like what Deleuze (1990) says of *Alice*, to understand the kingdom requires "a category of very special things: event, pure events" (p. 1).

Continuing with Deleuze and Guattari, Caputo's "holy hell" as a description of the futuristic in-breaking of the kingdom, could be read alongside a politics of schizophrenia, they propose in *Anti-Oedipus* (1983). As word and thing collapse for the schizophrenic, no separation exists between the personal and social experience, saying is doing in an immediate and direct manner. For Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenia is a privileging experience in that it frees the subject from the Oedipal prison. Without the distorting and flattening structures, the schizophrenic's proximity to the imaginary, flux and fluidity offers more "truth" in its perception of society. Rejecting the Lacanian notion of the real as the impossible, Deleuze and Guattari suggest instead that in reality everything becomes possible, because "reality" is what one's desire fabricates. This productive desire allows the schizophrenic to:

produce himself as a free man, irresponsible, solitary, and joyous, finally able to say and do something simply in his own name, without asking permission; a desire lacking nothing, a flux that overcomes barriers and codes, a name that no longer designates any ego whatever. He has simply ceased being afraid of becoming mad (p. 133).

The reign of the imaginary, of unfiltered desire, represented by Deleuze and Guattari's rather idealized schizophrenic is valued as liberatory. It is a complete abandoning to throes of Story, a wild embrace of imagining the impossible.

While not a direct parallel to Caputo's depiction of the kingdom of God, particularly in that Deleuze and Guattari wholly reject community as an oppressive force, the schizophrenic politic suggests *imagination* as the vehicle through which the impossible becomes possible, through which reality is produced via desire. The

kingdom, for Caputo, like the Hatter's feast, ought to be wildly hospitable where the distinction between who is in and who is out is all a bit mad. "Are there rigorous walls around the kingdom? Do they have border patrols there? Do they have a problem with illegal immigrants?" Caputo wonders, "the story is that insiders are out, and the outsiders are in. That, I readily agree, is perfectly mad – it makes perfect sense, or non-sense" (p. 480) in compliance with a poetics of impossibility.

The "sacred anarchy" of Caputo's notion of the kingdom is a productive disruption of community which functions as an imaginary vision of what could be, a vision which can transform and sustain the navigations of our daily lives as it breaks in, never fully realized, but in moments of proleptic chaos in which desire is manifest in an imagined future come to visit in the present and experienced as momentarily real. It is out of a similar impulse that theologian Monica Coleman (2006), proposes black women's science fiction as a significant source for theological reflection. Unlike other womanist fiction, science fiction "is not limited to serving as a source for describing the past experiences of black women" (p. 174). The imaginary structure of the futuristic dreams of science fiction, in conversation with complex and nuanced understandings of scientific discourse, bridge the gap between experience and fantasy, between the possible and impossible, in Coleman's estimation, "gives teeth to the eschatological vision" (p. 174). As the future invades the present in Story, the impossible is experienced as real. It is the transforming power of radical encounters with Mystery such as these to which spirituality speaks. This collective dreaming of "another possible world" (Althaus Reid, 2007), even in its impossibility

– not as an escapist exercise, but rather as a commitment to transformative action – is at the heart of why I teach.

Sacred Ambiguity

The invitation to consider theology as a poetic act privileges the aesthetic over the rational, yet it does not reject the role of reason and the reach towards cohesion. Where Whitehead comes to God via a rational extension of his cosmological vision, I come to God as an assertion of humility – a hopeful belief in beauty’s power to disrupt the banality of existence. Theologians work in metaphors, and any model is limited. I return to Monro’s (2006) consideration the theological task as one of death/resurrection, or deconstruction/reconstruction. This two-fold movement, in her estimation, stresses a moment between the two poles producing in which we are faced with the loss of meaning, and possibility emerges.

In that regard, it is not so much my positing God as story and people as storied body-selves that matters. That is simply a reconstruction to be deconstructed again, a resurrection to be followed by another death. It is in the dissonance generated by the limitations of any theological model that sacred ambiguity reasserts itself, that mystery is acknowledged. Story makes meaning possible, but as we co-create within Story to author stories, we work with figurative language, with metaphors seeking meaning. It is a process marked by unknowing. If spirituality is an enactment of theology characterized by self-implicating, transformative claims, then it functions both in the devotional making of stories and the critical process of breaking them down.

PART THREE

Interjection

A year has passed since I began hammering out the proposal that would become the Part I of this dissertation. It reflected how I spent January of 2009, gaining clarity about the shifts in my attention and discerning a sense of what my life and work were to be about in that moment. I fell into a way of thinking about knowledge that was less dependent on linear constructions, embraced the seemingly chaotic intersections of the multiple conversations I was having, and abandoned myself to playing them out to see what might unfold.

I have made the conscious, if awkward, choice to leave the tensions between what I intended to write and what has actually been written in place. There was no prediction of this reflection inserted after the previous “plateau”. Much of this work has ended up being about epistemology, explorations of *knowledge* and *knowing* and what either of those mean, so I embrace the messiness of the process reflected in its documentation because it serves to underscore the tenuous nature of writing, the false stability we read onto the written word rather than acknowledging that at best we get snapshots of the author’s thinking in a given moment – at the point of the last edit. We clean up texts to offer more unity and cohesion, hiding the author’s conversation with the author as a subject she or he participated in creating in the previous writing session. That is not to suggest that I have not edited this work – quite the contrary, it

has undergone significant revision – I simply mean that I have avoided the temptations to reconcile the tensions that erupted in the writing process.

Since last winter, publication of the two chapters that I was so excited about fell through [or so I thought]. The editor of *South to a Queer Place* went from eager and excited to not returning e-mails or phone calls in a matter of weeks. I have not heard from her in over a year now. [Note: Since I originally composed this section she has reappeared, and it looks as if the book might be back on. She has still not offered a definite word on the inclusion of my chapter]. Then a couple of weeks ago I was contacted by the editor of *Baptimergent: Baptist Stories from the Emergent Frontier* (Roberts, 2010) informing me that despite his efforts and the efforts of the publishing house staff, the editorial board pulled my chapter from the book. It was (somewhat ironically) deemed “too gay.”

I know these are not unique experiences for emerging authors, but they still sting. Particularly the second incident – mostly because I am frustrated with myself for even believing a mainline denominational publisher would print that essay. The work is far from perfect, and as I anticipated in its text, there are things I would change looking back on it a year later. However, both of those essays represent moments of clarity for me – shifts in my attention that felt generative and somehow more fully alive. Perhaps more than anything else I have written, they articulate a positionality I have struggled to name and hold onto, even if I am holding on loosely. These essays speak something of my border-dwelling hybridity: the pastor, scholar,

activist, seeker, storyteller who finds himself so often accidentally disruptive just by showing up.

I did get to teach the course at the Divinity School at Wake Forest University, and while it was reduced to a one credit hour seminar, it was still pretty incredible. The faculty review of my syllabus (a practice for all adjuncts, I am told) was interesting. I was asked to identify the authors we would read in order to demonstrate ethnic and denominational diversity. It was an uncomfortable process and I was unsure how to proceed. Should I place monikers like “Black Presbyterian Woman” in parentheses by their names? I ended up writing brief biographies of each and letting the titles of the authors’ works serve as the text to be categorized and codified. It did not feel very queer. While the faculty frustratingly employed an old identity politic in seeking to establish my credibility and ability to consider “diversity”, several ultimately expressed appreciation of what I brought to the school, noting that conversations in my classroom were spilling over into other courses and enriching the larger discourse. The students themselves, ten Master’s of Divinity and four auditors (all local ministers), were excited and receptive to the destabilizing experience of queer material queerly presented.

I learned in conversation from a member of the Curriculum Committee later in the semester that at least in part I was blocked from teaching a three-hour section on queer studies and spirituality because the original proposal did not include familiar theologians and my doctoral studies were not considered an appropriate background (despite “spirituality” appearing in the title of more than a third of my course hours,

and being the topic of my research). Again, I found myself navigating institutional assumptions that equate legitimacy with legibility.

In terms of my research, the course was to be a site of performance in which I could play out my ideas about queer pedagogy as spiritual practice. It was to serve as a source for reflection, and it certainly was that. I am clear that what I have written during and after that teaching experience was shaped by what I learned there, as it has been shaped by what I have learned in each class I have taught and in each time I have played the teacher in some space outside the classroom. While the inclusion of class preparation notes has proved to be not especially useful, particularly given the previously unanticipated need for an entire section of this dissertation to focus on articulating a theological grounding for my spirituality (which, not surprisingly, drew from many of the same sources we used in class). Still, the intentionality around my journaling and reflexive discussions with colleagues through this particular course are evident in the last phases of this writing project. Brief excerpts from my reflection journals are interspersed throughout the text.

While I continue to struggle with the impulse towards self-disclosure and the sort of authority implicit in relaying experience, I cannot help but also note that the events of the year in my life beyond school equally shape and inform my current research. As I began to explore in the initial proposal and accompanying essays (Appendices A and B), my work cannot be easily separated from the rest of my experiences, and thus to some degree all of my research is a hermeneutical process of

interpreting the knowledge produced in my just trying to figure out how to get through the day.

In the midst of a year in which many of my most primary relationships have radically shifted once again, my research has peeked through in spurts. I have engaged a significant analysis of “spirituality” in education discourses, and have pushed myself to articulate a theology that I could claim as I consider my own spiritual practice of engaging queer pedagogy. I have also had new writing opportunities emerge, an upcoming chapter for a book on queer pedagogies, and an editor interested in another article for a new journal of writings about body/spirit play. In June of last year I went on a pilgrimage to the island of Iona off the west coast of Scotland, an ancient sacred site in Celtic Christianity. In no small part, the pilgrimage served as a reminder that in the wave of family upheaval that was disrupting so much of my life and work, I still had my own journey to tend to. I needed to move, to find metaphors for meaning making, and practices to embody release and abandonment.

Why include this “interjection” in my dissertation? I am not intending to do a close reading or deep critical analysis of my familial struggle and the accompanying losses, nor am I intending to extensively theorize the grief I have felt in the series of significant deaths I have encountered this year. Yet, when I consider my experiences of the last year read alongside earlier writing about childhood and family, the grief is potent. The emerging inconsistencies and tensions are uncomfortable. The subject is destabilized.

I include this interjection into the reporting of my research as a representation of how my own destabilization has functioned to disrupt the research process itself. My thinking, my writing, my living, have been affected by the unsettling circumstances of this year. The illusion that having come through one storm there should be peace on the other side has fallen away. The implications of the sacred shattering of the illusory self, over and over again, inform anything I can say at this moment. I do not suggest or feel that I owe some explanation of the shifts in how my work has developed, or that getting naked somehow reveals an ultimate truth about myself as an author. This dissertation could certainly be edited to stand as if nothing else was going on during its writing, but that sort of decontextualization runs counter to the ways of thinking about knowledge I claim to embrace. I include this interjection so as to invite further connection-making, both for the reader and for myself, so that an engaged and integrated pedagogy may reflect knowledges and subjectivities produced in multiple contexts and resist the neatly cording off of one from the other.

So, as we proceed, I acknowledge the shifts from the plan as it was originally proposed. Rather than two plateaus in which I consider queer pedagogy and the Wake Forest University Divinity School course as two discussions, I have integrated them into a larger discussion of spiritual practices – repeatable gestures that serve to illuminate my engagement of queer pedagogy as spiritual practice.

And so we continue.

Queer, Pedagogy, and Practice

Queer Pedagogies

We begin with definitions. What do I mean when I speak of “queer pedagogy”? Defining the term is a tricky subject indeed. While it draws from previous discourses in curriculum studies and gender theories, the term first appeared in the academic literature with a 1993 article by Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell titled “Queer Pedagogy: Practice Makes Im/Perfect”. The two reflect on their attempts to grapple with post-structuralist theories of subjectivity and essentialist constructions of identity in the context of a lesbian studies course they co-taught. The authors seek to “describe the goals, organizing principles, content, and outcomes of this engagement in the production of ‘queer pedagogy’—a radical form of educative praxis implemented deliberately to interfere with, to intervene in, the production of ‘normalcy’ in schooled subjects” (p. 285). Ultimately, they conclude that despite their best efforts, all of their discourses were permeated with backdrop of white heterosexual dominance and “lesbian identity” remained fixed and stable within their institutional context despite the course’s explicit attempts to disrupt monolithic constructions of the concept. What the article successfully

Journal Excerpt:

How am I ever going to write about this course as a site of performance for queer pedagogies as spiritual practice without reducing pedagogy to a how-to list? And can I trust that original framing of the theme: Queer Pedagogy as Spiritual Practice? Why not Queer Pedagogy in Spiritual Practices...or Queer Pedagogy and Spiritual Practice? Neither of the latter is quite as bold, but they may offer more freedom and open up some fluidity in my organizing my thoughts. But, neither is really what I’m thinking about as I’m teaching this course. My reflecting is all about me as a teacher...about thinking about this queer pedagogy I’m trying to enact (or maybe draw attention to as it is

provides is both a working construct of what “queer pedagogy” might be:

a teaching against-the-grain, or, in this particular case, an amalgam of ‘performative acts’ (Butler, 1990) enfleshing a radical form of what we envisioned to be potentially libratory enactments of ‘gender treachery’ (Bryson, de Castell, & Haig-Brown, 1993) with/in the always already (Derrida, 1978) heterosexually coded spaces of academic women’s studies programs (p. 288),

and an analysis of the tremendous difficulty in realizing its goals.

Deborah Britzman’s 1995 article “Is There a Queer Pedagogy? – Or, Stop Reading Straight” furthered the discourse as she considered the role of reading practices and psychoanalytic theory in encountering resistance to knowledge, or thinking the unthinkable. She argues queer theory when brought into conversation with pedagogy:

insists, using psychoanalytic method, that the relationship between knowledge and ignorance is neither oppositional nor binary. Rather they mutually implicate each other, structuring and enforcing particular forms of knowledge and forms of ignorance. In this way ignorance is analyzed as an effect of knowledge, indeed, as its limit, and not as an originary or innocent state (p. 154).

Britzman’s is concerned not only with what *individuals* cannot bear to know, but what hegemonic *discourses of normalcy* resist knowing. Queer theory, she suggests, “can think of resistance as not outside of the subject of knowledge or the knowledge of subjects, but rather as constitutive of knowledge and its subjects” (p. 154). She looks to particular techniques through which queer theory is engaged and what they might offer in terms of rethinking both pedagogy and knowledge itself. Specifically,

Britzman considers the study of limits, ignorance, and reading practices, and in her consideration of each analyzes the ways in which hegemonic discourses produce certain knowledges and subjects as unintelligible.

Suzanne Luhmann in, “Queering/Querying Pedagogy? Or, Pedagogy Is a Pretty Queer Thing” (1998), also took on the challenge of articulating a queer pedagogy. Building from the growing discourse that Bryson, deCastell, and Britzman shaped, Luhmann asked tough questions: “Is a queer pedagogy about and for queer students or queer teachers? Is a queer pedagogy a question of queer curriculum? Or, is it about teaching methods adequate for queer content? Moreover, is a queer pedagogy to become the house pedagogy of queer studies or is it about the queering of pedagogical theory?” (p. 141). The spirit of Luhmann’s questions suggest a necessary inquisition into who or what is queer in this discourse. Following Britzman’s line into considering resistance towards particular knowledges, Luhmann advocates an “inquiry into the conditions that make learning possible or prevent learning” through an interrogation of the student/teacher relationship and “the conditions for understanding, or refusing, knowledge” (p. 148).

Part of where Luhmann is particularly helpful is in pointing to the linked political strategies of reclaimed language in both the cases of *queer* and *pedagogy*. Recalling that the term “pedagogue” conjures a pedantic and dogmatic schoolteacher, she draws a link to the historically derogatory usage of queer, “meant to shame people as strange and to position them as unintelligible with the discursive framework of heteronormative gender dichotomies and binary sexualities” (p. 142). While both

terms are marked by repudiation, they both have been “refurbished to serve critical functions” (p. 142), though from different social locations. While “queer” critically disrupts the production of normativities, with particular (though not exclusive) attention to sexualities and genders; “pedagogy” – when aligned with descriptors like *radical*, *anti-racist*, or *feminist* – denotes a position critical of mainstream education “as a site of unequal power relations” (p. 142). Further, she suggests that the terms share the common fate of reduction, and in that reduction the risk of being rendered superfluous. Both *queer* and *pedagogy* are susceptible to being usurped as convenient shorthand, suffering from “over-determination and under-definition” (p. 142); queer standing in place of the ever growing list of identity categories that cumbersomely are evoked to name the “community” (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, intersexed, two-spirited, etc.), and pedagogy reduced to a referent for instructional methods, teaching style, and classroom conduct.

Pedagogy is more than an exploration of the “how-to” of teaching, but rather encompasses questions about how we come to know, and how knowledge is produced in interactions between multiple parties (student, teacher, and written text, for a traditional example). Luhmann argues “this orientation to pedagogy exceeds education’s traditional fixation on knowledge transmission, and its wish for the teacher as master of knowledge” (p. 148). Radical or critical pedagogies, categories to which queer pedagogy is undoubtedly related, she notes are commonly concerned with interventions into the reproduction of the power dynamics with the intent of reshaping education towards the political empowerment and liberation of students.

Queer pedagogy, with its links to a theoretic frame suspicious of liberation narratives, does not disregard the aims of other critical pedagogies, however it does reorient the critical lens towards knowledge production itself.

If a direct response to the question of what is queer in queer pedagogy – the teacher, the student, the content, the curriculum, the theory – remains somewhat blurry, the afore mentioned authors (with whom I concur) reach consensus in moving towards considering queer pedagogy to be particularly concerned with interrogating the production of normalcy and pushing against the psychological resistance to particular disruptive knowledges. As such, the tendency in discussing queer pedagogy has been to focus on processes, practices and positions that point towards those aims and de-emphasize the centrality of queer subjects or practitioners. Thus, the “queer” in queer pedagogy functions more in its verb form, to indicate pedagogy concerned with queering, or disrupting the tyranny of normalcy.

Yet, if queer pedagogy has broader application than content specifically regarding sexual identities and practices, then perhaps it still owes a debt of loyalty to that curricular content. That is to say, while queer pedagogy can be strategically useful in a vast array of discursive analyses and education projects, its association (however loose) with queer (and/or queered) subjects necessarily invites a particular analysis of heteropatriachal normativities wherever such pedagogy is employed. Thus queer pedagogy in an introductory social foundations of education course might be utilized in considering the production of race and class in public schooling, but the implications for gender and sexual normativities would also be implicated in any such

analysis. Ultimately, a queer pedagogical approach would further interrogate the limitations of categories such as race, class, gender, and sexual identity as themselves products and producers of normativities – so the afore mentioned intersectionality would be explored, then the boundaries of the categories on which intersectionality depends would themselves be stretched and transgressed.

It is important here, even as I look to explore queer pedagogy as spiritual *practice*, and in relation to other specific spiritual *practices*, that we not fall into the trap of reducing the concept to a list of particular strategies that can be easily packaged and implemented. Just as spiritual practices are not all encompassing of one's spirituality but rather means towards focusing one's attention towards particular frameworks of meaning-making out of Mystery, queer pedagogy is more than the strategies that might be employed in its pursuit. Queer pedagogy is not a method but a stance – and one that I engage prayerfully.

Spiritual Practice

Having developed a workable sense of what I mean when I use the term “queer pedagogy,” we turn our attention to a consideration of the concept “spiritual practice”. When I speak of queer pedagogy as spiritual practice, we can now have some understanding of what I mean by “spiritual”. Spiritual, as an adjective, refers to that which is concerned with the transformative nature of proleptic hope, characterized by contextualized, storied body-selves, co-creating within the structure Story makes possible and imagining possibilities towards the inconceivable as the very structures of meaning are stretched to their limits. What, then, is meant by

“practice” in this context? Here I draw from MacIntyre’s use of the term in *After Virtue* (2007):

By a ‘practice’ I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systemically extended (p. 187).

MacIntyre goes on to offer examples, explaining that in his usage, Tic-Tac-Toe is not a practice, nor is throwing a football with skill; but the games of football and chess are. Similarly, bricklaying and planting turnips are not practices; but architecture and farming are.

To understand the distinctions between that which is and is not a practice, we must first understand the terms in MacIntyre’s definition. When he refers to goods internal to an activity, he is speaking of intrinsic reward. So in the case of chess, there might be goods externally and contingently attached, such as in prestige, awards, or money in the case of a tournament; however, there are always alternative ways of achieving those goods – none are particular to chess itself. In contrast, *internal* goods cannot be achieved “by any other means than by playing chess or some other game of that specific kind” (p.188). These might include the “achievement of a certain highly particular kind of analytical skill, strategic imagination and competitive intensity” (p.188). These goods are *internal* in two ways: first, as already noted, they can only be achieved through the particular

practice; and second, they can only be identified and recognized by the experience of participating in the practice. Thus, “those who lack the relevant experience are incompetent thereby as judges of internal goods” (p.189).

Further, MacIntyre notes that the notion of “excellence” in his definition of practice must necessarily be contextualized. He uses the case of portrait painting to illustrate his point. While the successful portrait painter is able to obtain many external goods (wealth, status, fame, etc.), they are not to be confused with the goods internal to the practice (the interpretation of the subject through the representation of the body). The standards by which one might be deemed “successful” in realizing these internal goods is shaped by the philosophical and cultural constructions that give meaning to the notion of “subject” and inform the possibilities for representing the body. “A judgment upon these goods,” MacIntyre argues, “requires at the very least the kind of competence that is only to be acquired either as a painter or as someone willing to learn systematically what the portrait painter has to teach” (p. 190). A practice in this conception, then, also involves standards of excellence and adherence to internal structures of the practice. As practices have histories, their internal structures and standards are not immune from critique; yet, MacIntyre suggests, “we cannot be initiated into a practice without accepting the best standards so far” (p. 190). Thus, a meaningful critique of a practice requires grounding in the tradition that shapes the standards and structures of that practice.

In light of the two previous points, MacIntyre notes a final distinction between external and internal goods. External goods are always the property and possession

of some individual, and the more someone has of them the less there is for others. External goods are thus objects of competition by their very nature, in which there must then be winners and losers. Further, their measure can be judged by an outside observer, someone external to the practice itself. Internal goods, subject to evaluation only by other practitioners, are realized as achievement for the whole community who participate in the practice. While they are not necessarily free from competition for excellence, in that they can be produced as its outcome, they are not themselves characterized by competition. Instead, internal goods have broader relevance and potential to enrich.

Then, applying MacIntyre's conception of "practice" to spirituality allows for a richer analysis than the easy dismissal of what Roberts' (2002) critiques as decontextualized ancient spiritual rituals. Where it might make some uncomfortable is in the suggestion that there might be excellence in spiritual practices. Are, for example, some forms of prayer more excellent than others? While all attempts at prayer may be worthy of affirmation, I would argue that one would be hard pressed to support an argument that within any given tradition some forms are deemed better or more sophisticated than others. By MacIntyre's definition, a practice, such as prayer, can only be evaluated by others in the practicing community, and then against its adherence to the internal structure and standards of excellence. Here we see evidence of Quinian holism in MacIntyre's thought, as the controversial practice is considered in relation to the aspects of the tradition not under dispute; however MacIntyre expands Quine to include not only thought, but also practice within the web

justifiable knowing. Thus, if we were to consider Roberts' specific critique of labyrinth walking as a form of prayer we would first consider the goods internal to Christian prayer, which would require a further definition of "prayer" itself. For our purposes let us consider prayer as some intentional means of opening oneself to the possibility of a transformative, proleptic experience of God. Then we would evaluate labyrinth walking both on its effectiveness in achieving the internal goods and its adherence to the internal standards for excellent prayer (as understood within the community of practitioners). Of course there are challenges as to who is included in the community of practitioners, the issue of competing standards, and differences in theology regarding whether prayer is initiated by God or the one praying, but the richness of those conversations, when held loosely serve to enliven the practice itself.

But further, we might consider the limits of thinking about labyrinth walking as a practice in and of itself, for while it might be understood as having intrinsic rewards, does it really contain standards of excellence or maturity only understood by other labyrinth walkers? Perhaps, but that argument seems shaky at best. It seems labyrinth walking is more akin to bricklaying or planting turnips than architecture or farming. In this analogy, prayer itself would be the practice. Labyrinth walking is more like what Brett Webb-Mitchell (2007) might call a "gesture," not quite the practice itself, but the repeated acts one performs in engaging the practice through which God may be encountered. Gestures, then, serve a performative function. They replicate previous gestures and in so doing engage in a discourse through which subjects are produced and bodies made either intelligible or transgressive.

If then, I am to propose “spiritual practice” as a category, then it might include things like prayer, worship, activism, and other activities which meet both MacIntyre’s definition of “practice” and my use of “spiritual” (primarily concerned with the self-implicating nature of one’s relationship to Mystery). My assertion in this larger work is that pedagogy, particularly my conception of *queer pedagogy*, belongs to that category, as well. So, let us first consider whether or not queer pedagogy itself meets the standards MacIntyre establishes for a practice. Queer pedagogy can be understood as having internal goods, in that the particular constellation of analytical skills and political/eschatological priorities upon which queer pedagogy depends can only be achieved through the exercise of queer pedagogies themselves, and thus they can only be recognized by the experience of participating in the practice. Further, excellence in queer pedagogy, while a concept that would certainly be queered for its upholding of and evaluation in relationship to prescribed norms, could only be comprehended in relation to the philosophical and cultural constructions producing the possibilities by which the practitioner can be understood as engaging said pedagogy. Since the success of queer pedagogical practice depends on playing out particular philosophical and cultural constructions only understood by other practitioners (or those at least willing to invest the energy to study the practice), excellence within the practice functions to expand the possibilities and enrich the entire practicing community rather than just the individual pedagogue. As for “spiritual”, queer pedagogies inherently disrupt the assertion of unified and stable subject, including the self. The disruption of an understanding of the self as

knowable is certainly both self-implicating and indicative of a humbling encounter with the limits of knowledge, or stated another way, an encounter with sacred Mystery.

Queer Pedagogy and Spiritual Practices

There exists, however, a much larger discourse on specifically *spiritual* practices beyond MacIntyre. Privileging voices whose articulation of spirituality are grounded in theological convictions reasonably close to those I have articulated, let us consider some other ways of thinking about these practices. To begin with, we return to Sheldrake, who I utilized to make the case that spirituality is both a relatively recent construct, and still useful in theorizing curriculum. Sheldrake (1995) reminds us that there has been

a major shift in western theology towards a more serious reflection on human experience in its cultural particularity and therefore pluriformity. This in turn provoked a movement away from a static approach to the Christian life, embodied in an analytical and abstract spiritual theology, and towards a more dynamic and inclusive concept, namely ‘spirituality’ (p. 57).

This spirituality, he argues, seeks integration of all aspects of human life and experience, rather than a corded off exploration of the interior life. Thus, issues of “life-style” are centrally important within Christian spirituality discourses. British theologian Rowan Williams highlights the themes of interconnectedness over an isolated notion of the interior life suggesting that spirituality “must now touch every area of human experience, the public and the social, the painful, negative, even pathological byways of the mind, the moral and relational world” (2000, p. 59).

Thus, Sheldrake contends, that removing a wedge between the spiritual dimension of human existence and the materiality, while resulting in making the conversation significantly more complicated, results in a greater attempt to integrate human and religious values than an “exclusive interest in the component parts of ‘spiritual’ growth such as stages of prayer” (p.59). The implication for the focus of my work is that the practices of trends in contemporary Christian spirituality are increasingly concerned with the interior in relation to the exterior, or even more interestingly, the blurring of the dichotomy between the interior and exterior.

As I have argued earlier, while the general concept of spirituality is the development of the human capacity for self-transcendence in relation to great Mystery, the practices of spirituality are, in Sheldrake’s words, “specific and have particular religious or doctrinal referents” (p.60). It is this relationship to doctrinal claims that situate practices within a Quinian web, making possible any possibility of validation of authenticity. “Every religious tradition,” he continues, “has tests for the authenticity of spiritual experience based not only on human considerations but also the revelation and ...beliefs of the tradition” (p. 60). That is not to say that those not claiming a religious tradition do not have the capacity for self-transcendence, or do not exist within relation to great Mystery, but rather that even the articulations of experiences of those persons and the practices either inspired by those experiences or in search of them have external referents in a larger cultural discourse.

Having explicated both my historically situated understanding of spirituality and some core theological assertions through which I make meaning of my

experiences and which my own practices, either in response to or in search of similar experiences, I focus my discussion of queer pedagogy as spiritual practice in relation to three practices more commonly spoken of in Christian discourse: hospitality, embodiment, and testimony. As I enter an exploration of these practices, I do so in relation to my previous explication of queer pedagogy, our discussion of cultural and spiritual practices, and my teaching the course at the Wake Forest Divinity School as a specific site for engaging these practices. The choice of these three emerges from my reflecting on my journals as I taught that course. Brief excerpts from those journals are included in the text. The three more traditionally conceived practices offer frames for interpreting my own pedagogy in the particular context of the course, and I engage them as an invitation into further theorizing my larger pedagogical vision. While each of these three engagements may be considered practices in their own right (though maybe not in the MacIntyrean sense), my use of them in this context constitutes them more as gestures, strategies or modes through which the spiritual practice of queer pedagogy is enacted. Further, each of these three not only function within the larger discourse on Christian spiritual practices, they are met with parallel discourses in other theorizing that shape my consideration of them. While the lines may be messy and the language a bit slippery, these practices/gestures/strategies function in this case in support of an understanding of the larger practice of queer pedagogy.

Embodiment

Perhaps the most basic of these gestures is what Barbara Brown Taylor (2009) calls “the practice of wearing skin” (p. 35). The practice of intentionally acknowledging and honoring our embodiment, while seemingly simple, can be radically transgressive. Ruffolo (2007, p. 255), explicitly engaging queer theories in relationship to teaching, asks interesting questions about the pedagogical possibilities of embodying queer theories, naming that “it is somewhat unclear as to *how* queer can be embodied as a radical tool” (p. 257), particularly in his consideration, for straight teachers. Working from the notion that bodies and cultures are dialogically produced, he explains that by *the embodiment of queer* he is referring to “a radical dialogical process of engaging queer ideologies through bodies and culture” (p. 272). In suggesting a way through the vagueness he identifies, Ruffolo argues that a radically queer pedagogical positionality is not dependent on the categories of an identity politic. “The embodiment of queer (a queer politic) does not necessarily displace or embrace queer as a verb or noun. The embodiment of queer, however, can be a descriptive position committed to radical (queer) processes. *Queer* therefore can be considered the intersection of queer as a verb and queer as an adjective: giving an account of queer highlights the radical process of reconsidering identity politics (verb) so as to describe and articulate the self as an ongoing negotiation working through the politics of identity (adjective)” (p. 257). This embodiment of *queer* is integral to my understanding of queer pedagogy as spiritual practice. Therefore, in order to further our understanding of embodiment in relation to our larger

conversation, let us continue by looking to those who approach embodiment (both as concept and practice) primarily through the lens of spirituality.

Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter, collaborative artists and theologians, are the developers of “InterPlay”, which they describe as “an active and creative way to unlock the wisdom of the body,” (2010). Over the last twenty-five years, the two have birthed and shepherded an international network of people gathering in groups to engage what they call “Body Wisdom Practices”. They define a Body Wisdom Practice as “a physical, repeatable action, that might create a desired change, balance a certain reality of our lives, or help us ‘maintain’” (2009, p. 39). While their use of “practice” is more akin to my use of “gesture” than the MacIntyrian notion, I retain their language in explaining the argument. They assert that repeated practices over time can help shift our behavior. “The ‘practice’ part is particularly important,” they suggest; “Although sometimes we have insight about what we want, we may need to make some sort of fundamental shift in action to move towards our desire” (p. 40). They conceptualize some Body Wisdom Practices as tools to utilize towards creating such changes. Alternatively (and maybe simultaneously), they suggest that Body Wisdom Practices help “balance a certain reality in our lives” (p. 40). Examples of these balance-oriented practices range from remaining attentive to one’s breath in encountering a difficult co-worker to setting aside time from childcare tasks to dance or walk in the woods. Finally, maintenance practices such as brushing our teeth or sitting meditation, function to keep the practitioner in some continued state of being.

In considering Body Wisdom Practices as spiritual practice, Winton-Henry and Porter advocate and embrace the physicality of spirituality, resisting the historic bifurcation of body and spirit. All practices, they argue, are physical, “even if their purpose is to create quiet or stillness in the body. And body and mind are also not split from each other, practices that involve the way we think are also physical activities” (p. 40). Recognizing that all people likely have existing body practices – bathing, eating, stillness – they suggest the development of a wider range of intentional Body Wisdom Practices that might work towards creating desired change over time. Desire, rather than obligation, becomes the central motivation in their understanding of practices, and referencing a belief in the centrality of joy and playfulness, they stress simple practices that lead to change “with a sense of lightness,” rather than an emphasis on willfulness and over-earnestness. Their conception of Body Wisdom Practices functions in accordance with Sheldrake’s notion that spiritual practices extend beyond the self and towards the transcendent. While Body Wisdom Practices, can be taken on for one’s own good, Winton-Henry and Porter suggest they also can function for the good of others, or “the planet or even all of creation (God)” (p. 40). Within InterPlay, the idea of Body Wisdom Practices undergirds improvisational forms of movement, music making, and storytelling that are the primary tools of the community. The premise of InterPlay is that as participants play, particular elements of these creative processes “become part of our vocabulary and we gain access to a different kind of experience” (p. 40). In

essence, what Winton-Henry and Porter provide is a framework for thinking about attentiveness to embodiment as spiritual practice.

Springgay and Freedman (2007) offer insight to similar themes from the angle of curriculum theory, noting that “curriculum scholarship often falls prey to an understanding of the body through binary opposites,” and going on to suggest that while Cartesian dualisms have been disrupted by “a return to holistic practices, these interventions have not fully addressed the potential of the body in the construction of knowledge” (p. xix). They argue that the body is a

site of complex intersections between knowledge, subjectivity, and experience, and call for a larger discussion about the “unspoken practices in education that silence, conceal, and limit bodies”

(p. xix). They propose a *bodied curriculum* where the body is understood *as* meaning rather than simply a container in which meaning is stored.

They draw from Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “flesh” as a means of talking about the body as neither material substance (as biological discourses produce it) or as containers where the mind (and I would add soul) is stored and thus separated from the world. Flesh represents the integration of mind

and body enmeshed within experience. Flesh is conceptualized as “in-between,

Journal Excerpt:

There seems to be a central tension emerging in the class around reconciling the embrace of a queer, poststructuralist positionality and questions about the existence of the soul. So much of our theological heritage is tied up in this notion of salvation that keeps the soul alive and distinct beyond the bodily experience that I find myself bumping up against it in my own learning process, not to mention as I engage my students. It’s not really an active belief of mine anymore, but it still rears its head from time to time. How can such an incarnational tradition, one that rejected Gnosticism and its devaluing of the body centuries ago, be so invested in this dualism?

where beings (bodies) constitute themselves not as objects, but as meaning, and as embodied existence” (p. xx). Thus, as knowledge is produced through bodily encounters, inter-embodiment is how we come to know ourselves and the world around us: “our subjectivity, is performed, constructed and created in relation with other beings” (p. xxii).

Curriculum theorist Peter McLaren (1999) speaks of the “enfleshment of meaning” referring to the ways in which ritualized knowledge is made sense of through the body. He uses “enfleshment” to mean the “dialectical relationship between the material organization of interiority and the cultural modes of materiality we inhabit subjectively” (p. 274). Thus, the body is the site of learned narratives that are “spatio-temporally constructed at the intersection of desire and meaning” (p. 274). Ultimately, McLaren’s interest in the body is in recognizing it as the grounds for all intersubjective relationships. “We cannot separate the body from the social formation,” he argues, “since the material density of all forms of subjectivity is achieved through the ‘micropractices’ of social power that are socially inscribed into our flesh” (p. 275).

Springgay and Freedman call further attention to understanding of the significance of inter-embodiment as they consider it relation to difference. Arguing that difference is performed and produced at the very moment of a bodied encounter, they claim the crucial need for curriculum studies to explore the ways that bodies become invested with differences and to attend to the “relational, social, and ethical implications of being-with other bodies differently and to the different knowledges

such bodily encounters produce” (p.xxiv). Invested in an exploration of reading strategies, through which knowledge as difference is produced, mediated, regulated, their articulation of bodied curriculum calls for a the disruption of normative assumptions and a risky openness to fluidity and uncertainty.

When read alongside one another other, Winton-Henry and Porter’s notion of Body Wisdom Practices, which privileges a spirituality in which “selfhood” is shaped and re-shaped through repeated bodily gestures or performances; and both McLaren’s *enfleshment* and Springgay and Freedman’s *bodied curriculum*, which privilege a pedagogy through which knowledge is produced through bodily encounters; their potential for queering a notion of an essentially stable and singular identity rings loudly. Each is invested in the disruption of binary constructions of self-hood and identity, and each is oriented towards an embrace of uncertainty, or something like what I have referred to as Mystery. Even in the decidedly secular work of Springgay and Freedman, there is a reverence towards that uncertainty, which they simultaneously name as risky and call for an openness towards. There is an implied faith in its transformative power; what I read as a queerly eschatological destabilization.

While other considerations of honoring the body as spiritual practice may be attentive to the sort of rituals that Winton-Henry and Porter mention, and may even seek to disrupt dualistic thinking, they tend to function in ways similar to how Springgay and Freedman characterize “holistic” (here, more in line with Miller’s usage than Murphey’s) curriculum studies, in that they are attentive to the body as a

container of the spirit but do not necessarily emphasize the function of the body in producing knowledge of the transcendent. Though Stephanie Pausell's (1997) work may deserve a similar critique, she still offers salient points for our conversation, especially in recognizing the centrality of the body in a particularly Christian spirituality:

Embodiment is central to the Christian faith. The Christian emphasis on the incarnation of God's presence in Jesus and the Christian understanding of community, which describes the church as the body of Christ, both put embodiment at the center of Christian meaning. Jesus' command that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves makes it clear that our faith has everything to do with how we live as embodied people. And when we gather to worship, we do things together that bring this command to life: in the meal of communion, we eat and drink, gathered together by Christ's own wounded body; in baptism, it is our bodies that are bathed in cleansing water; in the passing of the peace, we touch one another in love and hope (p. 16).

Here Pausell grounds practices of honoring the body in the particular rituals of Christian worship, with external referents to particular theological claims. As spiritual practices extend beyond worship, this Christian emphasis on embodiment can have serious implications for the grounding of bodied pedagogy in spiritual practice. Similarly, Barbara Brown Taylor's "embodied souls" (2009, p. 42) falls short of fully disrupting dualistic thinking, but nonetheless speaks to the sort of transformative pedagogy implied in what Springgay and Freedman call inter-embodiment as she suggests:

Wearing skin is not a solitary practice but one that brings me into communion with all these other embodied souls. It is what we have most in common with one another. In Christian teaching, followers of

Jesus are called to honor the bodies of our neighbors as we honor our own. In his expanded teaching by example, this includes leper bodies, possessed bodies, widow and orphan bodies, as well as foreign bodies and hostile bodies – none of which he shied away from. Read from the perspective of the body, his ministry was about encountering those whose flesh was discounted by the world in which they lived (p. 42).

Given all of this, when I claim honoring the body as a way of speaking about queer pedagogy as spiritual practice, I mean honoring the body within the function of knowledge production, with particular attention to the ways in which bodies shape our sense of identity and mark and our identifications. Sullivan explores the role of the body in relation to queer theorizing in her consideration of subjectivity, arguing for a departure from a Cartesian dualism, which asserts that identity is located in consciousness and “the body is simply a material receptacle that houses the mind or spirit” (p. 41). This kind of dualistic thinking undergirds liberationist assumptions “that ideology colonises the mind of the individual, and that the goal of politics is...to free the mind, and hence the self from the repressive constraints of dominant culture” (p.41). In contrast, poststructuralist theorists argue that because we both embody and are constituted by the discourses of our culture, we cannot discard or escape them.

Drawing from both Butler’s and Merleau-Ponty’s considerations of the body as one’s “being-in-the-world” and thus the means through which identity is performatively generated, Sullivan (p.41) explains, “It is in virtue of having/being a body that is discursively produced in and through its relation to culture, that I am an ‘I’” (p.42). The effect of this notion of the body-subject is that we understand ourselves and all that we encounter through grids of intelligibility which are built

from knowledge we embody. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's metaphor of a blind man's relationship to a walking stick, Sullivan suggests that as we do with our bodies, through the stick the blind man, experiences habitual perceptions "so attenuated as to skip the stage of conscious interpretation and intent. Indeed, interpretation is the wrong word here: we are simply perceiving" (2001, p. 272). In short, because our knowledge is inseparably grounded in our bodies, the body is the central framework through which we generate identity and perceive our experience of the world.

Foucault (1978) further argues that systems of power/knowledge form our relationship to our embodied being through discursive practices. The body-self is constituted through performances (gestures, movements, etc.) codified in historically and culturally specific ways and regulated to ensure their adherence to hegemonic values. Diprose (1994) goes on to suggest one's identity or body-self is only understood, or achieves awareness of itself, in relation to the other. Specifically she claims one's subjectivity, "is built on the invasion of the self by the gestures of others, who, by referring to other others, are already social beings" (p.120). One's sense of oneself then, the very possibility of experiencing the self as anything, is shaped by a repetition of other performances and only exists within a context of shared social systems of meaning that offer a framework through which the self can be read. As embodied beings, we may then be understood as a function of the regulatory strategies used to encourage adherence to culturally hegemonic values. In other words, one's body-spirit – one's "self" if you prefer – is made intelligible by its

particular failings or adherences to performances of normative identities in compliance with normative practices.

In the course I taught at Wake Forest, the practice of honoring the body emerged as an enactment of queer pedagogies both through particular classroom rituals in which we attended to the needs of the body traditionally conceived simply (through allowing movement, eating, encouraging collective sighing when we encountered a difficult or tense moment in class), but further it played out in the very content of the course.

Journal Excerpt:

I am a fan of the collective, noisy sigh. Sometimes my body wants a good loud noise, a big out pouring of sound in order to clear space and keep going.

An interpretation of Christian tradition that emphasized incarnation as a centrally defining characteristic led us to engage secular queer theorists with an eye towards the role of the body not simply as the housing of consciousness, but as completely integrated in the production of identities and knowledges. In other words, specific theological referents shaped our engagement with discourses that functioned to destabilize assumptions about the nature of self, and ultimately rippled into questioning the nature of creation and all kinds of ontological questions about the nature and existence of souls. Honoring the body as an aspect of the spiritual practice of queer pedagogy requires both an attentiveness to the actual body-spirits in the rooms, and a destabilizing exploitation of theoretical and (in this case) theological fissures in the doctrinal positions posing as immutable and ahistorical notions. The effect is to engage the specific practice of drawing attention to the ways in which

discursive power is exercised in the regulation of bodies, and the roles social institutions play as functions of that regulation. While not all of these articulations of either queering embodiment or the embodiment of queer would necessarily stand up to MacIntyre's definition of practice (though some certainly may), collectively they point to an intentionality in thought and gesture that can be taken up within a construction of queer pedagogy that itself could be understood as having goods internal to and partially definitive of it as an activity at which one might excel.

Hospitality

With a sometimes less than critical and often problematic lens, hospitality has emerged as a common trope in gay and lesbian theologies. Based largely on the assumption that gay men and lesbians value relationships uniquely since it is whom and how they love that positions them on society's margins, hospitality has been repeatedly claimed as the particular spiritual gift of the community. In *Soul Beneath the Skin*, David Nimmons (2002) portrays gay men as a peaceful, loving community that broadens the definition of family; as an army of volunteers that stood by countless bedsides as strangers and friends were dying of AIDS and their own, biological families refuse to be present; as a band of lovers who blur the distinctions between lover, partner, and friend; and as a community which has created an atmosphere of hospitality that opens lives, homes, and institutions inviting people to more fully live into the complexity and chaotic beauty of themselves.

This sentiment is further echoed by theologian and activist Robert Goss (2002), who describes how a loving, same-sex relationship positions gay men for radical acts of hospitality:

Generally, same-sex couples experience the need to share the fruit of their love with others. Their love finds the need to include others...The more that we [Goss and his partner] experienced the love of one another, the more we were freed to serve others in need. We took into our household ministry the throwaway people of our society, the developmentally disabled, alienated gay men and lesbians, and people living with the painful realities of HIV illness. We created a community of love for the marginalized and the disenfranchised (p. 126-127).

In *Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Bible*, Nancy Wilson (2000) claims “promiscuous hospitality” as a gay and lesbian (which is what she seems to mean by the term “queer” in her title) gift to Christianity. She reconsiders stereotypes of gays and lesbians, presenting them as a platform on which new theologies can be built. “One stereotype of gay men,” she considers, “is that they are fabulous cooks and hosts of great parties. Perhaps this connection of hospitality and gays is as simple as the notion of a ‘queer sensibility’: the love of gay men for elegance, for hospitality as an art form” (p. 232).

Similarly, Wilson lifts the stereotypical tradition of lesbian pot-luck dinners as an example of the less formal and “easy flow of work, preparation, food and home, sex and friends...with everyone pitching in and not a lot of ownership of the ‘product.’ Also, it [a lesbian potluck meal] may be characterized by permeable boundaries that include parents and children and other family members, as well as bisexuals and men” (p. 233). She suggests that these markers of “queer” sub-culture, springing out of a common sense of alienation and rejection, have become the fertile ground for the growth of communal values: “Many lesbians and gay men consciously create environments of hospitality in their homes or organizations. They do this as a gift, a way of life. And I don’t mean that straight people don’t do this, but there is something, perhaps, about being ‘unhinged’ from the conventional family constructs that opens up the opportunities, the desire to both deconstruct and reconstruct this aspect of our lives” (p. 234).

Journal Excerpt:

We were ousted from our classroom by tenured professor who played a trump card to claim the space he wanted. We’ve ended up in a conference room high and above the chapel, which is only lit by ghostly street lamps shining through the windows as we enter. One student noted that it felt like being initiated into some secret society to ascend those stairs to our new gathering space.

These students of mine, some have been run out of religious spaces over and over. Some are painfully hungry to stake a claim to some home base in their theological education. I remember that feeling. As we climb those stairs together, I try and figure out how to hold onto the message that they are welcome here – that I am welcome here – that I came into this job by invitation.

While I find the assumptions about “community” problematic and the idealized characterizations of whatever is meant by “community” as varying from quaint to laughable, these texts do point to a particular discursive construction that

reflects an aesthetic or poetic that is certainly powerful. While far from queer (in the ways I am using the term in relation to theory and pedagogy), this trope of the hospitable outsider, the marginalized subject who welcomes the stranger, has resonances with more mainstream understandings of hospitality as Christian spiritual practice, and frankly makes me smile. Wilson's insistence on claiming and reconfiguring the same stereotype imposed on Southern Belles, Stepford Wives, and women in general as a higher moral calling is intriguing. Perhaps it also evokes the metropolitan trope of visiting "developing" cultures, who have little materially but extend radical hospitality. Something in this sense of the "excluded" having accessed a spiritual call to challenge practices of exclusion seems to resonate with Wilson. I wonder if the patronizing and problematic assumptions behind these tropes can be transcended. While I cannot work my way through the problems with the production of collective identities in these images, there is still something in them that speaks to me about a hope for how I as an educator might hold space for another to feel welcome. And yet, as we shall see, that notion is in and of itself problematic.

But before we leave an exploration of hospitality in gay and lesbian Christian thought, we would be remiss not to look at Kathy Rudy's (1997) creative reimagining of the trope as she argues for hospitality as the core value to guide sexual encounters. "When I recommend hospitality," she explains,

I do not mean that strangers need to be welcomed through sex itself...our lives in Christ need to be opened to nurturing and caring for others...Unitivity and hospitality, it seems to me, are ways of talking about human life in a frame that is bigger than the individual subject...We know ourselves in relationship to and as a part of the

whole. In a Christian context, the moral markers of unitivity and hospitality remind us that any sense of individuality ought to take a secondary role to our membership in the Body of Christ (pp. 126-128).

Here we see Rudy play with some interesting moves considering our previous discussion of embodiment. Expanding on the metaphor of the church, or communion of Christians, as the resurrected body of Christ, for Rudy the individual body-spirit becomes secondary. The self, as a subject, exists to a lesser degree than participation in a collective embodiment. Thus, sex acts as a means of embodying, through one individual's hospitable encounter with another, a shared participation in and honoring of the larger body of Christ. It is a complex notion, and perhaps raises more questions than Rudy is willing to answer, but it does represent a rather queer appropriation of hospitality as it begins to question the nature of the individual subject within this theological understanding of the body metaphor.

The practice of extending hospitality, of welcoming the other, can similarly function as a way of thinking about queer pedagogy, but not without

Journal Excerpt:

Tonight, I am a live performance DJ. I'm sifting through my sources material and will walk into the seminar with a loose plan, probably more structured tonight than usual, because there is a need to trust that structure is there, that the container can hold, in an initial class meeting. We'll find a rhythm and share the responsibility of holding the space more as we go. We will queer the assumptions about knower and known, teacher and student, week by week.

I dwell in the borders of this academic structure. I am a disciplinary queer, teaching in a Divinity School with a (almost) PhD from a state university – not even in a religion program. It all seems very polyamorous, the way I'll affiliate with so many departments, my questioning fidelity to a single discipline.

some further critical reflection. The practice of welcoming the other somewhat problematically constitutes the other as just that, an “other”, and in so doing engages the host in a normalizing discourse. Derrida and Deutscher (2001) argue that the centrality of identitarian logic that the notion of community is commonly built on is inherently inhospitable, and perhaps even hostile, in response to the other. A firm sense of identity, he argues, can only be formed by excluding that understood as different and vigilant guarding against its intrusion. Because of what he perceived as this intrinsic connection between community and hostility, Derrida turned his attention away from community and towards hospitality, which he thought might be a more productive concept. Derrida hones in on the internal tensions in the etymological meaning of hospitality. While on the one hand the term means the benevolent welcome of the stranger, on the other hand it speaks to the power of the one issuing the welcome over the realm into which the stranger is invited, and by association over the stranger herself or himself. Thus, hospitality is a thing that cannot be achieved. It is an impossible, but necessary, action that Caputo describes as, “an enigmatic ‘experience’ in which I set out for the stranger, the other, for the unknown where I cannot go” (1997, p. 112). Or as Sullivan describes it, hospitality consists “of pushing against the limits of what one knows, moving into a beyond that one cannot anticipate or control” (2003, p. 149). Further, Sullivan reminds us that hospitality is not something that “an already constituted subject decides to do or not do...one’s being-in-the-world [body-spirit] is always marked, molded, formed and transformed in and through encounters with others and with a world – encounters that

are beyond one's volition and are central to one's sense of self" (p. 149). Thus, since identity is not essential, it could be understood as already marked by the necessity of an other, a point of difference by which one can understand oneself. Further, the markers of difference, fluid and shifting in a web of social relations, make a sense of identity simultaneously necessary and impossible. For Derrida, it is this paradoxical tension that undercuts the immobilization of being, and thus the possibility of community.

Despite these tensions, the impossibility of fully welcoming the other, because by the very act of welcoming one constitutes the other as outside whatever they are being welcomed to, the queer pedagogical task is to claim productive tension in that attempt. The tension is not unlike the tension Luhmann identifies in queer pedagogy itself, leading her to suggest that "queer pedagogy must learn to be self-reflective of its own limitations" (1998, p. 142). Like hospitality, Luhmann argues that ultimately a queer, post-identity, pedagogy becomes unthinkable – that at best queer pedagogy encourages an ethical practice in studying the risks of normalization and the "im/possibilities of (subversive) teaching and learning" (p. 154). Without the politics of representation on which liberationist, anti-homophobic strategies depended to fall back on, queer pedagogies function to critique normativities, even the ones they simultaneously (if unintentionally) function to produce. And yet, like in the practice of hospitality, we persist. Our very reflecting on the ways our practices produce and replicate the kinds of normative assumptions (here the educator as having the power

to welcome and thus mastery over the realm of the education setting), enacts a queer pedagogical stance as it suggest the sort of study of limits to which Britzman refers.

In her consideration of the practice of hospitality among early Christians, Pineda (1997) points out that in New Testament writings, the word *xenos*, is used not only to mean “stranger”, but also “guest” and “host”. “This one word,” she contends, “signals the essential mutuality that is at the heart of hospitality. No one is strange here except in relation to someone else; we make one another guests and hosts by how we treat one another” (p. 33). The early church, she argues, emerging in cultures with rich traditions and customs around hospitality practices, “grew up turning hosts into guests and guests into hosts” as traveling apostles visited communities gathered in homes and simultaneously experienced and extended hospitality. *Xenos* is a queer word, denoting a fluid and shifting set of identifications that only find their meaning in a relational context. The fluidity in this notion of *xenos*, of hosting and being hosted at the same time, of noting the institutional structures and transgressing them, points to a way of enacting hospitality as both a queer pedagogy and spiritual practice.

Testimony

Given my embrace of Story as a primary model for God, I would be remiss were I not to consider the practice of queer pedagogy in relation to testimony. Gary Wills (1999, p. 159) argues that Augustine of Hippo’s *The Confessions*, which may be considered a forerunner to the modern subject so destabilized by Foucault sixteen centuries later, might better be titled *The Testimony*. Dorothy Bass (2004) reminds us

that before his Christian conversion, Augustine earned his living teaching the art of persuasive speech to Roman citizens. She reminds us of his experience of watching fourth century children learn to speak, “Words, Augustine observed, are ‘precious cups of meaning’ that allow human beings to enter into community. He also knew from experience, however, that words can become weapons when they emerge from the mouths of those who seek to dominate rather than to love and serve” (p. xii). The power of words, of storytelling (and Story-telling) both in the production of the subject and the eschatological politics of hoping for a better world mark this Christian tradition of testimony.

Thomas Long (2004) speaks of testimony as “talking ourselves into being Christian” (p. 3), an unapologetic nod to the role of storytelling in the production of identity or the claiming of identifications. He names a hunger for “authentic God talk,” in which Christians speak of God in contexts beyond the church. “Talking about God outside of church is a potentially uncomfortable topic because it places many Christians in a bind. On the one hand, we know that our faith touches everything about life. It affects our relationships, our politics, the way we spend our money and spend our time...On the other hand, everybody knows that God and religion, like sex and money, are touchy matters, and speaking about faith in public always runs the risk of offense or even social rejection” (p. 4). Perhaps for some of us that reticence is born out of an awareness of the issues around the cultural power of Christian discourses, or even more, fear of association with a particular vein of particularly politically powerful Christianity that runs counter to much of how we

interpret and experience our faith. I certainly have encountered that very phenomenon while repeatedly revising this dissertation, navigating the discomfort of claiming identification within a tradition that so often has been problematic, while still trying to establish a credible voice with audiences beyond that tradition.

For my purposes, I speak of testimony as telling stories, as the active and conscious participation in Story, with the articulated hope of personal and cultural transformation. It is a practice that carries with it a complex set of challenges and is always in a tenuous dance with epistemologies and politics of representation. The process of naming and constructing oneself through narrative is inevitably plagued with humanist identity categories and generally includes an editing process that cords off parts of the self that fail to adhere to the categories of self-definition. Here, “talking ourselves into being Christian” parallels the coming out process central to gay liberation politics. Foucault’s hermeneutics of desire through the technologies of self-examination, confession, and self-decipherment, undoubtedly play into the testimonial act. However, rather than being at “the heart of the procedures of individualization” (1980, p.59), testimony is less invested in the libratory claims of the confessional act and more invested in story as a site of engagement. Whereas Foucault’s analysis of confession highlights the disjunction between self-knowledge and the interpretation of that knowledge by others so as to classify, evaluate, and identify the confessor within a matrix of normative values – processes I do not deny as being at play in testimony – testimony privileges the transformative function of storytelling as a creative act of community identification. It self-consciously and

unapologetically submits itself to be considered in relation to the community story and values that submission as itself a transformative act. Both telling stories and listening to them is dangerous work, and yet if I were to look for a common thread through all of the jobs that have made up the twists and turns of my career, I would name myself primarily a storyteller and storykeeper. Testimony is a central component of my spirituality.

In considering the prevalence of testimony within many historically Black Church worship traditions, Thomas Hoyt (1997) defines the practice as people speaking “about what they have experienced and seen, offering it to the community for the edification of all” (p. 92). Hoyt argues that the Black Church’s practice of testimony functions to make space for voices often silenced in other cultural contexts. He notes that the evocation of testimony borrows from the “world of courtrooms and trials” (p. 92), and in its more formalized practice (as in the worship tradition he claims) functions in a context in which the community expects to hear the truth spoken. Further, “Witnesses – those making the testimony – must speak the truth as they have seen, heard, and experienced it. The practice of testimony requires that there be witnesses to testify and others to receive it and evaluate their testimony. It is a deeply shared practice” (p. 92). As he explains the function of testimony within a “free church” liturgy (a designation of worshipping modes that are less formal and often emphasize the more expressive and emotive), he suggest that “a believer describes what God has done in her life, in words both biblical and personal, and the hands of her friends clap in affirmation. Her individual speech thus becomes part of

an affirmation that is shared” (p. 94). Thus, testimonies function within liberation theologies as sties of resistance and solidarity.

The common free church refrain, “Can I get a witness?” reminds us that *witnessing* takes on more than one form in the testimonial act. There is the witness who testifies, but there is also the community gathered in witness of the testimony itself, some of whom might go on to repeat the story to yet another witness, and so on. For Tom Henderson (2009), building off the work of Winton-Henry and Porter, this act of witnessing takes on a particular meaning: “first, noticing my own physical experience as I watch and listen and, second, affirming the person I have witnessed by telling them my own physical experience in just a few words or images” (p. 1). This sort of embodied witnessing points to the relational aspect of storytelling (for him, taking on multiple forms of dance, music, and speech), and harkens back to Murphey’s use of the Quinian web as a sense of seeking validity. For Henderson, witnessing is as much about attending to ones sense of how the information – the testimony, if you will – is being received as a bodily being-in-the-world as it is to offering the storyteller a sense of being seen or heard. It suggests a possibility for simultaneously noting either one’s own resonance with or opposition to the testimony, while still remaining attentive to the experience of the testifier.

Surely, the concept of testimony is not without problems (as I have noted elsewhere in my discussions of the tyranny of community and the limitation of liberation theologies). The unexamined assertion of personal experience as “truth” has deserved the critical responses it has evoked. And yet, to respond to those

responses with a stifling of stories and a closure to knowledge produced in the telling of personal narrative would smack of an arrogance equally problematic. Rather than eradicating their transformative power, problematizing narratives and their production of subjectivities opens them to being sites of multiple engagements, moments of crystallization in which individuals engage with one another in the production of more knowledge. We cannot escape discourse, and so we tell, listen to, and re-tell stories, knowing all along that doing so creates multiple truths and has the potential to enact accidental violences.

On the most obvious level, testimony has the potential to queer knowledge as the witnessing of another's personal narrative disrupts one's assumptions about the possibilities of what can be, or pushes up against what Britzman talks about as what one can "stand knowing" (1995). The more complicated nuances of testimony, which point to how it might function queerly and how it might be queered, show up in the post-colonial discourses around the subaltern, and particularly the debates the *testimonio* genre has produced. *Testimonio*, in this context, refers to a narrative form emerging in-between Latin American storytellers and predominately North American and European academics/consumers. The form became central to the subaltern studies movement and has drawn sharp criticism on a variety of fronts. *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, first published in 1982, sparked the perhaps most well known debates about *testimonio*, its appropriations, and the construction and function of "truth" after Menchu herself was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 (Zimmerman, 2001).

Anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos (1982) transcribed and edited interviews with Menchu, and then published them as a book, launching both herself and Menchu into the international spotlight during a time of on-going conflict in Guatemala. The work has sparked multiple and complex conversations. Stoll (1999), raised concerns about the factual basis of some of Menchu's claims, and those critiques were then taken up by others in attempts to discredit Menchu's political critiques (Beverly, 2004, p. X). Testimonio as a genre thus raised questions about how it should be read and taught – whether it belonged in literature, history, or social science. Further, critiques of anthropology, most notably Spivak in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) concerning the production of the subaltern as such necessarily excludes them from being able to be heard, raised significant questions about the viability of forms of knowledge production such as testimonio.

Beverly (2004), an adamant advocate of testimonio, takes a literary approach to the genre, and yet, he is clear that such an approach does not exclude the political implications and calls for transformation the texts evoke. His approach is not unlike my approach to the Gospel narratives, that could be argued themselves function in a similar vein to testimonio. In a collection of essays originally published over a fifteen-year span, Beverly demonstrates developments in his understandings of testimonio resulting from the controversies surrounding it. He marks a shift from the liberationist tones of his early work with the genre to his encounters with postmodern theoretical discourses. Beverly comes to suggest that “what testimonio requires of the academy is not that we ‘know’ it adequately, but something like a critique of

academic knowledge as such. That critique, which for us would amount to a kind of criticism/self-criticism, would point in the direction of relativizing the authority of academic knowledge – that is, *our* authority – but not the rejection or abandonment of that knowledge” (p. 7). Stated a different way, he suggests that what is at stake in testimonio, “is not so much truth from or about the other as the truth of the other...meaning not only that the other exists...but also the other’s sense of what is true and what is false” (p. 7).

While Beverly’s suggestion problematically locates testimonio as necessarily outside of the academy, glossing over the historic relationship between the story-teller/subject and the editor/interpreter, and arguably re-inscribes the same practices of power that produce the subaltern as such, he also speaks to the power of narratives to disrupt the institutionally ordained ways of knowing. I would argue, that while the production and dissemination of testimonio as research has undoubtedly been full of significant problems, it has also resulted in a subsequent body of critical work that has proven to be immensely productive. In my way of thinking, the limits of knowability, the problems with constructions of truth, the politics of representation and listening, all draw us further into Story, which constantly functions to simultaneously produce and disrupt meaning.

Arnaldo Cruz-Malave’s *Queer Latino testimonio, Keith Haring and Juanito Xtravaganza: Hard Tails* (2007) reflects the sort of complexity of which I am speaking. The book presents the story of Juan Rivera (aka Juanito Xtavaganza), the lover of artist Keith Haring through the years preceding his 1990 death from AIDS.

Cruz-Malave makes the conscious decision to remain an active and visible part of the text, not rendering his editorial maneuvers invisible, but rather allowing their visibility to disrupt the readers assumptions around the narrative's cohesion. The result is a theoretically sophisticated portrait of New York in the seventies and eighties, exploring the effects of AIDS, crack, and gentrification on the lives of queers of color. The messy politics of representation loom large as Cruz-Malave struggles to both bear witness to and relay Xtravaganza's story without enacting epistemic violence. Gopinath (2009), reminds us that "we know all too well from the various critiques of testimonio and conventional ethnography that have emerged in the last twenty years, the dangers or the project of 'giving voice' and speaking for the socially marginalized other." Cruz-Malave's struggle with this awareness led to a ten-year paralysis between recording the interviews and his tackling the book project. What emerges is a hybrid text, in which the edited interview is contextualized within

a reflective analysis of both the context of Xtravaganza's story and the challenges of engaging in this kind of research. While claiming its place within the genre of testimonio, the book deconstructs its methodology as it engages it, looping back on itself and occasionally repeating itself verbatim.

Cruz-Malave's intention is as much to consider the production of the text as it is to tell the story. His acts of interpretation and reconstruction are reflected in his ongoing theorizing of listening as an ethical and political act. The author implicates himself as the interview transcripts reveal the tension in his read of Haring as exploiting Xtravaganza and Xtravaganza's adamant rejection of the notion that Haring appropriated black and Latino cultural spaces that he accessed through his lovers as a means of fueling his art for consumption by an art world that minimized those very spaces: "A lotta people would say *that...*'Cause the aborigines had used the same images and Keith had just *swiped* them! But it wasn't a matter of swiping—Keith knew how to continue the conversation. And he knew how to continue the line

Journal Entry:

When I took on this role of teaching at the Divinity School at Wake Forest, I did so already known by most of the faculty as a former student. I was known by many of the students as one of the founders of the queer student organization within the school. I was known to other students because of my involvement in Baptist organizations. I entered the classroom with stories of me from other times and other contexts preceding me.

As I encounter students who had worked out strategies for navigating their positions around sexualities, both their own and other people's, I don't hesitate to challenge or disrupt their thinking, but I am also aware of my desire to read their stories through lenses that support my own navigations. Some of the students frustrate my attempts to make them intelligible, rejecting gay and lesbian identity categories, but also rejecting queer as an acceptable alternative. I feel exposed when I encounter my old identity politic scripts showing up in seeking to stabilize queer as a noun. Other students seem to hold in tension a constructivist understanding of sexual identity and a theology of election in ways I cannot fathom. They maintain the notion of a soul enscribed with a faith waiting to be realized.

with the street artists” (p. 44). Xtravaganza’s disruption of Cruz-Malave’s desire, and perhaps the desire of the reader, to cling to a particular interpretation of Haring’s relationship to the subcultures of queers of color functions to expose the longing for easy intelligibility and to invite questioning about our demands for adherence to our readings of another person’s story. It is this reflexivity on Cruz-Malave’s part that leads Gopinath to say of the work that it “can be read as an extended meditation on the possibilities and limits of collaboration across hierarchies of power and privilege: between Cruz-Malave and Rivera, and Haring and Rivera, but also between the reader and the text itself. As readers we are compelled to interrogate our own positionality as we are drawn into the circuits of exchange and ‘trade,’ in all senses of the word” (p. 1).

Cruz-Malave offers insight into the problematics of witnessing another’s story in what he refers to as “a reticent genre” (p. 97). He self-consciously struggles with his paralyzing shame and concern that his fascination with Juan Xtravaganza’s story is driven by a need to “secretly feed a prurient interest...for Latino loves under duress” (p. 96), or “providing someone a walk on the wild side so that, me included,

It’s like the identity/subjectivity conversations we’re having around gender, sexuality, and race, dare not disrupt embedded theology. Interesting to encounter what we can stand considering – and that point is different for everyone in the room. Hit it early with some, don’t know that we’ll hit it at all with others.

Making room for our stories and the stories we read, while holding their telling as sites of performance and loci for engagement rather than trump cards to shut down disagreement and dissent or objects for consumption, is the complicated and fruitful work of our learning community. In the end, I hope our stories of our storytelling and story holding, without demand for nakedness but with room for vulnerability, serve as

could finally feel, could *com-probar*, could both confirm and taste the joyous sigh of relief, that jolt that may be experienced at reliving ‘lesser’ lives at a distance, safely sconced at home, in one’s comfortable armchair, with one’s ubiquitous cup of coffee by one’s side” (p. 97). But in the end, Cruz-Malave’s queer testimonio offers a model for embracing both the necessity of telling and listening to stories despite the accompanying problems; both queering the practices of storytelling, re-telling, and listening, and demonstrating the potential of testimonies to queer what is assumed to be known or knowable. “I had stopped,” he bemoans:

For ten years I had been paralyzed with shame – overcome by the possibility that a word, a word of mine might damage, betray. But the art in Juan’s voice – its hesitation, elisions, detours – kept prodding me, urging me on to strain, to reconnect. And then one day, I just got up – as Juan would say, deferring interpretation – and fortified by the thought that such minimal deviations were not only a command but a hope, I decided to pick up the phone and answer his call (p.119).

Testimony is messy – we are implicated in the politics of representation of both ourselves and others – but those politics are as inescapable as discourse itself. We are aware of the limitations of what we do, and still we do it. We present ourselves as texts, and take up one another in that manner, engaging a plethora of reading strategies in order to make meaning of our stories, to seek common ground and ponder difference. In engaging testimony as an enactment of queer pedagogy as spiritual practice, the point of acknowledging difference is not to know it, or borrowing from Cruz-Malave, “to expose it until it yields its secret...not even to venerate the mystery of the other’s inscrutable, ever-receding, sacred face...It is more

simply – and more difficultly – to engage with that difference” (p. 119). We testify, and we bear witness, so that we may engage. The mystery is not so much in encountering the other, but in the possibility of being transformed by that encounter.

Conclusion

Embodiment, hospitality, and testimony hardly offer a comprehensive exploration of the ways queer pedagogy as spiritual practice might be enacted. They do, however, offer language and traditions through which my own practice might find meaning. When understood as an interrogation of the production of the normal, as an exploration of the boundaries of knowledge and ignorance, then queer pedagogy can also be understood as concerned with the transformational potential of engaging Mystery.

CODA

In November of 2009, I attended the American Education Studies Association conference in Pittsburgh, PA. Wanting to milk all I could from the experience, I studied my program and marked every session having anything to do with queer pedagogy or religion and spirituality. As I moved from session to session I began making connections with what turned out to be two different circles of colleagues. In most all of the queer pedagogy sessions, I found the same folks. Similarly, there was a cadre of scholars moving from one religion session to another. What was striking to me is that I saw none of the queer pedagogy folks in the religion sessions, nor any of the religion folks in the queer pedagogy sessions. Even more, I was struck by the several times I heard religion, and particularly Christianity, portrayed monolithically and derisively among those working in queer pedagogy. The very un-queer production of the Christian subject in those conversations was surprising. Less surprising, but equally frustrating, was the complete silence regarding queer theories and queer subjects in the religion sessions.

Ironically, as I engaged colleagues in hallways and over coffee, I found trends amongst both groups towards challenging *certainty*. Similar critiques of the ways institutions approached the processes of education as being about solidifying knowledge of oneself and the world were being articulated by these scholars who

seemed to have so little interaction. When I spoke of faith and spirituality among the queer pedagogy folks I was met with blank looks. When I spoke of queer pedagogy among the religion folks I was met with an absence of even a basic understanding of what I was referring to. While my experience of living in the in-between at that conference was hardly new for me, it served as a reminder of why I do the kind of work that I do.

Simply put, I find myself living with a foot in each of two of the most powerful institutions of knowledge production in my culture: the church and the academy. Because of the ways I am situated (and have situated myself), I am most often in conversation with those in each institution who are somewhat conflicted, deeply invested in the institution they call home and critical of it at the same time. As one whose work and life has been so shaped by both queer pedagogy and spiritual practices, I am somewhat evangelical about the potential for a culturally transformative, collaborative engagement at the places where those discourses intersect.

Given my critique of the discourse around spirituality in education, and my further assertion that there is still something worth holding onto in the conversation, what are the implications for a consideration of queer pedagogy as spiritual practice? I contend that if we consider queer pedagogy as spiritual practice, then we can still claim some transformational quality in its intent, not in the mode of the liberation models historically fueling critical pedagogies, but more in an implicit transformation occurring in humbling encounters with the edge of knowability, a movement from the

fear of limits of knowledge towards an embrace of mystery. At the same time, queer pedagogy has the potential to invigorate the conversations around both spirituality in education and spiritual practices in general, offering those conversations new life and potentially detaching them from their dependency on the essentialist and foundational thought of modern liberalism. This, in a nutshell, is my work: to reconceptualize queer pedagogy as encounters with Mystery, and to reconsider spirituality as practices drawing our attention to the limits of our knowledge claims.

In bringing these two discourses into conversation with one another, and reflecting on my enactment of both, I further articulate my identifications within (or pushing against) both the institutions built up around preserving each of them. It is a snapshot, a “just for now” kind of positionality, which is all it could possibly be, but it is a portrait in which I see myself and recognize something worth claiming. But even more importantly, I suggest that the defining aim of grappling with the limits of knowledge and knowability make these two discourses unlikely, but powerful, dance partners. For those invested in discourses around spirituality – whether in foundations of education, theological education, or church settings – queer pedagogy offers a framework for articulating a critical engagement with the embrace of Mystery required for their work to remain relevant in postmodernity. Similarly, by critically engaging spirituality rather than dismissing it altogether, queer pedagogues open themselves to a rich discourse with tremendous cultural capital.

In demonstrating my perception of common ground in these discourses, I have not only worked to articulate my own scholarly identifications (which, admittedly,

has been a driving force in this project), but also have attempted to open the door to a collaborative politic – a “queer” understanding of the advocates of spirituality and the advocates of queer theory operating from a common pedagogical impulse in examining how what it is known is called into being, and meeting the limits of that knowledge with a humility that does not silence or shutdown, but rather invigorates and invites contemplation. I long for a network of pastors and scholars, teachers and theologians, who come together across lines of institutionality not so much to organize for political reform (though I would certainly welcome that) but to learn from one another about the multiple ways in which mystery/Mystery informs our knowing and the navigations of our work.

And so, I return to the beginning, since attentiveness to these multiple discourses is precisely the kind of work that informed the projects I included in the appendices, the initial work that shaped the direction this dissertation has taken. I began this project with a discussion of epistemologies and methodologies that resurfaced throughout the text utilizing multiple metaphors. In the end, each of the metaphors I have referenced has its limitations. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) rhizome can be critiqued for its tendency to mask imbedded exercises of power in its attempts to decentralize hierarchies. The web or net that Quine (1953) and Murphey (1996) employ can be critiqued for its dependency on discernable edges to any given interpretive community and failure to adequately grapple with collisions of intersecting or multiple communities. The dj/remix, extrapolated from the ideas posited by Davis (2008) and Miller (2008), can be critiqued as advocating

juxtaposition for the sake of juxtaposition, and in borrowing snippets from multiple discourses detaching them from the larger referents that give them meaning. I have struggled with the limitations of each of these, and recognize that other approaches to the same questions I raised in this research might privilege different metaphors and thus produce different knowledges.

I argued for deep contextualization in this research, and given that I grounded an argument for the usefulness of spirituality as a concept in pedagogical discourse in its unapologetic claims towards self-implication, it was a necessary strategy. The fact that as a researcher I am particularly and noticeably present in the work is a function of the nature of the work itself. Because in my critique of spirituality in education rested on it being levied as a means of referencing personal experience and theological conviction in a way that shelters either from critical engagement, if I was to argue any utility remains in the concept I had to take on those critiques and model a different approach. It is challenging to write critically about spirituality. Drawing from Sheldrake's (2007) assertion of the self-implicating nature of the work requires both a deep contextualization and a reflexive stance. To engage that without slipping into fetishizing the autobiographical impulse requires vigilance.

The result was an articulation of the particular theological referents shaping my spiritual practices and a valuing of personal experience that simultaneous remains open to challenging the limits of ones own self-understanding. While personal narrative informs my research, the aim of the work has not been primarily to analyze or theorize my story, but rather to explore intersecting discourses around sexuality,

spirituality, and pedagogy. I entered into this project insisting that spirituality can be useful and has a place in critical discourses. I am satisfied that I have made a compelling case. Similarly, I have demonstrated that claiming a faith tradition and acknowledging the transformative and productive nature of that claim is not necessarily incompatible with poststructuralist and queer epistemologies.

I set out to write a readable text that dealt with complex ideas, and to write a book I would like to read. I think I have done that. I have not sacrificed depth in the name of accessibility, but I have further prepared myself to speak to multiple audiences. I am invested in the academy, but I am also really interested in teaching undergraduates and speaking in churches. Thus, I recognize my research is intended for multiple audiences, and so I conclude with a word expressing my hope and longing for each: To my fellow pastors and leaders of progressive faith communities, I encourage you to reject the simplicity of identity politics as a substitute for real engagement with complicated issues. To my colleagues concerned with spirituality in education: we must challenge our dependence on modernist articulations of Platonist assumptions if we are to be taken seriously in a postmodern age. To the queer pedagogues who inspire and challenge me: our failures to challenge the oppositions between intellectualism and faith, science and religion, are inconsistent with our larger project, and rob us of opportunities for powerful collaborations towards creating the change we value.

God said, 'You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, in

which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left?' (Jonah 4:10-11).

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APPENDIX A

A Loose Garment of Identifications

I confess: I was baptized as an infant. I was not born a Baptist. I was not raised a Baptist. Still, I am a Baptist. I know this because my church told me so when I joined. I joined a Baptist congregation that affirmed my infant Baptism. Being Baptist and all, it was the congregation's decision to make – though I am left with a “Baptist identity” that some would contest. I went to Divinity School identifying as a United Methodist refugee hanging out in a Baptist camp. I was really into the exile narratives. Dean Leonard (author of the preface of this volume) joked that if you scratched me I still bled Wesley. He was probably right, particularly if you scratched me while talking about grace. *I confess: there are parts of what I learned as a United Methodist kid that I want to keep.*

I grew up in Winston-Salem, NC, on the campus of The Children's Home. My father had grown up there as a resident and my mother, like me, as a “staff kid.” The church was literally the center of our community. Our work, our play, our lives radiated out from it. I grew up in a church that was made up of young people with hard stories. The kids in my neighborhood knew the world was complicated – full of challenges and injustices. In a church made up mostly of children, we learned the daily practice of resurrection.

In the middle of my southern hometown, I grew up side by side with rural and urban kids of different race. I grew up with a sense that our faith called us into action, it called us into working for a better world. It was a community – and a church – built on love and hope.

I confess: I am an ordained Baptist Minister.

Yes, I am an ordained Baptist Minister that was baptized as an infant. Truthfully, it really was not until the process leading up to my ordination that I came to seriously identify as Baptist. I was ordained by a congregation that knew and loved me well. They identified my gifts for ministry, and invited me to minister with their youth and young adults. They stood in line to place their hands on me in an act of blessing while I wept with joy, transformed by grace. Being Baptist and all, it was the congregation's decision to make – though it left me in an interesting place as I later tried to interpret believer's Baptism to young people discerning a call. *I confess: I have never been so sure that I was Baptist as I was the first time another was leaning back in my arms, submersed in the baptismal waters.*

I confess: I share my home, my bed, and my life with a man named Ron. The fact that I dearly love another man and have covenanted to spend my life with him was well known by the Baptist

When I was in middle school the church at the Home was dissolved and became a chaplain's ministry. My family moved to a church across town. I was heavily involved in the youth group and served as a youth representative on several councils and committees. I loved church, and took my commitments seriously, but I asked a lot of questions. By the time I was graduating from high school I found myself bumping up against a church culture that suggested faith primarily meant accepting what you were told.

I left for college both committed to my Christian faith and increasingly frustrated with church. This was the early 1990's, and with Cold War gone the culture wars took center stage. The horrors of the early years of AIDS thrust "homosexuality" into the limelight. I remember attending a church conference with my father where they talked for hours about the exclusion of homosexuals from ordination – the threat and abomination they represented. Later that day I told my father that God may be real, but certainly couldn't be found in church.

congregation I joined, the same congregation that later ordained and called me just months after they blessed our union when we made a more formal and public declaration of our covenant on our tenth anniversary. When I initially came back to church I did so as a Baptist, because it was a Baptist congregation that would have me – it was their decision to make. These congregational decisions I mention were not made in isolation or on a whim. They were decisions that were preceded by prayerful discernment. My congregation chose their practices in accordance with biblical study, attentiveness to tradition, and a sense of where God was calling them. I came to learn and love the prophetic Baptist tradition that claimed me. While many of my younger Baptist peers were wondering whether or not “being Baptist” was worth holding onto, I was falling in love with a way of doing Christianity that seemed well situated to respond to a changing world. *I confess: I get excited when I talk about Baptists.*

While in college I became heavily involved in campus justice movements. I was involved in work around sexual violence, racial reconciliation, gender equality, and the abolition of the death penalty. I knew my faith and my family story had something to do with my commitments to justice work, but I had not yet learned how to articulate the connection. I found church boring and consumed with protecting the status quo, so I distanced myself from it.

As I began dating Ron, I came face to face with the aggressive condemnations of Christians bent on saving me from eternal damnation. Rarely did I see those folks so interested in the gender of who I was dating show up in the places where we were speaking out about injustices on our campus or in the larger world. I wore a cross around my neck, but kept it hidden under my shirt. I knew that I saw the face of Christ in the broken and often angry folks I encountered as an activist, but I still couldn't name what that had to do with church.

And yet, I have never been quite so gay as when I have been identified as a Baptist minister. The juxtaposition of the two draws attention to the ways I am marginalized. Though I was fortunate to serve a congregation that had room for me to be known mostly for my work with young people, I knew that for many in our pews my standing up front mattered differently because it meant they belonged, too. I knew that the blessings the church bestowed on me were politically loaded, even if we did not want them to be. I knew that, at least to some, when I walked out into the world, I was known as “that gay Baptist minister.” Because I identified with a Baptist church, and because I identified with a loving man, I was a border-dweller – a hybrid – both a part of and separate from all at the same time. Even in my inclusion, I was understood as one to be included. I was a walking paradox.

Just saying, “I’m a Baptist minister, and this is my partner Ron,” still makes me laugh. I was invited (and still am) to sit on panels, speak to other church groups, guest lecture in classes – to stand up in front of the gathered body and confess: I am a

I followed church news, and all around me it seemed that pastors were being brought up on charges or churches were being “disfellowshipped” for blessing same-gendered relationships or celebrating the gifts of gay or lesbian identified Christians for ministry. Though I was thankful that there were places I knew were working for change, I stayed away. It was all just too exhausting.

Years later, after several bouts with depression and lots of failed strategies to numb the ache that I carried with me day and night, I accepted that it was time to go back. I longed for church – for a faith community that came together in worship and love. I began to bump into church folks in activist circles. I am sure they had always been there, but suddenly I had eyes to see.

The first time I met with the woman who would become my pastor and friend (and later supervisor), I told her that I was scared that if I came back to church, it would lead me to going to seminary. Two years later, I enrolled.

gay Baptist minister. I colluded (and sometimes still collude) with well-meaning folks trying to understand. I confessed to my ridiculous paradox, and then tried to make sense of it, answering questions about scriptural interpretation, offering a range of ideas about sexuality, and telling my story of how I came to “know” who I am. I let myself become one of the *good gays*, the gays that are “just like us, but different,” because it was the only space offered, and though I had not set out to find that status, in many ways it was pretty easy for folks to read me in that way. I made myself easily intelligible, an “acceptable other.” I was being created in the image of...I don’t know what...but I am not sure it was God. I was being created and re-created, being constituted and re-constituted, by this public discourse about homosexuality and Christianity, and I was implicated as a co-creator. *I confess: I am getting tired of explaining myself in ways that are more about making other folks comfortable than doing the Gospel work of reconciliation and resurrection.*

I began my formal theological education bent on coming to understand God. I figured that if I studied hard enough I could think my way there. I learned a lot that was really useful – but ultimately came to recognize that there were limits to the whole thinking project. At some point you just reach the edge of mystery and stand in awe. I began to find new ways to talk about my experience of God, and eventually came into the beginnings of practicing contemplatively oriented prayer. It would take a few years for those practices to root themselves – I was pretty skeptical. However, those years in school represented a major shift in the focus of my attentiveness. I also found ways of praying in which my body and my spirit no longer felt so divided.

I developed a strong identification with the Lazarus story in John 11. I loved Jesus calling to Lazarus to “Come out!” (11:43). I had known the darkness, and I was emerging from my tomb, following the voice of Christ.

There is an over-againstness to that conversation that no longer works for me, a way of understanding and being understood that is dependent on the stability of our identities worn anxiously.

I am getting tired of trying to figure out what it means to be an insider and outsider at the same time. I am getting tired of being the litmus test by which some other Baptist is determined to be a good liberal, a good moderate, or a good conservative. I am getting tired of being the “other” by which your identity is constituted. I am tired, but not angry – really, please hear me when I say that. I am just feeling done with the pattern of this conversation.

I am ready for what is emerging – new ways to talk and think about being Christian, and about being Baptist. I am ready to pay attention to a discourse through which God is creating and re-creating us *in God's image*, through conversations that speak us into new ways of being.

Towards Identifications

I am writing this knowing that if I wrote it a year from now it would be an entirely different essay, as much as I know that if I'd written it a year ago and read it now I would want to revise it. One of the gifts and challenges of postmodernity is an awareness that knowledge is always situated in a particular time and place, mediated by the language and symbols we can access at that moment, and inseparable from our embodied experiences of the world. It is an awareness that is daunting, simultaneously toppling our foundations and inviting us to be fully present to what *is* right here and right now.

The toppling of those foundations calls into question the limits of any claims I can make about my own “identity.” As for the idea that deep underneath there is a core self just waiting to be liberated? My toppled foundation #452. That’s been a hard one for me to let go of, but the effect of trying has been a deeper encounter with mystery. In accepting my unknowing, even of myself, I experience humility. I encounter grace. I am constantly being formed by the conversations in which I participate. I can only know myself in relation to whatever strategies I use to make meaning of my experiences and of the body that experiences them. I am less and less invested in my identity, more and more interested in my *identifications*.

The noun *identity* emphasizes the notion of a singular, stable, core-self that we both should and are able to unveil. In contrast, *identifications* is the noun form of a verb – the very structure of the word (an active verb held stable for a moment by the addition of the -ion suffix) suggests fluidity, acknowledging ever shifting matrices of engagements and influences. In its plural form, *identifications* makes room for one to stand in multiple places simultaneously. It acknowledges the experience of finding those multiple places sometimes congruent and sometime conflicting. Whereas *identity* is built on a foundation of core principles assumed to be universal across time and space; *identifications* shifts our attention towards practices, always in conversation with tradition, but finding meaning in particular contexts. So, I claim Christianity as my primary identification. My faith offers an amazing system of language and symbols through which I read my embodied experiences of the world, but I am still becoming. I am a work in process. I am a sacred creation (and a

discursive production) spoken into being through a language of Love – and that process is God. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1).

Shifting from an obsessive attachment to the quest to uncover my “true” identity towards wearing a loose garment of identifications has opened me to paying attention to God working in my life through all that I encounter – the lines between the sacred and mundane are falling away. Those binaries have just quit working for me – most binaries have. Understanding myself over-against some “other” always requires my closing myself off (at least to some degree) to that other. It requires a deepening sense of alienation, even from myself. Wearing this loose garment of identifications has also allowed me to let go of the “enough” questions: *Am I Christian enough? Am I Baptist enough? Am I man enough?*

Identifications are less about core essences, more about free associations (in a Baptist polity kind of way). I identify with certain words and gestures and the ideas they represent because they have shaped a sense of subjectivity that, while always incomplete, is an attempt to speak about how I am reading what is going on with my body-self. Talking about my identifications pushes me to think about what I *am* primarily in terms of what I *do*. The *practices* take center stage. And yet, just as I am constantly reading and interpreting other people’s practices and gestures, they are also reading and interpreting mine. Despite the intention of my performance, of how I string together those practices, I have little control over how I am understood. My practices can play with words, symbols and gestures, juxtapose them onto one another

in creative and interesting ways, reshape them and place them in new contexts, offer them up to those around me; but I cannot escape the systems of meaning through which they are read, nor can I control the route they take through those systems. So, I tread lightly, working out my salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).

While identities are fixed and require clear borders (which then must be defended and protected), identifications are fluid and multiple. We identify with Christ, we take on that posture, and so we follow on a journey towards Jerusalem, taking on that practice. Full of hope and fear, but trusting in the Mystery, we journey with whomever else shows up on the same road; engaging in conversation and storytelling; tending to one another's bodies/spirits; praying, walking, and resting together. We travel together for a while, then shifts in pace or the need for rest bring us new travel partners. We keep traveling, following that which is life-giving, leaving the dead to bury their dead. We hold our identifications loosely, so there is room for the movement of the Spirit. We are emerging, and the journey defines us.

Sexuality and Sexual Practice

My deep longing is for the church to engage a conversation about sexuality that is not caught up in the gender of my partner choice, but rather in the practices we claim by which our bodies encounter the sacred in one another. I long for a conversation about sexuality that is not so concerned about who fits into what category and how or why they ended up there, but takes seriously the implications of our incarnational tradition for the holy mystery of sex. I want to talk about pleasure, about deep and intimate connection, about the permeable boundaries of our body-

selves. But, I do not want to have a conversation that makes me Exhibit A, as if my thoughts and experiences of these miracles of sexual practice are somehow freakish and exotic. I do not want to continue to walk into rooms with my partner and know that there are folks wondering “Who does what to whom?” Or worse yet, I do not want to continue dealing with folks’ assumptions that they know the answer to that awful question by how we stand, speak, or dress.

When we let go of identities in favor of identifications, then we have the possibility to connect in new clusters and formations, to engage serious conversations about *sexual* practice as *spiritual* practice, to teach our young people what it means to embody love and encounter God in the sacredness of a partner’s touch. Why must we assume that my sexual practice has more in common with other men who partner with men than with other people of faith who approach sex as a form of prayer? Why must we assume that the sexes of our bodies, or the qualities of our gender performance, are the most important aspects of how we extend hospitality to a lover? Aren’t these core spiritual values that deserve to be shaped and informed by our faith? So, why do we hand them over to the discourses that serve only to alienate us from ourselves, one another, and God?

For the most part Christians in recent years have bought into reducing a conversation about sexuality to a debate about “sexual orientation.” As the term is used in these debates, sexual orientation is based in a notion of immutable differences. It is a strategy that derives from a scientific/medical understanding of homosexuality merged with a history of efforts seeking equal rights under the law.

The thinking goes something like this: if my sexual identity is congenital and unchanging, then it is “natural” and “God-given,” therefore you must accept me and my relationships. It is a strategy that was adopted from the liberation movements of other marginalized groups and has offered its share of successes, but it is also a strategy with significant problems. First off, it sets up the category of “sexual orientation” as a clear-cut binary. Either you are a straight, or you’re gay. If you claim the possibility of choice in whom you partner with you undercut the central reasoning of the argument, and therefore fall outside the categories of analysis. It also assumes that gender is stable, another clear-cut binary. Folks are understood to be either men or women, based on whether they are male or female, and anything else (ranging from those who make “abnormal” choices in clothing and accessories, to those born with ambiguous genitalia) is deemed *unnatural*. Further, the strategy of immutable difference sets up a notion of identity that in its controlling of boundaries, demands that loyalties be chosen between the sometimes conflicting politics of sexuality, gender, race, and class. The effect is that the reigns of the conversation around same gender desire too often remain in the hands of wealthier, white, gay, men – while same gender loving women, people of color, working class folks, and non-westerners are relegated to other conversations about justice. It sets up a system by which we pretend that racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and imperialism are not all products of the same strategies to regulate access to institutional power.

Personally, I also find the logic of the immutable differences claims to be somewhat victimizing. It assumes that if I could change I would...after all, who

would choose such a life? *Well, I would.* I love my life. I love the gifts I have come to know because I share my life with the man I love. I am thankful that my experiences with falling outside of dominant norms (so often violently regulated by the church) have opened me to a greater awareness of the other privileges that I carry in our culture as a North American, middle-class, white, male – also “identities” that I would argue are not *natural* or simply given, but rather are socially constructed, discursively produced, and far flimsier than they appear to be. Still, those identities are read onto me, and I read them onto myself. They shape my embodied experiences of the world, and thus they shape what I know and how I know it.

Ironically, because within the larger church I am read first and foremost as a gay man, I find it difficult to gain access to many faith-based conversations about other justice issues. At least here in the South, though I suspect it is a broader trend, we somehow have managed to buy into this idea that churches can either take on issues of gender and sexuality or issues of race and class, but rarely both (I pray that the emergent church will take up the hard work to find another path). Despite my childhood experiences, a career as a public school teacher, and a long history of work around other justice issues in the public sphere, when church folk come together beyond the congregational level to talk about justice and reconciliation I am often asked to either straighten up or stay away. As long as I am working with secular activists, the connections between racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, imperialism, and rampant consumerism seem pretty obvious – and the assumption that they function separately and without overlapping targets seems pretty

problematic. Still, in both ecumenical gatherings and those recent collaborations of Baptists of different stripes and flavors, rather than being understood as having a unique and possibly valuable perspective to offer on Christianity, power, and politics, folks like me are most often deemed a threat to unity (a unity that ironically seems dependent on our exclusion).

Here is my point, the thing I am feeling passionate about and finding life-affirming these days: the emergent posture in regards to sexuality and justice, the truly prophetic stance at this moment, claims that life-affirming sexual practice based in loving kindness is a powerful, sacred, and transforming gift from God. It is good and holy. When *this* is our starting place, then the conversations about “What made you gay?” no longer have relevance. The gender, race, and class of my partner become secondary to the ways in which we honor God through our embodied resurrection practices of sacred sex. *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).*

I say all of that, I name my deep longing for a different conversation, and yet I also believe the church still plays a huge role in working for a just and safe world for folks who call into question our assumptions about sexuality and gender. As much as I long for a discussion about sexuality that moves from identities towards identification, from orientations towards practices, I know that we are constituted by a larger cultural discourse. I would love to see the church take the lead in reframing the conversation and moving beyond apologetics that keep us locked neatly in place, but

as we do that let us not forget the daily physical, emotional, and spiritual violence that far too many of our brothers and sisters face at the hands of others claiming Christianity as their foundation. I am ready for a new conversation, but I must move towards that without ignoring that the worst of the old conversation is still destroying the lives of people I love.

A Call to Greater Justice

I spend my time these days studying and teaching at a public university. I work at the intersection of Curriculum and Cultural Studies, and teach undergraduate courses in both Education and Women's and Gender Studies. I have neither given up my ordination nor my commitment to ministry, but I have come to understand that amazing opportunities for engaging and rethinking my spiritual life have come with a willingness to walk beyond the boundaries of the churchyard. Whether I am talking about the role of spirituality in the education process, or introducing the complexities of poststructuralism and queer theories, I carry my identifications with my faith communities with me. Sometimes those identifications are named more explicitly than others, depending on the time and place, but it is widely known among my students and colleagues that not only is my ordination as Baptist minister part of my background, it is also part of my present.

I can land in conversations about the relationship between the church and state on Tuesday, teach about the racialized and classed nature of the push for legalized same-sex marriage on Thursday, and then on Saturday find myself functioning as an agent of both the state and the church in performing a wedding and signing a license

for a cross-gendered couple. Those practices and conversations leak into one another (which, by the way, makes the signing of those licenses more and more difficult).

While I am always careful about the boundaries of my role as a state employee, I make little attempt to pretend that my multiple identifications are clearly distinct or lacking in meaningful tensions. The invitation for me is to live fully within those tensions, to pay attention to how God is speaking through the stretches, and then to relax and trust.

The ideas I have sketched out here have implications not only for sexuality, but also for how we think about privilege in relation to race, class, nationality and all other categories of identity that we take for granted. When we absolutize our identities, we set up rigid walls around communities that function as much to divide as to include. We buy into the subtle hostilities in processes of self-definition that needs easily discernable others, *abnormals* by which we can understand our normalcy. That subtle hostility, when paired with anxiety and nurtured by fear, can erupt into hatred and violence. The church has a responsibility to confess and challenge our roles in producing and regulating those systems of categorization and their inherent outcomes.

In the end, I am unsure as to whether or not there is anything really *emergent* about what I have said at all. What is new about paying attention to God working in our lives? What is new about Christ's radical hospitality? If what I am saying is read as disruptive, I pray that it is a result of my joining ranks with countless others over the past two thousand years who have sought to live their lives in the way of Jesus. I

pray that I am but one of the countless people of faith from all traditions who opened themselves to the movement of Sacred Mystery in their lives. I trust that God is in it all.

APPENDIX B

An Open Letter to the Bishop

This is a Southern story. I am sure of this like I am sure that my heart pumps blood through my veins. I know it like I know that just now my lungs are filling with air. A sense of Southernness so permeates my consciousness that, at least to me, it largely goes unnoticed. To talk of my experience as Southern is to highlight the backdrop, to decenter the presumed subject in favor of all that surrounds him. And yet, to fail to recognize the Southernness of that same experience is to misunderstand the overwhelming power of that context which produced it. The South is a lead character in all of my stories, regulating and defining the lives of the rest of us players.

On February 25, 2006 my partner and I sat down for a Saturday morning breakfast at a diner in Charlotte, North Carolina. We were tired, and in need of a still moment in the midst of a hard week. We were in Charlotte to bury his mother, and breakfast would be our only chance to be alone before picking up his brother from the airport and heading back to the funeral home for final arrangements. We ate quietly, reading the newspaper, comfortable in the security of being known so well as to feel no obligation for conversation. Ron broke the silence asking, “What was your Sunday School teacher’s name?”

“Which teacher?”

“You know...*the* Sunday School teacher.”

“Jimmie Grubbs. Why?”

“I think you should read this.”

Jimmie Grubbs had been arrested and faced a series of sex abuse charges. I went outside, threw up, caught my breath, and decided since this had waited for twenty years it could wait two more days. We buried Ron’s mother on Sunday. Monday morning I called the FBI. I was one of more than a dozen who would eventually come forward, and at thirty-three the oldest of the North Carolina victims – at the time of the investigation most of the others were still in high school.

Six weeks earlier I left my job as Minister with Youth and Young Adults at Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh. There were only a handful of clergy who publicly identified as something other than straight and still managed to serve a congregation in my home state, and I had been one of them. Of that small group less than half of us publicly identified before our ordinations, and as far as I know, I was the first male to do so outside of the mostly gay and lesbian Metropolitan Community Churches. I loved my work, but I was exhausted. Working with a church youth ministry kept the memories and effects of my sexual abuse constantly stirred up, so I left and headed back to school. A month and a half later, and more than fifteen years since I had last heard anything of his whereabouts, Jimmie Grubbs interrupted my breakfast and was thrust back into my life.

It is not as if I had not worked on my issues around the abuse, nor had I been able to avoid questions about how the abuse continued to shape my sexuality. Those

had been significant themes in both my academic and spiritual lives. I had spent the summer between my second and third years of Divinity School studying sexual ethics and homosexualities in Christianity at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, courses not offered at my school in North Carolina. That was 2002, the summer after news of a string of abuses and cover-ups in Boston (and then elsewhere) rocked the Roman Catholic Church.¹ The sexual abuse of boys by church leaders stepped into the national spotlight. Everywhere I went out there I found myself in conversations about sexual violence, secrecy, and either the scapegoating of gay priests or the sexually arresting institution of celibacy.

I was also in Berkeley to figure out if it was where I wanted to continue my studies. It is as close as I would ever come to living out the exile theme so dominant in the narratives of queer Southerners, that notion that in order to be fully ourselves we must leave the South and spend our lives nostalgically pining for it (Smith, 2001; Brassel, 2001; Segrest, 2001).² That summer I learned that I was able to hold my own in conversation with even my most radical classmates, both intellectually and politically. But even more, I renewed my investment in the South, knowing that I wanted more than anything to be a part of those same conversations back home. Neither my queerness nor my abuse could be divorced from their Southern context. I could run with the Bay Area queers, and I could question the Roman Catholic Church's actions in New England, but I was still a Southern sissy abused by a Sunday School teacher in a protestant church. I had important conversations that summer, but in the end my trip to Berkeley just pointed me back to North Carolina.

Dews (2001) speaks to the strange tension of the insider/outsider experience for us queer Southerners who chose to remain in the South, a position “creating a double or triple vision of the world, a position from which one may both participate in southern culture and yet remain apart from it” (p. 236). For years I had worked towards reconciling my relationships with the South, with Christianity, with professional identities as both teacher and youth minister, with queer theorists and gay communities, with my partner and my family, with masculinities and “manhood”; but in the months between Jimmie Grubbs’ arrest and his sentencing, the task changed. I was invited to live into the complexity of multiple identifications as I lost the capacity to internally regulate their boundaries. In the chaos and turmoil the investigation and court proceedings brought into my life, the clearly demarcated categories of my “identities” that I longed to claim as crystallized and stable bled into and reshaped one another. The juice from my snap beans blended with the red-eye gravy from my country ham, which tasted of the vinegar I poured on my collards. As they ran together, my identities lost their cohesion. In effect, I was queered.

The destabilization of my self-definition was not an intentional exercise in post-structural theories, rather it was a lived experience that post-structural theories helped me describe. I could no longer manage with a wink and a laugh to identify myself as the ironic sum of a list of easy categories. “Southern, Christian, white, gay, man” pointed towards something, but was based in an “additive model of identity” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 71) that no longer added up.³ The life I was living required a radical reconfiguring of all of those identities that made up my sense of self, and

brought to the surface the limitations of my claiming them each as discrete from the other. I struggled to speak about my shifting subjectivity. I longed for an entry point into a discussion of what it meant to carry in just one body all of these often conflicting discourses that shaped me. I found that the text begging to be reread and theorized was my autobiography, the text of my own story.⁴

If our subjectivity is preceded and determined by the language that speaks us into being, then mine was constituted with a drawl. I grew up with the notion that Sunday morning is for worship and Sunday afternoon is for visiting. I learned the art of storytelling, as both a practice of hospitality and a pedagogical strategy, on the front porch of my great-grandfather's farmhouse. Whether I am preparing a sermon or a scholarly paper, my words are always inflected with the cadence of the old folks whose stories told me who I am and where I belong. Southerners are a storied people, and in our storytelling we seek a common understanding of the South that shaped us. Jim Grimsley notes that despite our considerable diversity in life experience, as Southerners, "...when we talk about ourselves, we reach for...common material, the grotesque South, the soul-food South, the South that never forgot the Civil War, that never forgave slavery. We reach for a South that has simmered in its own traditions, that has a past. We remember a South that made us suffer in one way or another, and we hold onto that" (p. 231). For better or worse, I cannot engage in the act of writing without asserting my Southernness. I make meaning from and through stories, and no amount of coaching could keep me from writing them with an accent.

I grew up in Winston-Salem, NC, hometown of Krispy Kreme and R.J. Reynolds Tobacco. It was a town that could glaze you in sweetness, while slowly stealing away your ability to breathe – but the South is changing, and in a move towards redemption the town’s largest employer is now the Baptist hospital (www.wsbusinessinc.com, 2007). Both sides of my family have called North Carolina home for more than two hundred years. I am a cradle Christian, baptized into the United Methodist Church before I spoke my first word. As for many of us in the South, religion was such an omnipresent force in my rearing it is as if Christianity was absorbed through the pores of my skin; as Faulkner said, “It’s not so much whether I believe or disbelieve—it’s just there” (in Ketchin, 1994, p. xii). I have lived my whole life in what Flannery O’Connor described as a South in which people “still conceive of humanity in theological terms”; a South that while “hardly Christ-centered, is most certainly Christ-haunted” (in Ketchin, 1994, p. xi). I grew up in a place where the church loomed large and faith was our native tongue. In the cultural discourses that constituted my subjectivity, Christian and Southern were so conflated one bespoke the other.⁵

The letter that follows represents a moment of organic theorizing. It was an act of letting go of attempts to reconcile disparate identities in favor of holding gently a complex web of identifications. At the end of the odyssey launched in that diner in Charlotte, the need to address the church of my youth seemed self-evident, so I wrote a letter to the father of a childhood friend – a man who at the time of the abuse was

the District Superintendent for the Methodists in and around my hometown, and at the time I sent this letter was the Bishop for the Western North Carolina Conference:

December 2, 2007
First Sunday of Advent

Dear Bishop McCleskey,

I hope this finds you well. It has been ages since we last met. Please send my regards to Matt. I hope he is doing well. I am writing you because I want you to know that during that time your son and I were friends, my world was in chaos.

I am one of Jimmie Grubbs boys, one of the twelve that have come forward thus far. He was my Sunday School teacher at Maple Springs United Methodist Church. Don't worry; I'm not going to sue.

That was me, "adult victim number six," who was there when he was sentenced on October 17th. They told me I'd read a prepared statement, but then never gave me a chance. Instead, they put me on the stand, asked me what we'd done in those secret rooms. Then they cross-examined me, and called me a liar; but in the end, the judge deemed me credible. I had the strange experience of having a stranger wearing a robe, sitting on a platform high above me, tell me that what I already knew was my history was indeed my history. My story has been sanctioned by the state. That matters to me more than I wish it did – after all this time to hear, as if hearing it for the first time, what I had heard in my head for two decades: *what happened actually happened*.

After all that, there is just this one thing I want to make sure you understand: I do not hold the church accountable for what Jimmie Grubbs did, but I do hold the church accountable for propping up a culture that made it so easy.

When Jimmie Grubbs was my Sunday School teacher we called him Coach. I can remember the first time I met him – the day he sat down on the floor beside me in my confirmation class. What I want you to know is that Coach was a mastermind at picking his boys, but I guess I was a pretty easy target.

It didn't take a genius to figure out that I was the frequent target of homophobic taunts.

It didn't take a genius to figure out that I was prone to crushes on adult men.

It didn't take a genius to suspect that I had secrets I was longing to tell.

But this was Sunday School in a conservatively moderate United Methodist church, in a conservatively moderate Southern town. It was 1985. AIDS had just come into the news. All I knew of men who loved men was that they died, and most folks I knew thought they deserved it. All I knew was that I wanted to be among them, living or dying.

Coach was a mastermind at picking his boys, but I guess I was an easy target. It took him a while to build up to it, but one day driving me in that white convertible, he said, "You know, it's really okay if you are gay. God just made some of us that way. We don't have a choice."

"It's okay," he said. "You're safe with me, but other's won't understand..."

And my life changed. I was named. There is tremendous power in naming...to be named is to be claimed. It is a blessing – or a curse. God just made some of us that way. We don't have a choice.

We don't have a choice.

I had no choice.

I was gay.

This is what it meant to be gay.

So what I want you to understand, Bishop, is that I was framed. It was a set up. Where else was I supposed to go? The church left my parents ill equipped for the likes of me, told them I was an abomination. The only adult who would name what was going on inside me, claimed it for himself. Jimmie Grubbs wielded them in his own crafty ways, but the tools he used were forged in the church's fires.

Next time you are invited to take a stand for folks like me, who once were the children longing to love outside the lines, remember that when no one else stood up, Coach stepped in. And it nearly destroyed me.

Bishop, I left the United Methodists fifteen years ago, right after I spoke up the first time about Jimmie Grubbs. I was nineteen. I went

to a pastor, and he took me to a District Superintendent. There should be a letter on file, but it was lost by the time I showed up with sheriff and the FBI a decade and a half later. That letter, so dutifully lost, was incomplete – I was too scared to tell all of what happened, and no one asked for more information than I gave. I was too scared I would be implicated and run out of church, never mind that I was just a boy when I knew him.

Two weeks after breaking the silence I went to the Annual Meeting of the Western North Carolina Conference (at the same place where I once performed sex acts with Jimmie Grubbs) and witnessed a three-hour argument about what exactly makes for a “self-avowed, practicing homosexual,” the kind of homosexual denied ordination in the United Methodist Church. Later that day, on a drive through the mountains, I told my father that God may be real, but God surely can’t be found in the church.

We drove on in silence.

I became an activist. I remember thinking it would be a status symbol to someday have my name on a file with the FBI. I just figured it would say “dissident,” not “victim.” Turns out they didn’t use my name anyway, just victim number 1617605. What does that number mean? I wonder who 1617604 and 1617606 are. I imagine our secrets snugly pressed against one another, high on a shelf in some warehouse of stories.

It seems funny now, most of the folks who knew me thought my frustration with the church was just about my being excluded as a gay man – they only knew the half of it. In reaching out to me, those big-hearted, Southern, gay Christians told me, “God just made some of us that way. We didn’t choose this.” It was a familiar refrain.

They played point/counterpoint with the seven clobber passages: “No, this one isn’t about homosexuals, it’s really about temple prostitutes,”

“This one is really about abuse of slave boys,”

“There’s nothing in here about consenting adult lovers.”

They argued that the *truth* about what the Bible says about homosexuality could be found in understanding the historical context in which it was written, and that historical context doesn’t include *people like us*.

But if the meaning is in the truth, and the truth is in the history, and I am not in the history, how am I to find anything in scripture at all? And so, I lost my scriptural heritage in a struggle to come back to the church. It was reduced to the history of its origins and in the process was rendered irrelevant. As a gay Christian without a choice, without a sacred story, I was lost.

After eight years of wandering, I came back to church. I had this deep longing that would not let me rest. Around that time, I heard a woman say, “Who cares if it’s a choice, it’s my choice to make. Love is a sacred gift, and that’s enough for me.” That was all I needed to hear. The deep longing overwhelmed me. I cried every time I took communion that first year, just to be back home, to claim my belonging in the living body of Christ, resurrected in the life of the community.

I picked up my Bible once again. I fell in love with Lazarus, Jesus’ close friend, who in the eleventh chapter of John dies and spends four days rotting in a tomb, only to hear Jesus’ voice calling for him.

But Jesus does not roll away the stone himself. Jesus does not go into the tomb and wake Lazarus up. He does not aid his friend in making the short journey out of the tomb (which must not have seemed so short to a dead guy whose hands and feet were bound). Jesus simply cries with a loud voice “Lazarus, come out!” (John 11:42).

Jesus calls on Lazarus to take the initiative to come out of his tomb. Jesus calls on his friend to practice resurrection, but the practice of resurrection requires his participation. Christ can hold the space, give voice to the hope, but coming out of the tomb requires standing up and walking.

Lazarus makes his way out of the tomb. He stumbles out into the crowd gathered there, following the voice of his friend and teacher. But Jesus stands aside. Instead of taking direct action in aiding his friend, Jesus turns to the crowd and directs *them* to do the unbinding. For me, this is perhaps the most significant (and overlooked) part of the story. This is the part that keeps me coming back.

In fact, the last words of the Lazarus story are “unbind him, set him free” (John 11:44). Jesus’ command to those gathered is a powerful directive to the community of believers. Jesus calls Lazarus into resurrection, but then he calls the community to overcome their propensity for spectating and get involved. Resurrection is a

communal event...it is a team sport! Unbind him, set him free! This is Jesus' word to those privileged enough to bear witness to one emerging from the tomb. It is the work of the community, to unbind, to set free.

So this Jesus in the Lazarus story, he doesn't *do* a whole lot, himself. This is not the Jesus who finds us good parking places at the mall. This is not a Hollywood Jesus. This is a Jesus who stands on the horizon beckoning towards wholeness. This is a Jesus calling to practice resurrection.

This is why I am still a Christian, or at least why I don't flinch if you need to call me that. This story is still my story, and I know it is told in lots of other ways in lots of other traditions, but this is the one I learned in Sunday School. The church gave me lots of stories. This is the one I'm holding on to.

It's not always easy being a queer Christian, even in a gay affirming church. I read from low and outside. I claim my choices as holy and sacred.

What I want you to understand is that this is not over. My father is going to General Conference, where he will "vote for his son" – he said that too me, honest. Dad would never claim to be an activist, and he does not thrive on controversy. There are a lot of issues facing the church that are more central to his faith and getting far less attention, particularly the love and care of children in need. But he is no longer able to sit silently knowing that I had to leave the Methodist church in order to find a home – a home where I could be ordained, a home where I minister with youth.

Please do me a favor, Bishop, listen to those folks trying to get your attention, the ones making the case for the inclusion of gay, lesbian, bi, trans folk in the church. But know that they are tired, and will settle for the slow progress they can get. Not all of us can settle anymore.

For some, the cost has been too great.

Sincerely,
Rev. Brian Ammons

Jimmie Grubbs was sentenced to twenty years in federal prison. When the sentence was announced a wave of fist-pumping, back-patting, and hushed cheers of “Yes!” rippled through those gathered in the courtroom. Sitting between my partner and my father, I was still and silent. Glad as I was that he would no longer have access to boys, I would not participate in the revelry. There were no winners. Nothing was restored. As we left the room, sheriffs, lawyers and FBI agents shook my hand or hugged my neck. We walked briskly past a swarm of cameras as we left the building, not pausing to comment.

Going into the court that morning, my intent was to tell the story of my life in the two decades since knowing Jimmie Grubbs – the way his choices had continued to effect my daily existence. And I wanted to forgive him, at least in as much as “forgiveness” means letting go. I did not get that chance. The language and proceedings of the justice system constituted me as an easily discernable victim, a present-day version of my twelve-year-old self. I participated willingly because I wanted to stand in solidarity with the younger boys. Even still, whatever subjectivity I could claim shifted while I was on the stand. While being asked to describe in detail the rooms in which I performed my earliest sex acts, I looked at Jimmie Grubbs and knew that despite all that surrounded me in that moment, he did not have the power to reduce me to a child. In that moment I was the man I long to be, a grown man holding another grown man accountable not with anger or malice, but with compassion.

In the months that followed, my letter to the Bishop was born in response to that moment of grace. As a Southerner, I had learned that stability was valued above all, that direct confrontation was crass, that silences served a purpose, and that it was better to just smile and walk away. I learned those things not in the formal teachings of the churches of my youth, but rather in the practices of well-intended churchfolk. But the faith that taught me to believe in resurrection was bigger and than the Southern institutions that tried to contain it. As a queer, I had learned to go ahead and let things be complex, to cease pretending that there were clear distinctions between any notion of us and them, and that whatever meaning we read onto our bodies and experiences was shifting and fluid.

I never received a response to my letter. I did not really expect that I would, though I have chosen to believe that it was read and hope its contents planted a seed. Perhaps more importantly, I know that the Southern church culture that refused to talk about ugly things is the same church culture that taught me a faith built on grace and forgiveness. It is a queer juxtaposition, and in coming face to face with the impossibility of it, I was undone. All I can say is that it is my deep belief that in my unbecoming – in the queering of Brian – God was present.

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- Smith, D. (2001). Same difference: My Southern queer stories. In C. Dews & C. L. Law (Eds.), *Out in the South* (pp. 127-143). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Sullivan, N. (2003). *A critical introduction to queer theory*. New York: New York University Press.
- Whitlock, R. U. (2007). Queerly fundamental: Surviving straightness in a rural Southern high school. In N. M. Rodriguez & W. F. Pinar (Eds.), *Queering straight teachers: Discourse and identity in education* (pp. 65-94). New York: Peter Lang.

¹ Mark Jordan's *Telling Truths in Church* (2003) has been particularly helpful in shaping my thinking about navigating conversations about both sexual identities and sexual abuse in a church context. His has been a rare and important voice in naming the intersections of multiple issues of human sexuality and the church's silence regarding them.

² The theme of leaving in order to find freedom is often repeated in queer Southern narratives – Smith: “One of the stories I tell about myself begins something like this: In 1982, I moved to San Francisco to become gay, and there I found out that I was southern”; Brasell: “...she moved from the South to New York City and ‘became a full-fledged gay activist’”; and Segrest: “I told myself in private conversations that I had to get away from home to be myself” (p. 204). Aside from these three cited essays from *Out in the South* (Dews & Law, 2001), the trope is repeated in major works of Southern fiction as exemplified in Allen Gurganus' *Plays Well with Others* (1997). Grimsley (2001) offers a variation on this theme as he explores the experience of Southern queers who face a self-imposed, internal exile within the South's major cities (Atlanta, New Orleans, Miami, etc.). This version of the exile resonates more closely with my own experience of finding a home in the relatively progressive city of Raleigh – which, though smaller by far than Atlanta and Miami, holds its small-town Southernness in splendid tension with its cosmopolitan aspirations.

³ Sullivan refers to the “additive model of identity and oppression” (p. 71) in her discussion of race and queer theories. She quotes Anzaldua in her critique of the model: “Identity is not a bunch of little cubby holes stuffed respectively with intellect, sex, race, class, vocation, gender. Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person. Identity is a...process” (in Sullivan, 2003, p.71).

⁴ I have found the work of other queer Southerners helpful in this regard. In “Queerly Fundamental” (2007), Whitlock speaks of theorizing her own story in these terms: “I engage autobiographical narrative, and thereby lived experiences, as text, as ways-of-knowing, ways-of-being-in-the-world. Emergent themes thread together, but not neatly in a pattern” (p.70)

⁵ As a Southern queer, the church plays a particularly distinct role, even for those who, in Grimsley's words, “never attended any service or sang any hymn.” He goes on to explain that the church is inescapable in the South, “...and has set about it's task of telling people how to live...Most of all we have the church that tells us sex is nasty, never to be discussed except in its nastiness. For gay people, this is the hardest part of all: because we can only identify ourselves as ourselves through what we desire, and we learn from the first moment of life in the South, that desire is a deadly evil thing” (p. 232).

APPENDIX C

Sexualities and the Church

Course Proposal for the Wake Forest University Divinity School
Submitted by Brian Ammons, 2/09/09

MIN 790: Sexualities and the Church: A Que(e)ry

Brief Description: Ministers in a variety of settings are increasingly expressing a need for thoughtful preparation to engage both the religious and the larger cultural discourses around same-sex desire, coupling, and sexual practices. This course will bring some of the frameworks referred to as "queer theories" into dialogue with the traditional theological disciplines, and will examine the implications of this work for the larger conversation about sexuality and gender in the church.

Learning Objectives: Students will be able to articulate an understanding of queer theories and their implications for Christianity. Further, students will employ strategies grounded in these theories as they consider themes and practices relevant to Christian ministry.

Course Meetings: The fifteen contact hours will ideally be divided into eight two-hour sessions (except the first meeting, which will be only one hour), with substantial time in-between. The course material is complex and may require a significant shift in thinking for many, so time to read, reflect, and process will be crucial to the learning process. I have considered other less-traditional structures, but am convinced that much would be lost by longer meetings or meetings held in rapid succession. The most sustainable rhythm would be weekly meetings for half a semester (my preference is for earlier in the semester), but either bi-weekly meetings for the whole semester or twice-weekly meetings for a month would be workable.

Course Overview: We will begin with a broad critical analysis of the range of Christian positions commonly taken in relation to homosexuality, GLBT, or Queer "inclusion" in the life of the church (including condemnation, conversion, access to baptism, church leadership, blessing of unions, and ordination). Particular attention will be paid to emerging work calling for a new way of approaching these conversations. From there, we will engage in a brief introduction to queer theories (focused primarily on the significant influences of Foucault and Butler), and how these theories might shape our consideration of sexualities and the church. The rest of our study will build on this basis and deepen both our understanding of these

frameworks and our fluency in utilizing them. Our “que(e)ry” will lead us to interrogating a variety of topics, including:

- Normativities and the production of the “sexual subject”
- “Liberation” and “community” in the church and GLBT organizing
- Scripture and reading strategies
- Ethics (and its limitations)
- Marriage and procreation
- Sex as spiritual practice

Assessment: Students will be evaluated through short papers, a final project, and class engagement.

- *Short Papers:* In preparation for class meetings, students will be expected to complete one-page, single spaced papers about one of the assigned readings. Papers will briefly respond to the following four questions: What was the author’s primary argument? What worked well in making the argument? What did not work well or needed more development in the argument? How does this reading connect with your experience (personal or ministerial), or other studies?
- *Final Project:* Students will have the opportunity to propose and complete a final project designed to match their needs and interests. Options include (but are not limited to): a traditional academic paper (exegesis, analysis of a denominational stance/process, theological question, etc.); an ongoing journal throughout the course reflecting engagement with readings, class meetings, and outside discussions; a liturgy for a ritual relevant to course themes; a sermon manuscript or video; or a short film or art project. Projects will be due two weeks after the last class meeting. An optional gathering to share/reflect on final projects will be considered.
- *Class Engagement:* Preparation, attendance, and participation in discussions are critical to the success of the class.

Texts:

Articles and/or chapters will be drawn from these or similar sources:

Althaus Reid, M. (2002) *Indecent Theology*

Ellison, M. & Thorson-Smith, S. (2003) *Body and Soul*

Goss, R. (2001) *Queering Christ*

Spargo, T. (2000) *Foucault and Queer Theory*

Other readings will be on reserve, many from the journal *Theology and Sexuality*

Syllabus: Sexualities and the Church: A Que(e)ry (MIN 790)

Instructor: Brian D. Ammons

Contact: bdammons@uncg.eduAvailable by appointment on Mondays

Ministers in a variety of settings are increasingly expressing a need for thoughtful preparation to engage both the religious and the larger cultural discourses around same-sex desire, coupling, and sexual practices. This course will bring some of the frameworks referred to as "queer theories" into dialogue with the traditional theological disciplines, and will examine the implications of this work for the larger conversation about sexuality and gender in the church. Here we will question both the theological, ecclesial, and spiritual practices that produce/assume gendered and sexualized normativities, and the practices that then disrupt/transgress those same normativities. We will engage the sacred mystery and the secular oddity simultaneously, reflecting on how one informs the other. Our presupposition is that the discourses on sexuality and the church might be best illuminated by attentiveness to the persons and practices that push against their boundaries or cut against their grains, and so our questions emerge from those tenuous spaces.

Ours is a large task, and our time is short. If we do our job well, we will likely walk away with more questions than answers, but also with some new tools and a bit of practice in applying them. We are ministers in an era of extensive conversation about sexuality, often framed as debates around "Christianity and Homosexuality" or "The Inclusion/Exclusion of Homosexuals". These debates take on various forms and pop up in both ecclesial and secular contexts. Our work is to consider the nature of these discourses, the knowledge they produce, and the ways they function culturally. During our time together we may not work out where you stand on any given proposition in your own denominational body, and we may not become expert givers of pastoral care for GLBT persons, but we will be better able to critically engage questions of grave importance to the people and communities we are called to serve.

We will begin with a broad critical analysis of the range of Christian positions commonly taken in relation to homosexuality, GLBT, or Queer "inclusion" in the life of the church (including condemnation; conversion; access to baptism, church leadership, blessing of unions, and ordination). Particular attention will be paid to emerging work calling for new ways of approaching these conversations. From there, we will engage in a brief introduction to queer theories (focused primarily on the significant influences of Foucault and Butler), and how these theories might shape our consideration of sexualities and the church. The rest of our study will build on this basis and deepen both our understanding of these frameworks and our fluency in utilizing them. Our "que(e)ry" will lead us to interrogating a variety of topics, including: biblical hermeneutics, racialized and gendered bodies, "liberation" and "community", marriage, and sex.

Course Meetings: We will meet from 6:00-8:00 each Monday from the beginning of the semester until Fall Break. Class participants may decide to hold an optional final gathering in which students will have an opportunity to share a meal and offer learnings from their final projects.

Assessment: Students will be evaluated through short papers, a final project, and class engagement.

- **Short Papers:** In preparation for class meetings, students will be expected to complete one-page, single spaced papers about one of the assigned readings. Papers will briefly respond to the following four questions:
 - What was the author’s primary argument?
 - What worked well in making the argument?
 - What did not work well or needed more development in the argument?
 - How does this reading connect with your experience (personal or ministerial), or other studies?

Papers will be evaluated and accepted based on adherence to the assignment and quality of execution. Each accepted paper (at the “A” or “B” level) is valued at 10 points. There are six possible papers, you will be graded on four – thus you either have two weeks off or two unaccepted papers may be dropped. **40 points (10 each).**

- **Final Project:** Students will have the opportunity to propose and complete a final project designed to match their needs and interests. Options include (but are not limited to): a traditional academic paper (exegesis, analysis of a denominational stance/process, theological question, etc.); an ongoing journal throughout the course reflecting thoughtful engagement with readings, class meetings, and outside discussions; a liturgy for a ritual relevant to course themes; a sermon manuscript or video; or a short film or art project. Projects will be due two weeks after the last class meeting. **40 points. Due 11/2.**
- **Class Engagement:** Preparation, attendance, and participation in discussions are critical to the success of the class. While students are not expected to be experts in the material, they are expected to engage in class discussion. Questions are valued and welcomed. **20 points.**

Texts:

Wilchins, R. (2004). *Queer theory, gender theory: An instant primer*. Alyson Books: Los Angeles.

All other required readings will be made available on Blackboard. Optional resources for those interested in further reading will also be posted.

Schedule: (*Readings are listed with the day they will be discussed*)

9/7: Normativities and the production of the “sexual subject”
Ammons, “Beyond Inclusion”

9/14: Queer Theories/Gender Theories
Wilchins, *Queer Theory/Gender Theory: An Instant Primer*

9/21: Scriptural Engagements
Goss, “Overthrowing Heterotextuality – A Biblical Stonewall”

9/28: The Body as Queered Text (read at least one of the following)
Douglas, “Black Body/White Soul: The Unsettling Intersection of Race, Sexuality, and Christianity”
Mollenkott, “Crossing Gender Borders: Toward a New Paradigm”

10/5: “Liberation” and “community”
Althaus-Reid, “On Queer Theory and Liberation Theology: The Irruption of the Sexual Subject in Theology”

10/12: Marriage and Relationships
Rudy, “Gay Communities and the Value of Family”

10/19: Sex as Sacrament, Sabbath, and Hospitality (choose one of the following)
Goss, “Out of the Closet and Into the Streets”
Rudy, “Toward a Progressive Sexual Ethic”

Other Course Policies:

Students are expected to adhere to the Honor Code of the University. Please refer to the Divinity School Bulletin and Student Handbook.

Late Work: Work is expected to be turned in at the class meeting on the day that it is due. Should the need arise for you to negotiate an extension it is your responsibility to contact me *before the due date*. Plan ahead, and keep a back-up copy of your work in case of computer problems.

Exceptionalities: Please notify me of any special learning needs so that we may adapt to best enhance your learning experience. If you have a disability which may require an accommodation for taking this course, please contact the WFU Learning Assistance Center (758-5929) with the first week of the course. In order to make accommodations for you, we must have a written statement from the WFU Learning Assistance Center.

Attendance: Regular class attendance is expected. If you know that you will be absent, please contact me ahead of time. Unexcused absences will adversely affect your engagement grade. *Missing two or more class meetings will constitute automatic failure of the course.*

Course Grading:

For all courses carrying graduate credit in the Divinity School, there are three passing grades—A (excellent), B (commendable), and C (satisfactory)—and one failing grade—F (failure). An A has the grade point value of 4.00 for each semester hour of credit involved, a B the value of 3.00 for each semester hour of credit involved, and C the value of 2.0 for each semester hour of credit involved. An F grade carries no credit. Pluses and minuses may be given at the discretion of the faculty member.

Author Notes (includes optional readings):

Althaus-Reid, Marcella: Argentinian Theologian and former Senior Lecturer in Christian Ethics, Practical Theology and Systematic Theology at the University of Edinburgh. She began her studies of theology in Buenos Aires at one of the leading centers for liberation theology in the Americas. She worked among economically deprived communities in both Argentina and Scotland.

Ammons, Brian: is a Ph.D. candidate in Curriculum and Cultural Studies, and Women's and Gender Studies, at the University of North Carolina – Greensboro. His primary research is on Queer pedagogies as spiritual practice. He is an ordained Baptist minister and 2003 graduate of The Divinity School at Wake Forest University. He authored chapters coming out later this year in *South to a Queer Place*, and *Baptist Stories of Emergence*.

Bailey, Marlon: recently earned a Ph.D. in the African Diaspora Studies Program with a designated emphasis in Women, Gender, and Sexuality in the African American Studies Department at the University of California, Berkeley. His primary research focuses on Ballroom, a Black gay subculture in the US.

Douglas, Kelly Brown: is Professor of Religion at Goucher College in Baltimore, MD. She is a priest in the Episcopal Church, outspoken advocate around HIV/AIDS issues in the Black Church, and author of *Sexuality and the Black Church* and *The Black Christ*.

Goss, Robert: teaches Religious Studies at Webster University. He is an ordained pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church, where he transferred as clergy from the Roman Catholic Church where he had been an ordained Jesuit. He earned a Th.D. from Harvard.

Kandaswamy, Priya: holds a Ph.D. in Ethnic Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. Her dissertation research examined the intersections of race and gender in the U.S. welfare state's efforts to regulate sexuality, control labor, and police the boundaries of citizenship.

Monroe, Irene: is a Ford Fellow and doctoral candidate at Harvard Divinity School. She is a widely published columnist and well-known speaker/activist around the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality. She has been a regular contributor to *In* Newsweekly, *The Advocate Magazine*, and *The Witness*.

Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey: is a feminist and queer theologian, grandmother, and Professor Emeritus of English at William Patterson University. She is author of numerous books, including the pioneering "*Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*" in 1978 (with Letha Scanzoni) and the award-winning *Omnigender: A Transreligious Approach* in 2001.

Patrella, Ivan: is an Argentinian theologian, currently Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Miami. He is the author of numerous works including *The Future of Liberation Theology* (2004), and *Liberation Theology: The New Generation* (2005).

Queen, Carol: has a Ph.D. from the Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality. She is the author or editor of many books, including *The Leather Daddy and the Femme* (1998), and *PoMoSexuals* (1997). She is an activist/educator, minister in the Universal Life Church, and co-founder of the Center for Sex and Culture.

Richardson, Mattie Udora: is a writer and activist who has been published in a variety of anthologies, including: *Every Woman I've Ever Loved: Lesbian Writers on the Their Mothers*, *Does Your Mama Know: Black Lesbian Coming Out Stories*, and *Sisterfire: Black Womanist Fiction and Poetry*.

Rudy, Kathy: is Associate Professor of Women's Studies at Duke University. Her 1997 publication of *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexuality, and the Transformation of Christian Ethics*, sparked a controversy that led to her leaving her joint post with the Duke Divinity School. While more than ten years old, it remains an insightful and influential text.

Wilchins, Rikki: is an activist and author whose work has focused on issues of gender as it impacts many Americans: straight and gay; male, female and transgender; white and of-color; youth and elder. Her work on combating discrimination and violence caused by gender stereotypes has provoked criticism by some in the transgender community, but has been widely accepted by others.