

CRIP/TOGRAPHY: DISABILITY THEOLOGY IN THE RUINS OF GOD

Of Postapocalypse and the Ruins of God

Since the middle of the twentieth century, we have become “a world that lives with the reality of... ‘possible annihilation’ everyday.”¹ While the proverbial shoe waiting to drop has been identified with everything from the atomic bomb to climate disaster, from viral pandemic to asteroid, a form of literature has been proliferating that is not so interested in an apocalyptic event as in what comes after, a genre known as “post-apocalyptic.”² This narrative genre—think, for example, *The Hunger Games*, Emily St. John Mandell’s *Station 11*, Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, Peter Heller’s *The Dog Stars*, graphic novels like *Tank Girl*, the movie *The Book of Eli*, Disney’s *Wall-E*, or, earlier, William Gibson’s “The Winter Market”—visits humanity sifting through the ruins, distilling how we will redefine ourselves as societies.³ Ironically, disability has, within this genre, moved from modernity’s locus of sick body on a pallet before the divine healer to lead character, from a unique and exceptional demand on sympathy to a pervasive condition within sociality. The “clean slate” of an apocalyptically washed world starting over is within postapocalyptic frames not wasteland—a scene of bodies crippled and krumped among the ruins, persons working to detourn technological debris as prostheses of new sociality.⁴ As Clare Barker puts it, while speaking of disability in those other “postapocalyptic” or “postcolonial” zones, “The reconstruction of civil imagining is undertaken...not just through mobilizing the trope of disability but through the privileging of disability subjectivities.”⁵

¹ Christina J. Smith, “What disappears & what remains: Representations of Fluidity in Postapocalypse,” MA thesis, 2007, North Carolina State University. On-line PDF.

² Postapocalyptic literature is dated back to the middle of the 20th century, beginning with Walter M. Miller, Jr.’s, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960).

³ Smith, “What disappears,” 54.

⁴ Postapocalyptic literature assumes no eschatological telos for a given world, no defeat of a corrupt world, no telling revelation or exposure such that “truth” or meaning is known with certitude. Post-apocalyptic brings together the ecological and industrial ruin of the city, human and socio-cultural transition, technological detritus (often creatively detourned), and disabled bodies. Writing specifically of one genre of postapocalyptic, namely cyberpunk, Moody reports that “cyberpunk visualizes a future of common disability... In this fictional future the dialectic between impairment and disabling is resolved; ...the social environment of the future disables everyone, if not equally.” Nickianne Moody, “Untapped Potential: The Representation of Disability/Special Ability in the Cyberpunk Workforce,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 3 (1997): 90-1.

⁵ Clare Barker, *Postcolonial Fiction and Disability: Exceptional Children, Metaphor and Materiality* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 30. Intriguingly, James Berger, who authored *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (U of MN, 1999), and who is recognized as a key theorist of postapocalyptic, starts his theoretical undertaking by writing of his experience growing up with a disabled sister. Nonetheless, he never explicates how he

The emergent crip of postapocalyptic times—like modernity’s “Man of Reason”—carries the possibilities we imagine for human life. So what then shall we make of the figuration of the crip as fathomed in these postapocalyptic ruins? What constructive potencies for human life and sociality do we intuitively yoke to this figuration? Writers, like Lois Lowry in *The Giver* quartet, contend that thinking with and around disability offers us “the opportunity to rebuild the world in a radically different way”—at the least, assuming interdependence to parse the farce of the so-called “golden years of the earth.” Lowry uses disability like a rune stone. She sets her series of stories (i.e., *The Giver*, *Gathering Blue*, *The Messenger*, and *Son*) between two villages separated by an entanglement of forest, itself agentially lively and not always innocent. One village exposes children born with disability, although if the child seems promisingly gifted, she or he may be granted reprieve. The other village, “Beyond,” is a kind of “city of shelter,” led in later works by the boy, Jonas, who fled with the troubled child Gabriel from the robotic normalcy of well-reasoned, if completely unfeeling life in *The Giver*. This pivot from disability as aesthetic eyesore to the “rune” [“r-u-n-e”] thrown “to find new ways of looking, new patterns to create meanings in the new world” is intriguing.⁶ But here I ask, could disability also then become figuratively capacious in the ruins of God?

At the same time that postapocalyptic literature borrows crips to think through the ruins of modernism, theology has been sifting through the ruins of God. “Death of God” or “radical” theologies have been, like ocular floaters, troubling theological vision since the 1960s and its post-holocaust reflections.⁷ With poststructuralism in the theoretical atmosphere, religious pluralism strewn through broader sociality and the obvious popular and institutional shifts within Christianity in the western metropolises, God has been, in the last two decades, turning up yet again as but a relic in the ruins of modernism. “Something about whatever it is within a civilization that can collectively sustain and animate and discipline desire has failed”⁸: “The death of God” marks this God-shaped hole, this amputation of cultural sensibilities. Despite the so-called resurgence of religions with the turn into the third millennium, significant numbers of western Christians have trouble “believing in God.”⁹ This might well be the cultural way of registering the “death of God,” of unconsciously sensing, as Richard Kearney puts it, that “After...the traumas of the Holocaust, Hiroshima, and the gulags, to

thinks these scenes of the postapocalyptic and that family scene are related. Lois Lowry, author of *The Giver* quartet, likewise acknowledges that one experiential condition of her writing has been living with a daughter become disabled owing to a neuro-spinal virus. See Dan Kois, “Amazing Adventures in Empathy,” *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, October 7, 2012, 52-3.

⁶ Chandra Phelan, “Research Reveals that Apocalyptic Stories Changed Dramatically 20 Years Ago,” Published on-line October 29, 2009. <http://io9.com/5392430/research-reveals-that-apocalyptic-stories-changed-dramatically-20-years-ago>.

⁷ First wave “Death of God” theologians included Thomas J.J. Altizer, Charles Winquist, Richard Rubenstein, Robert Scharlemann. The second wave has included Mark Taylor’s *Erring*, the weak philosophical thought of those like Gianni Vattimo and the weak theology of John Caputo as well as the (third wave?) immanentist atheology or “radical theology” of Clayton Crockett and Jeffrey Robbins.

⁸ Robert Pippin, “Nietzsche and the Melancholy of Modernity,” *Social Research*, vol 66 no. 2 (Summer 1999): 501-2.

⁹ Theologian Elizabeth Johnson owes this situation to what she calls “protest atheism” a registration of intellectual dissonance or, given evidence of ethical hypocrisy, institutional avoidance.

speak of God is an insult unless we speak in a new way.”¹⁰ We take up theology then amidst the vertiginous swirl of the abjection of God, belief, and Christianity itself—in the ruins, in other words.

The “death of God” names not simply the philosophical death of ontotheology (of a God reigning from the supernatural stratosphere, guaranteeing that what happens in the world is backed by sovereign authority, divine will, and so will culminate in happy endings), but a cultural loss of sense and, specifically, a loss of desire. If the “death of God” somehow marks the ruins we’re in, then how odd it would be to throw this problem of desire upon a disabled figure. The disabled have been culturally construed as ungendered, asexual, the ones who are forbidden sex in the name of preventing monstrous births—thus, forbidden the reproduction of life itself. To desire the crip has itself been seen as perverse. Indeed disability names that morphological condition construed as “worse than death,” making desire in regards to disability something more masochistic than a death fetish. Clearly what is needed, as Robert Pippin explains in terms of Nietzsche’s announcement of the death of God, is “the possibility of some sort of [different] erotic attachment, ...a different sort of psychic economy.”¹¹ Postapocalyptic sensibilities prescriptively suggest that crips might figuratively navigate just such a void, that is, this “loss of sense.” Crips might be the link to this other erotic economy, to hope, to a psycho-social allegiance to life. But what kind of hope lies in such cultural ruins and krumped figures?

Liberal culture suffers from a loss of passion. Say what we will theoretically about desire, it’s a lack thereof which “the death of God” marks and remarks upon.¹² These ruins of God through which theology trudges mark, as Jean-Luc Nancy put it, not only a “sense of loss,” but a “loss of sense”—a loss of an energetic gradient, a loss of that which has gathered and organized meaning, ritual, and purpose.¹³ Intellectually well honed, we find joy precluded by overwhelming responsibility in the face of a world so troubled—positively troubled by our analytic reasoning and negatively by the technological outcroppings of modernism. Analytically critical of the worlds through which we navigate, we cannot figure out how to lace generosity, joy or beauty—that upon which we can rest, that which attaches us to life, that which makes ethical engagement possible—into these critical analyses.¹⁴ How then will we love this world, desire it passionately, as it now moves through its less than ideal passages, as it emerges krumped and crippled in the hand-hold of the Anthropocene? And yet, should these intuitions of postapocalyptic sensibility line-up with liberal theology in the ruins of God, crip becomes the possible “yes”

¹⁰ Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), xvi.

¹¹ Pippin, “Nietzsche & Melancholy...,” 502, 506.

¹² Pippin, “Nietzsche & Melancholy...,” 498.

¹³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 81.

¹⁴ Nietzsche might analytically surmise that we are then not yet—psychologically speaking—free of or finished with the death of God. As Pippin explains, Nietzsche “presents the revolutionary experience of modernity (the experience of loss and death, of rejection and destruction, as well as of self-liberation and enlightenment) as dangerously unstable ‘psychologically,’ collectively, leading either to the narcissism and smug self-satisfaction of ‘the last [humans]’ or the ‘pale atheists,’ or to the self-lacerations, guilt and melancholy of the ‘passive nihilists’ and self-proclaimed murderers of God (or perhaps the destroyers of metaphysics, deconstructors of texts or archeologists of power).” See Pippin, “Nietzsche & Melancholy...,” 514.

to life, a figural pivot for some kind of faith. A rune stone thrown, hoping that therein we might discover what makes leading a life now possible. “Crip/tography,” this disability theology in the ruins of God, considers what theology might be and do among the damned and damaged, in the winter of the worn-out and wrecked relics of commodity capitalism and “God.” Crip/tography, this theo-philosophical venture drawing on the imagination of postapocalyptic literature, opens a vector of desire for those, like crips, who think from the remembered interface of humanity with the diverse terrains and temporalities of a world becoming—not from the ledge of transcendental, metaphysical fantasies.

Ruin seems something of the aesthetic texture of our future as we release the lenses of idealism so as to admit life appears far more wabi-sabi, fragile, and limited than moderns admitted. The work here is to see if we might loose desire for life within this postapocalyptic passage and, in so doing, provide a pivot for liberal theology to move beyond its nostalgia for Jesus as Healer.¹⁵ I link such a move with thinking Spirit as locus of equanimity within a non-dual philosophy – as a locus for cultivating non-judgment, forbearance, and the regeneration of social flesh.

God in the Ruins

To be sure, theology and disability—the phenomenological experience of disablement as well as the critical studies field—have often held each other at arm’s length. Theology, at its popular liturgical level, remains at the level of desire cathected to wholeness, i.e., “The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear” (as if assuming miraculous remediation), which from a disability studies perspective yokes theology to the cult/ure of public appearance within capitalism. Reading disability as “body in pain,” assuming pain to be “an argument against existence” (perhaps because of theology’s historical tendency to yoke pain with fault), theology unconsciously reacts to disability from a location of resentment against life.¹⁶ Unthinkable and therefore intolerable, disability, we are theologically enculturated to assume, must be remediated, overcome ... if nothing more, then by a tolerant, if grimaced inclusion under the conditions of “the normal.” Construing disability as “brokenness,” theology hides its metaphysical refusals, its resentment of suffering as a condition of becoming, in its own fixation on healing the “in/valid.”

¹⁵ Jesus as Healer has been the winsome figuration recuperated in the 19th and 20th centuries, beginning with biblical scholar Adolph van Harnack and re-iterated through the recent phases of the Jesus Seminar, especially in the work of John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg. As argued in my *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement* (Fortress, 2007), I suspect that the figure of Jesus, whom von Harnack saw as “vital, pure, and busy” set over against “the miserable wash of humanity” (a.k.a., “disabled”), a figure Crossan and Borg seem inherently to assume, actually has to do with the modern realist episteme. Further, healing remains an undeconstructed power line of colonialism. Modernity, assuming itself the superior model of civilized being, borrowed the medical gaze and has sought out—in the other, both colonial and metropolitan disabled—aspects of degeneracy, which is then brought before the healer (the theater of science, medicine and religion). I argue that this Jesus figure—as “vital, pure, and busy” and so distinct, then, from other colonized figures—is less “in the text” and more in the eye/mind of the modern reader.

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 129-130.

Disability studies has, however, actively resisted redemptive fix/ation, whether in science and medicine or in theology, as well as the metaphysics of perfection named by Eden and “Ever After.” Disability studies expressly releases many of the traces of what has been construed as struts of a theological worldview—no transcendental telos, no promise of salvation, no fix, no redemption. Or, as disability theorist Petra Kuppers puts it, “no origin story, no diasporic experience, ...no patrilinear descent, no matriarch, no heteronormative narrative that duplicates itself into the future.”¹⁷ There is among persons disabled, in fact, “no necessary family resemblance,”¹⁸ for disability “describes nothing shared: no one form of embodiment or orientation to the world...”¹⁹ Such power lines of redemption...into normalcy...as have been wired into liberal theology keep persons who are disabled silenced, marginalized, on the healer’s pallet—using us to develop the liberal sentimental virtues, but not letting us speak for ourselves. Given these mutual exclusions, disability studies remains a “bit” player in the theological scene—even sometimes absent as a *critical* approach within theologies which nonetheless call themselves “disability theologies.”²⁰ But what, then, is theology if not redemptive hope, a giant eraser for pain?

Disability theology, it seems to me might be related to that set of theologies themselves somewhat abject, because of their play in the ruins of God—namely, the “death of God” theologies, those theologies that have attempted to evoke an absurd love of the world while keeping their eyes on the Holocaust and Hiroshima. Death of God theologies, prior to the recent decades of deconstruction, named the release of the supernatural, omniscient God above the world. Or variously, these theologies celebrate “God’s abandoning...divinity to the point of plunging into the mortal condition.”²¹ Such theologies, privilege—as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it—transimmanence, the sacred in the midst of the world without ineffable reserve.²² These theologies are not necessarily equivalent with the secular rational dismissal of religion, although the discourses may share both this sense that Christianity—as it has been known in the West—“no longer functions” as well as a desire to value the only world we know.

¹⁷ Petra Kuppers, “Toward a Rhizomatic Model of Disability: Poetry, Performance and Touch,” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* vol. 3 no. 3 (2009): 228, 233.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 228, 233.

²⁰ Many pastoral theologies which pay attention to persons living with disabilities think through the medical model and the optics of modern realism, conceiving of “disability” as an obvious medical impairment, a pathological condition, as distinct from a critical disability studies notion of the social construction of disability. On the distinction between the medical and the social models of disabilities, see Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 7. Crip theory—and crip is to disabled as queer is to gay—emphasizes the fluidity of selfhood, embedded in evolutionary becomings. It refuses to make an identity out of “disability” and also therefore refuses the binary of able/disabled even as it phenomenologically philosophizes from a particular locus of flesh encountering or expressed through other elemental agencies. See Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2006) and Alison Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

²¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity II*, trans. John McKeane (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 30.

²² Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 222 n101.

If Death of God theologies pose consistent challenges to the ontotheological project harbored in theology itself, these theologies, equally or more so, have named a cultural diagnostic. “The end of ...metaphysics,” explains Mary-Jane Rubenstein, explicating Nancy’s perspective, “says nothing more and nothing less than the senselessness of existing with an exhausted set of concepts; a configuration of sense comes undone, a philosophical, political or spiritual order decays.”²³ Putting his finger on the exhausted concept, Nancy continues: “But ‘God is dead’ means that God no longer has a body.”²⁴ Inasmuch as “to *be* that body and *be nothing but that*, forms the principle of Western (un)reason,”²⁵ an economy of the “the body proper” has, suggests Nancy, led to a capitalist banalization of life: “‘The body’...is our old culture’s latest, most worked over, sifted, refined, dismantled, and reconstructed product.”²⁶ A discourse banking on “the body proper” commits western culture, he concludes, to “an irreversible coma.”²⁷ Does not the exhaustion of persons chasing such “cruel optimism” as “the body” proper—with half of all U.S. citizens below the poverty line or just scraping by—seem to legitimate just such a surmise?²⁸ Hence, “the death of God” (also known as “the death of metaphysics”) means nothing more nor less than the failure of an epochal pattern of sense, of a particular economy of life—anchored, as Nancy sees it, in “*the* body of God,” which has grounded the western economy of “the body.”

The loss of this psycho-social logic, i.e., “the death of God,” can feel for any number of us like waking to an amputation, inducing thereby dysregulation and caetextia as well as melancholy. This death, however, also pinpoints the exhaustion of “the body,” literal and figurative, now made so useful to commodity capitalism and potentially opens the way towards a new sense, a new cultural logic closer to the flesh. “What is coming to us,” Nancy suggests, sounding like a herald of the postapocalyptic tenor and its aesthetic texture, “is a dense and serious world...with nothing to oversee it or sustain it, no Subject for its destiny, taking place only as a prodigious press of bodies....What is coming to us is...a world-wide world, one that doesn’t refer to...an other-world, that is no longer ‘international’ but already something else, and that is no longer a world of appearances or aspirations.” But, he concludes, “it’s still a world, a proper place...for the spacing of our bodies... for the sharing of their resistances.”²⁹ Conscious of Nancy’s cautions that flesh can all too easily, given theological history, be negatively calibrated, especially as set in relation to spirit, I nonetheless translate Nancy’s notion of disaggregated bodies—“*corps*” (as “mass

²³ Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder*, 117.

²⁴ Nancy, *Corpus*, 59.

²⁵ Nancy, *Corpus*, 5 *sic*.

²⁶ Nancy, *Corpus*, 7.

²⁷ Nancy, *Corpus*, 91.

²⁸ Lauren Berlant defines “cruel optimism” as a relation to a desired object, an attachment, which actually occludes one’s own flourishing. “Optimism is cruel,” she explains, “when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving...” See her *Cruel Optimism* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011), 2. The attachment I consider here is, obviously, “the body,” both class/ified and ableist. “The latest Census Bureau data shows that one in two Americans currently falls into either the ‘low income’ category or is living in poverty.” See Lynn Stuart Parramore, “9 Economic Facts That will Make your Head Spin,” *AlterNet*, February 19, 2013. (www.alternet.org).

²⁹ Nancy, *Corpus*, 41.

extended," as ecological "place") as distinct from "*le corps*" (as vessel-like container)—by the English term "flesh."

"Flesh" cannot as easily as "the body" submit to the transcendentalist metaphysics, which Nancy has soundly critiqued as occasioning disheartening emptiness, all freedom squeezed out by trivial choices. Flesh is, I want to presume with philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, something we share. "Instead of multiple, but separate and discrete corporealities, there is a tissue of intercorporeality [inclusive of sensation]"—flesh, in philosophical terms—"in which each body is open to and affected by others."³⁰ Various said, flesh is more than a unitary body; it designates a social plane or "commons" on which bodies encounter one another and become involved, entangled. The rawness of flesh admits our exposure, our vulnerability to one another, and is unable to hide the wounds, tears, disfigurements, and desires that a more abstract language of embodiment often can. And yet to write of flesh—a transposition, as I see it, of Nancy's announcement of the coming clamor of bodies and his insistent claim that "the sigh of bodies does not penetrate anything invisible"³¹—does not relieve us of the sacred.³² Rather than thinking of God as the death or

³⁰ Margrit Shildrick, *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Subjectivity, and Sexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 26.

³¹ Nancy, *Corpus*, 47. "Flesh" has a considerable theological history which needs to be distinguished from this proposal for "social flesh." "Flesh" named the mortal condition, the inheritance of "woman," as over against spirit and spirited life—leading to the feminist incarnational imbrication of enspirited flesh or "body." More constructively, although still imbricated with that theological history, Luther (reading the Pauline letters) thought of "flesh" as an orientation towards the world based on human reason, prudence, even practiced righteousness. "Luther's 'eight great traps' of the flesh included: 'external goods' like 'power, honors, parents, friends, family, relatives'; 'physical goods' like 'health, strength, beauty'; 'spiritual goods' like 'talent, memory, intellect, prudence'; 'knowledge and skills,' 'bodily and mental'; 'physical, that is human, wisdom,' as in 'liberal arts, philosophy, etc.:'; 'intellectual wisdom'; 'heartfelt grace in righteousness, devotion, gifts of the Holy Spirit, etc., in meditations'; and finally 'God as He is revealed to us in His divine properties.'" See R. Chris Hassel, Jr., "Hamlet's 'Too, Too Solid Flesh,'" *Sixteenth Century Journal* vol. 25 no. 3 (1994): 616. All of this was suspect because, as Luther saw it, humans were naturally ego-centric, a condition that then fouled reason, even our will to do good. It even fouled how we came to link up "properties" with God that we could then pretend to defend. Whereas "the prudence of flesh" assumes to seek to know and do perfectly, "the wisdom of spirit" or "the prudence of spirit knows that it must fail, but is cheerful in the companion knowledge of God's mercy" (Hassel, 613). On "social flesh" as a contemporary ethico-political ideal, see Chris Beasley and Carol Bacchi, "Envisaging a new politics for an ethical future: Beyond trust, care and generosity towards an ethic of 'social flesh,'" *Feminist Theory* vol. 8 (2007): 279-298.

³² Nancy might well worry that a philosophy of flesh "incarnation" still assumes spirit, as disembodied, coming into so as to signify flesh, or that flesh acquires value only as raised to the exponential of spirit (*Corpus* 69, 75f). His philosophy precisely insists upon the inverse thereof (*Corpus* 87), which I take to be a spiritualizing of flesh, a way of living body as "mass" (as he puts it)...without any transcendental outside. "If we wanted to keep these words [i.e., transcendental and immanent]," he writes, "we'd have to say that [the transcendental] takes place within [the immanent], but without being dialecticized—that one takes place *as* the other, and that such a taking-place is what *places* are. Places, places for the existence of being...are the exposition of bodies... *Here* the neighbor would be what comes, what takes place in an approach..." (*Corpus* 89, 91). Nancy fears, it seems to me, that any theological evocation threatens to generate significance outside the transpiration of flesh, that "theology" closes off the senses by distilling the essence of life to a higher plane. "God, Death, Flesh: the three-fold name of the entire body of onto-theology," Nancy writes, suggesting how a whole system can be carried in a concept or a

devaluation of the world of bodies, Nancy insists that the death of God opens out “*here*, the world of bodies, the worldiness of bodies, and *there*, a cut off, incorporeal discourse...”³³ Emptying the ontic discourse related to “the body of God” opens out now upon the horizon of flesh.

Exorcising “the body of God” resonates with the sentiment of disability studies, given that cultural notions of health likewise “appeal to a...transcendental ontology.”³⁴ A certain theological scaling of the world informs our paradigm of health and the “valid” (versus “invalid”) body, even as devoutly scientific as venues of biotechnoscience claim to be: “When Deleuze and Guattari write that ‘the organism is the judgment of God,’ they indicate by this phrase,” explains John Protevi, “the way in which major Western philosophers have held that God’s perfection is the model for the self-ordering of the ideal, politically attuned human organism” – that is, “the body” which biopolitics assumes as the pivotal human self, secured by immunity cordons and advanced, through biotechnology, towards its inherent telos – vitality, capaciousness, efficiency, productivity. To crips, “the body” – as Protevi analytically insinuates – appears to be a transcendental term in a material mask, a frame of judgment which – in our experience – but en/crypts; that is, it constitutes for us a cultural death sentence. “‘Organism,’” Protevi concludes, “is thus not a strictly biological term...”³⁵ If “organism” is not simply a biological term, but a religio-political physiology,³⁶ then to “become crip” – sporting an attitude towards any insinuation of pathology, lack, deviance, or other “invalid” humanity – is a performance that, as Helene Cixous said of feminism, flips the bird at the judgment of God.³⁷ Crip/tography unlocks the crypt, the capitalist enclosure, of “the body.”

Moving among the postapocalyptic ruins, crips transform the vacuity of “the death of God” into a theology of flesh. To speak of postapocalyptic ruins is, after all, to speak with a tinge of utopian irony – not (or not only) dystopian lament. Postapocalyptic ruins always also carry a cultural fantasy of value – here, then, of a love able to abide not only world becomings outside of human agential control, but of a love able to navigate human injustice and ineptness now laced through such becoming. It speaks of a faith determined to keep faith with the mundane, with this commonplace world. There are, given this razing of transcendence, no pre-established identities from which something – a body, a religion – errs, but an appreciation or at least a forbearance of the fractures and differential relays, of the interstitial which deterritorializes.³⁸ Crips have exited that life captured by

trinity thereof (75). And yet, Nancy is never unaware of the cultural power of liturgical language as the structural memes for creating value, e.g., rethinking as he does here “mass” – that conjunction of body as mass with the religious ritual of the same name--itself.

³³ Nancy, *Corpus*, 61.

³⁴ Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 2.

³⁵ John Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xv.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁷ Helene Cixous, “Sorties,” in Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986), 96. Cixous seems to be playing upon Christianity’s use of the bird as symbol of Spirit; Spirit has been in the recent past as well as historically a conceptual metaphor important to opening a place for women within Christianity.

³⁸ Daniel Colucciello Barber, *On Diaspora: Christianity, Religion and Secularity* (Cascade

eternal questions of our legitimacy, that worrisome, self-conscious itch affected by the internalization of the medical gaze. Crip/tography invites a comparable deterritorializing of desire.

If “the reconstruction of civil imagining is undertaken...through the privileging of disability subjectivities,”³⁹ crip might well be a timely cultural “rune” thrown towards loosing an absurd love of life and generosity articulated within corporeal flesh in less than ideal straits. As “runes,” crips—given that “disability” occasions the psychic reassessment of the order or laws of nature and the affective core that has allowed such resentment against life as held in “naturalism” or “theism” (and therefore “wholeness”) to build—joy in the privilege of matter, even through its twisted, torqued, krumped passages. “In immanent thought,” explains Deleuzian scholar Joshua Ramey, “the spatial, temporal, historical, erotic and volitional dimensions of finite existence..., these hazardous dimensions have become absolute,” calling for “a kind of...love manifested not as the possibility of escape from, but a transformation of, debased creation.”⁴⁰

Dug like a tick into immanence, retaining a daily relation to the chaotic depths of chaosmos, and mobilizing the concept of flesh, crip/tography, as one stream of radical theology, may finally be heard into theological speech—even as a spiritual key to that “desire that will persist beyond the Apocalypse of the planned society and the imminent demise of technological reason as we pass through the current ecological and economic holocaust.”⁴¹ In the wake of “the death of God”—a sensibility which situates the sacred as always already respecting life as exposed and given into the world, without reserve or transcendental remainder,⁴² consorting with crips might, so postapocalyptic thinking goes, make possible “a new...way of resolving the problems of suffering and death, of suggesting the continuing possibility of purposiveness, dedication, the sustaining and disciplining of desire in the face of loss, suffering, and death.”⁴³

Conserving Disability

Postapocalyptic literature, contrary to Western modern humanist (un)reason, conserves disability (that is, morphological difference, impairment, corporeal anomaly). Modern reason, which insists that “Anything (Including Death) Is Better than Being Disabled,”⁴⁴ has not exactly faded away. Precisely that sentiment not only fuels genomic research, but has been named among Hollywood’s six mega-sales stereotypes. Certain popular cultural mediums have not, in other words, made the postapocalyptic turn and do not appear to be

Books, 2011), 133, 132. Barber’s poststructuralist work on Christianity strikingly echoes the critique of metaphysics by critical disabilities scholar Petra Kuppers, cited earlier in this essay.

³⁹ Barker, *Postcolonial Fiction...*, 30.

⁴⁰ Joshua Ramey, *The Hermetic Deleuze: Philosophy and Spiritual Ordeal* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 20, 28.

⁴¹ Ramey, *The Hermetic Deleuze*, 217.

⁴² Nancy as explicated by Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder*, 123.

⁴³ Pippin, “Nietzsche and the Melancholy...,” 509-510.

⁴⁴ See “6 Insane Stereotypes That Movies Can’t Seem to Get Over,” published at Cracked.com.http://www.cracked.com/article_20082_6-insane-stereotypes-that-movies-cant-seem-to-get-over_p2.html. Accessed on February 11, 2013.

tracking this new geography of desire. Take for instance, Katniss, the heroine of the postapocalyptic trilogy *Hunger Games*. In the movie (as distinct from the book), her hearing is restored after the eardrum shattering explosion of a bomb.⁴⁵ James Cameron, the director of *Avatar*, admits that what finally sold that now popular movie was the trailer containing the image of wheelchair riding Jake Sully restored to wholeness, when his consciousness is transmitted into the Na'avi body.⁴⁶ Even as the movie *Avatar* overtly problematizes technology, miraculous remediation of disability—and here in a mode that resembles early Christian, specifically Athanasian, notions of resurrection into a transcendent other dimension—makes the story work by delivering on the culturally assumed, Edenic promise of restoration to the garden and, implicitly, to somatic wholeness—in this case, the garden of avatars, of ideal, ecologically wise natives. Moderns learn to metabolize this redemptive fix in relation to the pathological “lack” we have been trained to diagnose, whether in the pitiable disabled other or, then, surreptitiously in relation to the self. The medical gaze, circulated through modern medicine and science as much as by theology and its correlative social justice practice, has become very much a practiced social gaze, still shaping desire. But in this, desire, cathected to cruel optimism, continues to assume life is livable on an economically lofted, transcendental plane—the plane of commodity capitalism and its now hollow project of the individual.

Postapocalyptic literature, in one sense, hemorrhages the detritus of commodity capitalism now reaching its point of exhaustion—when saccharine suburbs and strip malls go to weeds, when the belly of the urban metropole of achievement coughs up, splits open, and spills out the refuse that has been stuffed in its maw—the “underground” of history that has been there all along. That our modern construction of reason has brought us not only the Jewish Holocaust, but the broadscale “[...] Inheritance of Loss,” as Kiran Desai named it,⁴⁷ cannot, in the face of climate change, amidst ecological and economic riptides, be ignored. Without ever having detonated an apocalypse, we—postapocalyptic literature has us imagine—have been left to start over, to reason together again, in the muddle of radiation, pollution, fragmentation, vampires, zombies, and crips.⁴⁸

And yet, even as a postapocalyptic mood unsettles that which has given our western lives meaning, whether Enlightenment reason or “the body of God,” there’s a certain sense of “homecoming” that can be felt in postapocalyptic scenes—at least for a crip. Remembering Kupperts’s rhetorical distancing from modern narratives (i.e., no origin story, no redemptive fix, no salvation, no telos), one can hear a crip/tic resonance in Teresa Heffernan’s description of the postapocalyptic: “These narratives refuse to offer up a new beginning or any

⁴⁵ Rubiarose, “Disability: Lost in the Translation of *The Hunger Games*?” *Feminist Disability Studies Blog* (blog), April 13, 2012, <https://feministdisabilitystudiesblog.wordpress.com/2012/04/13/disability-lost-in-the-translation-of-the-hunger-games-2/>.

⁴⁶ This appears to be a very Athanasian notion of hybridic wholeness, wherein the body is miraculously “resurrected” into an eternal—here, nativist—realm, which is “more real” than the finite world. Sully is laid at the foot of the Tree of Souls, “a protagonist who must literally die in order to occupy a place in the world of the Na’avi.” See Michael Peterson, Laurie Beth Clark, and Lisa Nakamura, “I See You?": Gender and Disability in *Avatar*,” *Flow*, February 5, 2010, <http://www.flowjournal.org/2010/02/i-see-you-gender-and-disability-in-avatarmichael-peterson-laurie-beth-clark-and-lisa-nakamura/>

⁴⁷ Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006).

⁴⁸ Phelan, “...Apocalyptic Stories Changed 20 Years Ago.”

hope of rebirth or renewal.... There is no better world that replaces it.... There is no overarching critique, there is no cataclysmic destruction that promises to cleanse the world and separate the righteous from the damned, good from evil, and there is no resolution or salvation."⁴⁹ Some of us, thus, find relief in these postapocalyptic environs, where we are not driven to overcome or overcompensate for the etchings along our skinline, even as we must also admit the reality of non-fortuitous potentialities.⁵⁰ Comparably, while speaking of urbanism, cyberpunk author William Gibson insists, countering those who would call his narrative castings "dystopic," that "The city you want, [especially] as a young creative person, is partially ruined, marked by areas of the semimoribund in real estate values. Low rents, minimal policing, casual welding allowed on sidewalks."⁵¹ In other words, the messy metropolis might be, in some way, more livable than all aspects of civil "regooding."

Rather than weaving us into "the Christian apocalyptic model that underlies modernity,"⁵² postapocalyptic literature "'points toward the importance of timeliness, of being time-bound, grounded in time.'"⁵³ It dares the imagination to dig into fragility, mundanity, and limit, letting in unruly chaomic tides which human agency cannot control or master. With disability, life—as over against the fantasies of modernism and the unanchored labor of mentality—knows what it is up against: we crips feel our world and its' alter intelligences. Crips sound out our way, living with an awareness of agencies other than our own, even but bacteria, ecosystemic blowback, or evolution's genetic experiments.⁵⁴ In this lived experience, we find gravity and psychic ground—perhaps also "authenticity," a quite rare experience when so many things today are subject to "spin." The world before us—from the inevitable hurdle of uncut curbs to affective clouds of social aversion—is particular in shape (requiring our calculated and truly singular experiential discernment), delimited in scale and definitively not subject to our delusions of omnipotence. Isn't the crip, with his or her permission to assume a different scale of life (a different tempo, a different relation to productivity), a recognition that we cannot be that "im/possible naturalization"

⁴⁹ Teresa Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the 20th Century Novel* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2008), 5.

⁵⁰ Catherine Malabou's *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity* (Polity, 2012) as well as her *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage* (New York: Fordham, 2012) challenge a kind of "bright-sided" (Ehrenreich) positivist streak within even poststructuralist works like that of Deleuze.

⁵¹ As much as cyberpunk has been taken to be dystopian, Gibson reminds us *au contraire* that "Cities can be at their experiential richest during periods of relative disjunction... Relative ruin, relative desertion, is a common stage of complex and necessary urban growth. Successful...cities are built up in a lacquering of countless layers: of lives, of choices encountered and made." See William Gibson, "Life in the Meta City," *Scientific American* vol. 305 no 3. Special Issue: "Better, Greener, Smarter Cities" (September 2011): 89.

⁵² Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture*, 11.

⁵³ Lee Quinby as cited in Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture*, 11.

⁵⁴ Persons living with disabilities do, of course, all differ; and because of the singularity of impairments or morphological anomalies, we all have different experiences. And yet, because of the social construction of space, built on normalcy, living with disabilities requires exquisite phenomenological attention. Process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead might describe this distinction as the difference between a modernist orientation to "causal efficacy" versus crips' attention to "presentational immediacy," a felt embeddedness within which one discerns action versus a relationship to a distantiated horizon of thought.

which has informed humanist notions of ability?⁵⁵ Disability names then a cultural rune stone for those seeking to exit modern reason and, as I will argue, modern theology.

Civil rights movements insisted that women were not “deformed” men and blacks were not “degenerate” whites so as to claim registry within modern humanism. Disability, which signified the underlying negative difference of those racist and sexist categories, has itself nonetheless remained invalid, the undigestable sediment of modernism. While disability has served in the modern period as “the master trope of human disqualification,”⁵⁶ disability is—in the Western university as in the public more generally—considered a topic of marginal public relevance—the concern of but an insignificant, whiny, angry, and sick minority, dismissively assumed to be but the last, if failed vestige of identity politics. Despite poststructuralism’s critique and deconstruction of the management of difference by way of binaries, western culture has been thus far unwilling to relent the normal versus disabled (or “invalid”) binary at the heart of modern reason. Unwilling to love, to find beauty in the figural crip, in these human “ruins,” culture clings melancholically to modernist idealism. While women, ethnics, and diverse sexualities have challenged and entered the humanist book of life (though not in any complete way that has led to social and economic equality), disability—the perceived somatic “lack” that engendered woman as deficient male and black as degenerate human—remains the undeconstructed keystone of modernity. But the postapocalyptic has cast the rune: admitting the irreversible, the things which cannot be put back together, the crip becomes a figural pivot for a cultural mentality stuck between “worse than death” and soulful consent to a life without decisive, conclusive ends or, therefore, judgment.

Disabilities studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson may not use the term “soul-craft” in her apologia for “Conserving Disability,” but one who is religious might. “Conserving Disability,” speaks to an alternative vision of nature wherein the picture of health refers not to bounded self-enclosure or its dream of purity but to living with carnivalesque vigor amidst the human and planetary manifold, having learned “to abide the unexpected, to live with dissonance, to rein in the impulse to control.”⁵⁷ Such insights are strikingly parallel to—yet previously unexamined in light of—theological teachings regarding the spiritual virtues and, further, resonant with ecological ethicists’ call to relinquish our quest for the domination of nature. If we require a new relation with pain to move towards justice and cultural survival, then postapocalyptic authors like Lois Lowry deploy disability as an invitation to remember the emotional-affective self, which returns us to the work of growing trust with one another amid socio-political ruptures.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Scott DeShong, “The Nightmare of Health: Metaphysics and Ethics in the Signification of Disability,” *Symploke* 15.1-2 (2007), 275.

⁵⁶ Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependence of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 3.

⁵⁷ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “The Case for Conserving Disability,” *Bioethical Inquiry*, vol. 9 (2012): 339-355.

⁵⁸ Iain McGilchrist, writing on “The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World,” diagnostically prescribes just such a reorientation for the West—a reorientation that rebalances the left brain hemisphere’s ability to see from a distance, its enthrallment with certitude and pragmatism, with the right hemisphere’s attention to relational care, “a reverbative, ‘re-sonant,’ respons-ible’ relationship” that reshapes even what we will

What I am calling crip/tography, this disability theology in the ruins of God, may have everything then to do with a radical, appreciative openness to life moving through the hand-hold of the Anthropocene. Yes, we have lost, are losing, are loosing certain energizing sensibilities, sheltering frames, and orienting ends (Transcendence, Presence, order, judgment), but we wake nonetheless to life—like an amputee waking to the morning after. The passage marks loss—though not just loss, but also possibility, transfigurative possibility. As we're beginning to feel:

the sense that the power of the [apocalyptic] end in narrative is exhausted leads on the one hand to the anxiety that we exist after the catastrophe, after the end, and on the other to the hope that the very openness of a narrative that cannot be claimed by a unifying telos, that resists the pull of...absolute ends, keeps alive infinite directions and possibilities.⁵⁹

As Deleuze and Guattari explain amid their own cryptographic deployment named “schizoanalysis,” the broken are likely to make a break for it: “Once a person has experienced a break, s/he becomes... ‘molecular’⁶⁰ or ‘‘deterritorialized,’ and is then an outlier to those standards,...a nomad.”⁶¹ Crips and schizo nomads may be some of the first escapees.

The Rune of Disability

“Admitting that disabled persons often become social spectacles” and trying constructively to “utilize [this] voyeuristic attention,”⁶² the crip becomes both a moving icon of the love of life and a model for that practiced disposition towards exquisite affective sensitivity (thus, “crip/tography” as a mobile iconography), that disposition of keeping faith with life for which radical theology also calls. Carrying culture’s projective fear of disaster, even disaster contagion, simultaneously with culture’s fear-filled, but projective “idealization,” i.e., “You are so inspiring, ...so awesome,” crips may be figural models for divining

mean be belief, McGilchrist insists. “Since the left hemisphere is concerned with what is certain, with knowledge of the facts, its version of belief is that it is just absence of certainty..., so belief is just a feeble form of knowing. . . . But belief in terms of the right hemisphere is different... For it, belief is a matter of care: it describes a relationship where there is a calling and an answering, the root concept of ‘responsibility.’... It means that I stand in a certain sort of relation of care towards you, that entails me in certain kinds of ways of behaving...towards you... [Belief] is having an attitude, holding a disposition towards the world, whereby that world...is one in which God belongs.” See Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (Yale, 2009), 170-2.

⁵⁹ Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture*, 14. Modernity used “(R)evelation,” that sense of appointed ending and revealed truth, to give itself direction, along which it could be said to progress.

⁶⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 213.

⁶¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 54-5.

⁶² “Disabled people often become social spectacles. Perhaps, however, it is what one does with social attention that matters—perhaps the body on display (the spectacle) can utilize its voyeuristic attention through artistic and political acts ... In strategic acts of self-exhibition, the disabled or disfigured body becomes the source of creative and intellectual productions.” See Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, 10.

towards the future—of hope for those unstrung, without destination, but soulfully attentive to chaomic becoming. Crips are, of course, being overly idealized in such whispered insinuations, and of course we cannot live up to such idealization. The point is rather that the crip models another way of being human, of joying in the mundane. As a positively errant “performativity” (rather than an identity “cause célèbre” or cause horrible, evoking pity),⁶³ the crip cuts into the patterned control, mastery, anesthetization, and sterilization of a transcendentalized vision of the good life.

The crip recognizes creative variation as a common underpinning within a world of becoming; “flux and instability...are the conditions of all corporeality.”⁶⁴ Within a multiply agential materialism, persons disabled are not then “in/valid” representations of humanity. Dis-ing disability marks rather a locus of resentment against the conditions of becoming, a resentment informing what Foucault called that “racism that is not really ethnic but biological.”⁶⁵ Where persons are marginalized as “disabled” and so “invalid/ated,” we need, psychoanalytically speaking, to open out resentment against life shaping the “eyes of the beholders,” among those for whom my body then constitutes something of a social danger or contagion, a state of exception or emergency. “Disability” — this “othering” fixation upon chaomic variation — develops where persons resent or have not learned to navigate life in relation to other than human agency, where persons have not developed their sea-legs in relation to a world prone to tectonic shifts and upheavals, smaller and greater in degree.

Postapocalyptic literature and thought dares, in the figure of the crip, to find a new way through pain. “To be a truly just society,” cultural theorist David Morris insists, “the West would need 'to construct a new understanding of pain: an understanding that did not disavow but rather accepted and transformed the tendency in pain to isolate the individual.’”⁶⁶ Countering the way in which Western theology has internalized pain as guilt, we must find a way to recuperate pain as a moral sensibility. “Suffering,” explains neurobiologist Antonio Damasio, is meant to “put us on notice” that not all is well with the world.⁶⁷ Human survival, Damasio continues, consequently depends upon sensitivity to pain:

Suffering offers us the best protection for survival, since it increases the probability that individuals will heed pain signals and act to avert their source or correct their consequences....It is difficult to imagine that

⁶³ I am thinking “crip” beside Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity — where crip, like Butler’s notion of gender, is not an attribute, but a differential “doing,” a constructive, iterative, material movement within sociality, which does not only inscribe, but also revises social norms. See Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (NY: Routledge, 1993).

⁶⁴ Margrit Shildrick, *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Subjectivity and Sexuality* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 10.

⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, cited by Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 11.

⁶⁶ David B. Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 242. Cited in Linda Holler, *Erotic Morality: The Role of Touch in Moral Agency* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 127.

⁶⁷ Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (New York: Penguin Press, 1994), 264.

individuals and societies governed by the seeking of pleasure, as much as or more so than by the avoidance of pain, can survive at all.⁶⁸

As our environment becomes itself disabling (owing to the release of lead, PCBs, benzene, and nuclear particulate, among other things), respect for social flesh—the gross disrespect of which results in human impairment—becomes the better part of wisdom.

But there's still that problem of desire to be dealt with. I have been insinuating that the crip offers a pivotal intervention in that often volatile, overly efficient and calculative logic of human life. Utilitarian pragmatism cannot justify the existence of, let alone the intentional "conserving" of disability. And romantic love cannot find much to love here. Then again, distanced objectivity, like idealism, measures the crip as but medical parts and a "black hole" of pain. "Heart, wind, song, flower, space, time, love: To leave these absent is to leave cripple in stark terms," insists crip poet Neil Marcus. "There is always wind in my cripple," he laughs knowingly, adding as well the memorial traces of "Off shore breezes./Scented nightflowering vines./Wild salsa dances that run past midnight."⁶⁹ Calculative logic, frozen in its own fears, cannot catch the breezes, the winds, the spirited life coming off the crip. Then again, it isn't as if Jewish and Christian traditions—peopled with the likes of limping Jacob, stuttering Moses, barren Hannah and crip Jesus—cannot imagine the enticement of the body become crip from wrestling with sacred passion.⁷⁰

Not only is such modern calculative logic, alienated from affect, dangerous in terms of how it has measured and so disposed of disablement, it is a dangerous formulation for humans who find ourselves, now and then, more and less, youth and elder, up against the question of deciding to exist. Deciding to exist is the other side of the question philosophically named by Deleuze and Guattari as the question of believing in our world: "It may be that believing in this world, in this life, becomes our most difficult task...We have so many reasons not to believe in the human world; we have lost the world, worse than [losing] a fiancé or a god."⁷¹ To keep faith with life within the postapocalyptic milieu is comparable to developing life-love for that en/crip/ed frame forbidden the regeneration of life itself during modernity. In other words, keeping faith with the crip is, it seems to me, not distinct from keeping faith with a world of becoming at this epochal turning. Idealism, the habit of loving only the perfect, is "a kind of withdrawal from, a kind of fantasmatic defense against, our being in the midst or flow of

⁶⁸ Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 264, 267.

⁶⁹ Neil Marcus, "The Metaphor of Wind in Cripple Poetics," *Cripple Poetics: A Love Story*, ed. Petra Kuppers and Neil Marcus (Homofactus Press: Ipsilon, Michigan, 2008).

⁷⁰ Yvonne Sherwood traces the tableau of crippled figures extending from Jacob to Jesus in her essay "Passion-Binding-Passion" (in *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline*, eds. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller. NY: Fordham, 2006: 169-193). She insinuates that the bible may be far less interested in the wholesome self and its care than we moderns. Comparably, historian of science Donna Haraway suggestively insinuates the crip...via the disfigured and grotesque Christ of Isaiah 53...as performative map for the posthumanist landscape. See her "Ecce Homo, Ain't (Ar'n't) I a Woman, and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape," in *Feminist Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (London: Routledge, 1992), 86-100.

⁷¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 75.

life.”⁷² Loving the ideal has assumed the status of the norm, given our culture’s enthrallment with spectacle, with stars of music, movie, sport, and fashion, if also the scientific powers of biotechnology. Consequently, our souls are persistently disaffected with the ambiguities of embodiment, the frustrations of the flesh. But as postapocalyptic literature surmises, few can outrun or outwit the ramifications of human driven planetary evolution.

“How do you do it?” It’s a question surreptitiously whispered behind the scenes by those beginning vicariously to try on the figural crip. I, the crip, holding your fears of pain and isolation, of that which you fear might be worse than death, can tell you how, waking day-by-day to who knows what might come, gradually evolves to greeting the surprise of dawn with wild joy. Breaking through the objectifying stare, the crip entices, looses desire to sink below the romantic fantasy of the body and deep into the contours of lived and loved flesh—hence, “crip/tography” as this other geography of desire. In the end, disability, which names but “the etchings left on flesh as it encounters world,”⁷³ is an aesthetic practice of attentively weaving relations with gravity and time. Crip simply names one learning to become adept at living the art of the flesh. And flesh, scholar of late antiquities Virginia Burrus, reminds us (here thinking with third century Christian theologian Tertullian), became at least once upon a time in our past “the site of a deliberately offensive, explicitly countercultural faith.”⁷⁴ A timely faith then for those who desire still to believe in our world.

Crip Theology in the Ruins of God

Working with reference to postapocalyptic literature and its’ ironic embrace of the crip, the ruins, I’ve been trying to loosen a certain crisis-mongering fixation on cultural traumas—the death of nature, the “end” of humanism, the death of God. Such traumatic recitals can further freeze affective engagement just as we need, rather, to invigorate affective attachment. It may even be, suggested Jacques Derrida, that “there is not even a crisis of the present world.”⁷⁵ Scenes of crisis for persons still wired into apocalyptic reason leave us like acrophobes staring into the abyss of the Grand Canyon or like those fixated and frozen before the morphological variance of the crip. To be sure, the postapocalyptic mood is not ignorant of losses—of species, of futures. We don’t emerge but krumped, crippled. But just as Christianity’s sense of emptying God into the flesh of the world could not have been ignorant of such calculative logic as keeps disability at arms length, neither need desire—especially as love of life—be absent of or always circumventing pain.

As with earlier death of God or radical theologies, God here—in this disability theology—becomes ruined, emptied, that nothing-something, so that we are face-to-face with each other—with the sensual flush of sentience and its precarious vulnerability, its injurability. Or thinking from another theopoetic

⁷² Franz Rosenzweig as summarized by Eric Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Illinois: University of Chicago, 2001), 21.

⁷³ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “The Case for Conserving Disability,” 342.

⁷⁴ Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 52.

⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001* (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 70. Derrida’s point seems to be that “crisis” represents something of a psychological symptom of hanging onto a world, thus of trying to “save” a world, which we no longer inhabit.

perspective, Spirit has been poured into the world to the point that the distinction between Spirit and world has been positively ruined—which is not to say Spirit is either absent or nothing, for “there is always wind—offshore breezes, scented nightflowering vines—in my cripple” (Marcus). Spirit locates a theology no longer referred to a Higher Order; it rather informs a theology that can get intimate with flesh and geosocial storms (Genesis, Jeremiah), while inviting gratitude, generosity, and trust “as openness to what comes..., a sort of anti-paranoia,” if you will.⁷⁶

When thought in proximity to flesh, Spirit might have everything to do with aspiring to a passionate equanimity, replete with infinite mercy, in relation to one another. Flesh names, as Judith Butler has put it, a “precarious . . . vulnerability to the other.”⁷⁷ Owing to that precarious vulnerability, anxiety, fear, disgust, dread, and shame haunt the flesh and can be borrowed by cultural technologies like the politics of health,⁷⁸ the civilizing politics of fear, or that resentment against life marginalized as “disability.” Equally, flesh recognizes even the tempting pleasure of toying with aggression, given the uncomfortable torsions and tensions of difference within social flesh: how easy it would be to find pleasurable sociality by marginalizing “disability.” Think of Spirit, then, as a necessary “prosthesis,” a locus which might be cultivated towards spacious and fearless empathy, of forbearance and equanimity amidst messy entanglements.

Given that disability has remained troublingly anathema to difference as we now live it,⁷⁹ the non-duality of Spirit, i.e., “There is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free...” (Galatians 3: 28), might be a locus from which to work the release of a Christianity recently more cathected to the power of judgment (if hidden in “healing”) than love and historically indulging life resentment, hidden in idealism.⁸⁰ Spirit suggests a locus of non-reactive presence to the swirling interdependencies (that influence us and that we influence in each moment), so that we might offer “extreme sensitivity to initial conditions.”⁸¹ Spirit does not then become an invitation to turn away from complexity, but is a way to stay mindfully and ethically present to the world, to contextual conditions—precisely when fear might opt for [“protective”] dualisms or when love might feint in aversion or disgust. A philosophy of Spirit might then—like those other mindfulness practices, Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta, which have historically been accompanied by philosophical systems of reflection that cultivate “perennial wisdoms” around which persons are trained to be mindful (as for example, “non-duality,” the recognition of self and other, like world and the sacred, as interdependent)—lead to a sense of kin-ship, to ethical renunciation of opposition to, judgment of and mastery over one another.

⁷⁶ Karmen MacKendrick, *Divine Enticement: Theological Seductions* (New York: Fordham, 2013), 47.

⁷⁷ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 29.

⁷⁸ Charles Edgley, “Health Nazis and the Cult of the Perfect Body: Some Polemical Observations,” *Symbolic Interaction* vol. 13 no. 2 (1990): 257-279.

⁷⁹ Lennard J. Davis, “Why Is Disability Missing from the Discourse on Diversity?” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 25, 2011.

⁸⁰ Gilles Deleuze, “To Have Done with Judgment,” in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 126-135.

⁸¹ Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), 5.

Consequently, crip/tography – this nomad theo-spirituality for everyday life – is not so much a project of “saving the world,” “saving souls,” or even saving the vulnerable other as it is learning to live precarious life with the deepest sense of devotion and faithfulness possible. Crip/tography reminds us yet again that to become human it is not necessary to become whole, but to attend to the call of the other – and thus to become just, to practice love, pardon, tenderness, mercy, welcome, respect, compassion, solidarity, and communion among all our relations.

We might call crip/tography a “preterite” spirituality. Thomas Pynchon’s literary corpus imaginatively recalls, borrowing Calvinist terminology, the “preterites” – those who are rejected or passed over. For Pynchon, the religious setting is American secular culture, the preterites being those excluded and anonymous, in terms of social organization, and, in that way, “cut off from grace.” We meet comparable persons in postapocalyptic literature. A preterite spirituality – and in this one finds resonance with learning to live disability, which releases the realm of ideals, fantastical eschatologies and redemption – “fosters dispositions that reflect a sense of human limitation.... They make no claims to be the first, ‘prefigurative’ flowerings of emancipated modes of being,” but instead “are dedicated to local efforts at survival, self-transformation and face-to-face service.”⁸² These make no promise of radical transformation, no claim to purity (ecological, ideological, economic, platonic or spiritual), but instead celebrate a shared kinship of all souls (who escape from or refuse to recognize class or gender by simply, rather, honoring friendship), critically awake to existence, self-forgetting and generous, trained towards patience amidst the quotidian over the long-term, towards freedom and responsibility through self-reflection.⁸³

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⁸² John McClure, *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 20.

⁸³ McClure, *Partial Faiths*, 53-62.