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# **Creativity at the Edge of Chaos: Theopoetics in a Blazing World**

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We are all mixed up and mixed up in all<sup>1</sup>

What matters is that we're always mixing with other people. Sometimes it's normal and good, and sometimes it's dangerous. [An artist] mixes in ...painting. Writers do it in books. We do it all the time.<sup>2</sup>

## **I. Performing Theopoetics**

There is no essence, no boundary or centre, to theopoetics. This may be cheerfully acknowledged even as we continue to debate and create 'as if' the fabrication we are engaged in could be compared to building a house rather than inventing a fiction. Meanwhile, in the shared arena we have constructed, contrasting approaches stage their dissonant performances. Theopoetics is the embodied speech of profligate, erotic generativity;<sup>3</sup> theopoetics calls us towards apophatic darkness.<sup>4</sup> Theopoetics is not about poetry at all; theopoetics is inseparable from the superabundance of meaning poetry represents.<sup>5</sup> Theopoetics voices the tragic intensity of suffering and trauma; theopoetics invites us to a celebration—a great party that lasts till the new dawn breaks.<sup>6</sup> Theopoetics is openness to something unprecedented approaching; theopoetics overflows with multiple sacramental incarnations in everyday life.<sup>7</sup> Theopoetics is an ancient Christian tradition; theopoetics marks the kenotic finale of the Christian religion.<sup>8</sup> Theopoetics generates art

that reimagines the sacred; theo-poetics is the avenue to political engagement with the 'secular'.<sup>9</sup> Theo-poetics confronts dry, rational dogmatic forms; theo-poetics is the voice of theological thinking in process.<sup>10</sup> Theo-poetics precedes theology and is archi-theological; theo-poetics comes after theology as 'anatheistic' retrieval of unfulfilled potential; theo-poetics is continually implicated in theology as 'supplement'.<sup>11</sup> Theo-poetics is articulated after the death of God; theo-poetics 'can no more do without God than it can do God in'.<sup>12</sup>

I don't find such dissonance at all dispiriting. Despite our differences, theo-poetic practitioners seem remarkably content to admire each others' improvisations and contribute our voices to the cacophonous chorus. I very much like the image that Sheila Gallagher borrows from George Saunders to describe wisdom reconceived in artistic form; it is as if you place contradictory ideas expressed at their highest level in one space together, 'and just let them sit...sort of vibrating'.<sup>13</sup> But perhaps the reason that I feel so relaxed about the indeterminacy I encounter is that what I most value in theo-poetics is the profound ambiguity this 'irredeemably ambiguous signifier' shelters.<sup>14</sup> I fear nothing more than regimes of innocence and purity; attempts to police boundaries and eradicate chaos - whether these are political, cultural or theological.

So I am glad that in reaching for reimaginings of the sacred we have not yet enforced new orthodoxies. Yet, despite this radical openness, there is one characteristic of theo-poetics which all practitioners appear readily to affirm: creativity. This is what has drawn us here. While the 'letter' of traditional academic and ecclesial theologies may have become deathly, we hopefully insist that there is spirit and life to be found in imaginative and artistic 'makings' of the divine. We celebrate a poesis of intensity possessed of transformative power which we variously translate as: call, lure, event, revelation, kingdom, process, hospitality, making, becoming divine—and more. Furthermore, at those points in which our discussions of the sacred employs a theistic register (which happens sometimes) creativity emerges as a defining divine attribute.

To be clear, this is a form of creativity that confounds traditional understandings of divine agency. We image it as a proliferation of pluralities, relational entanglements in matter,

epiphanies in the everyday bearing eschatological promise. It is a creativity operating without nostalgia for pure origins or predetermined becomings. However, despite having extended the frame in this way, it remains challenging to consider how creativity itself might be deeply ambivalent. This has been a topic of a lively conversation between Richard Kearney and Catherine Keller, both of whom—whilst acutely aware of the problems of theological language—continue to perform their theopoetics within this ‘semantic God-space’.<sup>15</sup>

Kearney’s important essay ‘Enabling God’ sets out his eschatological vision of a ‘possible becoming God’ through the optimistic and convivial evocation of a party that goes on till morning. Responding to his celebration of a breaking new dawn beyond injustice and suffering. Keller asks: ‘Does Kearney’s rising-sun God preclude all future resistance to its own goodness?’ Might we discern within this triumph of light a Western ‘cultural passion to annihilate the darkness, whether evil, mystical, epidermal—or uteral?’<sup>16</sup> Drawing upon her own feminist interrogation the ambivalent relations between primal chaos and divine creativity in *The Face of the Deep*, she questions whether we are not required to keep ‘the grammar of God’s creation ambiguous’.<sup>17</sup> Shouldn’t we preserve the witness to a feminized chaos, operative in the darkness and the deep that forms an integral part of the biblical creation narratives? ‘What about the darkness over the face of *tehom*?,’ she asks. Is this to be vanquished by light and trouble us, ‘[n]ever more?’<sup>18</sup>

The dialogue between Kearney and Keller is developed further in a conversation published in *Reimagining the Sacred*.<sup>19</sup> Here Kearney resolutely affirms that any possible God we place faith in must be entirely beneficent. Drawing upon Nicholas of Cusa and Augustine, he states, ‘all that God is able to be is love, not nonlove—that is, evil. Surely to be nonlove would be precisely what God is not, what God is incapable of being. So if there is evil in the world it is our doing, something we do as creatures with freedom and choice.’<sup>20</sup> Whilst finding many points of engagement with Kearney’s position, Keller nevertheless continues to require ‘some ambiguity’ in God.<sup>21</sup> In her process theological terms. God ‘must be somehow responsible for the terms of the universe, in which a vast indeterminacy of complexity at the edge of chaos is encouraged... There is a certain erotic risk in creation ... a risk of real harm to self and others.’<sup>22</sup> Thus divine creativity, like that of creatures, is

irreducibly 'ethically ambiguous'<sup>23</sup> and, even whilst assenting to a loving God, Keller affirms that 'to love is also to be mixed up in a chaos that involves hostility, pain, and darkness.'<sup>24</sup>

Whilst Keller's perspective provokes significant theological disruption, it also opens space for a deeper engagement with the ambivalent nature of aesthetics than is usually considered 'decent' when contemplating the divine.<sup>25</sup> Aesthetic creativity and aesthetic awareness often generate strange or disturbing insights as they contemplate a universe far from benevolent in its operations. They mix up creativity with violence and terror and are thus carefully regulated when ethics polices theological thinking. However, pointing to the way in which Etty Hillesum generated an erotic aesthetics of the sacred in resistance to fascism,<sup>26</sup> Keller argues that it remains possible to contemplate the divine in extreme circumstances without attributing responsibility for evil to creaturely failings alone. Such efforts to relieve the divine of responsibility for the consequences of 'ethically ambiguous' creation cannot be sustained within Keller's panentheist understanding, which must hold that 'all things are in God'. However, for Keller, as for Hillesum, an aesthetic approach continues to insist 'the universe in which horror can occur is nonetheless in some sense beautiful. There can be a defiant glow in the darkest darkness ... More ambiguity!'<sup>27</sup>

Beauty and horror. In what follows I seek to reflect further upon the ambivalence of creativity and the significance this holds for theopoetics. I do so through engaging with the writing of Siri Hustvedt, a contemporary American author who has named the writing of ambiguity as the challenge that drives her work: 'ambiguity is inherently contradictory and insoluble, a bewildering truth of fogs and mists... I chase it with words even though it won't be captured'.<sup>28</sup> Artists and artistic creations populate her oeuvre and her explorations of ambiguity are undertaken principally through representing the ambivalence of creative making (*poesis*). As I hope to demonstrate, Hustvedt's sustained engagement with this theme offers important insights for theopoetics. In the focussed space of this article, I will draw principally upon her essays in art criticism and her monumental novel *The Blazing World*.<sup>29</sup>

## II. Writing Ambiguity

*The Blazing World* is a book that Husvedt describes, with authorial affection, as presenting 'ambiguity in all its richness' to her readers.<sup>30</sup> However, many of her reviewers have not read it as an ambivalent text, but rather one which delivers a rather obvious, and for some painfully outdated, feminist message concerning male domination in the art world.<sup>31</sup> The narrative is based around the attempt of a middle-aged woman artist, Harriet Burden (or Harry—the androgyny is important), to reveal the misogyny that has prevented the importance of her work being recognised. After the death of her husband Felix, a successful and influential art dealer, she initiates three major artistic productions under the cover of male artists who connive in her elaborate hoax. The first project, entitled 'The History of Western Art', employs a young and naïve artist, Anton Tish, as surrogate. In the second, 'Suffocation Rooms', her proxy is a close friend—the gay, black, performance artist Phineas Q. Eldridge. In the final work, she collaborates with a rising star of the art world, Rune, to stage an exhibition entitled 'Beneath'. This is the most successful of her performances. That all of these works receive enthusiastic critical acclaim justifies Burden's conviction that 'All intellectual and artistic endeavours...fare better... when the crowd knows that somewhere behind the great work ... it can locate a cock and a pair of balls.'<sup>32</sup> However, the triumphant climax to her scheme also represents the frustration of Burden's ambitions. Rune publicly refutes her claims to be the instigator and prime producer of 'his' work. He later dies, meaning there will be irresolvable claims concerning the terms of their relationship and, thus, contradictory opinions concerning Burden's status as an artist.

The novel is constructed around this central theme and can, at its simplest level, be read as a protest against the ways in which women's creativity has been systematically denied public recognition. Husvedt is happy to acknowledge the validity of this interpretation and the feminist politics which undergird it. However, the work operates upon multiple levels that carry the reader far beyond this presenting issue to decentre and problematise our understanding of creativity itself.

One way in which this happens is through the novel's fragmented construction as the diverse testimonies of many witnesses. The work claims to be the compilation of a mysterious editor, I.V. Hess, whose gender, motivations and judgements remain unclear. Hess collates competing and contradictory accounts of Burden's life and creative legacy.

These include contributions from several art critics (one of whom it transpires was Burden herself in another staging as Richard Brickman), Burden's artist collaborators, her family and close friends, and other diverse characters such as the visionary New Age mystic Sweet Autumn Pinkney. Their accounts are interspersed with Burden's own notes inscribed in numerous journals—labelled alphabetically *but excluding the letter 'I'*. These fragmented reflections recording aspects of her creative journey cannot themselves be aggregated into a coherent whole which would securely inform the reader's evaluation of Burden's art. As Hustvedt states:

there is no single truth here ...I tore the whole business apart by employing nineteen different narrative voices, including an editor. Harry ... is in continual dialogue with herself, and often writes to herself in the second person. I thought of the novel as an explosion of single perspective narration, one intended to destabilize all sanguine narratives about "how it was."<sup>33</sup>

An inspiration for this explosive narrative form comes from Hustvedt's deep engagement with the work of Soren Kierkegaard, whose presence has formed the background of her imaginative life from childhood.<sup>34</sup> Hustvedt is particularly attracted to Kierkegaard's extravagant use of multiple pseudonyms as a creative strategy to challenge hegemonic narratives with 'many small truths, a plurality of voices that create the glorious racket'.<sup>35</sup> Conjecturing that these multiple voices were poetic forms generated from the silence of Kierkegaard's own woundedness, she writes:

he circled the silence and the wound with torrents of words, with multitongued reflection, and I for one am grateful for those worlds within worlds within worlds..... The meanings proliferate. If we are to read him and his masks well, we must dance with him.<sup>36</sup>

The reference to dancing with Kierkegaard's masks is important. Burden's three artistic interventions, constructed under cover of male 'pseudonyms', are in fact three facets of one extended artistic project. This is titled 'Maskings' in the novel—and in one vividly symbolic scene Burden enacts an erotic masked dance with her avatar Rune. Hustvedt has gifted to Burden her own deep identification with Kierkegaard, and the novel frequently refers to the artist's emulation of his masked personas: Kierkegaard's 'poetized personalities', 'heteronyms', 'personified possibilities.' These are regarded as artistic interventions and

their energy is multiply replicated in Burden's creative work. Writing through the pseudonym of the invented art critic, Richard Brickman, Burden states:

adopting the masks allowed her greater fluidity as an artist, an ability to locate herself elsewhere, to alter her gestures and to live out "a liberating duplicity and ambiguity" Each artists mask became for Burden a 'poetized personality' a visual elaboration of a "hermaphrodite self" which cannot be said to belong either to her or to the mask but to a "mingled reality created between them."<sup>37</sup>

### III. Art and Ambiguity

The co-created 'liberating duplicity and ambiguity' described here moves the novel beyond the gender binaries some critics have found troubling into different territory, one in which creativity is located in an 'in between' space which is no longer securely tied to the identity of particular male or female artists. It is generated from a process of mixing, mingling and bleeding into others. Indeed, there exists no singular artistic self for, as Burden reflects, '[t]he thought's words and joys of other people enter us and become ours. They live in us from the start'.<sup>38</sup> 'We are all a ménage'.<sup>39</sup> The genius of the 'Maskings' project is its visual representation of this dazzling ambiguity.

However, in the hall of mirrors that Husvedt has assembled within her text, we gradually become aware that the 'Maskings' project itself is a crystalized metaphor—a poetised possibility. It carries us *beneath* the artistic intervention to enquire into the nature of subjectivity. It also carries us *beyond* it to inquire into the production of social worlds for which art is taken as a trope. In relation to subjectivity, it becomes apparent that before 'Maskings' Burden was already 'masked' as wife, mother, daughter. These are roles in which Husvedt, drawing upon her own extensive readings in psychoanalytic theory, portrays as those in which female subjectivity is experienced as amorphous, fluid and predicated upon a blurring of identities between the self and other. In this frame, Burden speaks of the overflowing joy of early maternal relations which entail a perilous lack of boundaries between mother and child.<sup>40</sup> She also experiences the 'madness' of melancholia in relation to the death of her husband and father, in which the absent other is incorporated into the wounded self.<sup>41</sup> Although psychoanalysis gives Husvedt terms to speak of the amorphous

self through the symbols of maternal *jouissance* and melancholy, what is particularly interesting is that in employing them Husvedt reverses traditional assumptions that they function as barriers to creative agency. States which are frequently viewed as the enemy of artistic self-expression are reinterpreted by her as powerfully creative. She has become convinced that creativity ‘draws from the boundlessness, brokenness, merging identities, disjunctions of space and time, and intense emotions of our unconscious lives’, and far from sublimating these into harmless forms it brings their disruptive energy into the social arena.<sup>42</sup>

This perspective owes much to Husvedt’s engagement with the work of Julia Kristeva. Kristeva herself is a theorist of ambiguity. Complicating the Lacanian separation between the paternal symbolic (the realm of language and culture) and the maternal real (the inchoate realm of subjective dissolution, *jouissance* and death), she postulates a continuing relation between these spheres as the initial relation with the mother’s body continues to impact upon the speaking subject through ‘semiotic operations.’<sup>43</sup> Husvedt offers this gloss on Kristeva’s theory:

Kristeva’s semiotic chora is a maternal space, an affective, patterned, shifting reality dominated by biological drives that predates the speaking subject. After a person learns to speak, to represent the world in symbols ... the semiotic and symbolic exist in a dialectical tension within language itself ... there is a bodily, sensory, temporal presence in symbolic artistic expressions that goes beyond bounded rationality.<sup>44</sup>

As Husvedt states, Kristeva maintains that the semiotic is operative in poetic and artistic creativity—it is endlessly generative but also threatens to overwhelm subjective identity and/or unleash social disruption. The ‘aesthetic task’ entails encountering chaos beyond the regulating safety of the symbolic order:

retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn ... [here] “subject” and ‘object’ push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again—inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject.<sup>45</sup>

The point is, Husvedt argues, ‘that ambiguity is dangerous.’<sup>46</sup> It is dangerous for the creative artist, and particularly so when the artist is a woman, because she may be less able to access mechanisms of separation from the maternal.<sup>47</sup> It is also dangerous for the social

body which mobilises its 'articulate, conscious powers' to protect the system as a whole 'from inarticulate and unstructured areas'.<sup>48</sup> Art therefore unfolds upon a terrain of horror (and ecstasy) which the mechanisms of law, custom, morality, religion, and state force are structured to restrain.

As Madelaine Watts explains, Kristeva's representation of the abjected maternal and its continuing destructive/creative power 'casts a long shadow'<sup>49</sup> over Husvedt's conceptual and fictional world creation. This raises questions for those, like myself, who do not unquestioningly assent to the psycho-sexual categories Kristeva employs. Yet, Kristeva's contribution is to insist upon the profound interrelationship between subjectivity and social forms (which she has exploited to enable reflection upon racism, religion and social revolt as well as art and creativity) and to highlight the intense ambiguity of art born between desire and abjection. It is these aspects of her theory that Husvedt employs to greatest effect in her representations of artistic creativity.

In her works of art criticism, Husvedt returns again and again the legacy of Goya, whose 'traumatic visions' painted in 'The Disasters of War' she regards as the progenitor of art in the modern era.<sup>50</sup> Goya was clearly deeply wounded by what he had witnessed in the Napoleonic Wars. But in transmuting horror into compelling art, his work is deeply ethically ambiguous—implicating the viewer with the artist in an ambivalent pact. Husvedt writes that we encounter Goya's work 'as a loss of borders and of secure ground'. It is Husvedt's conviction that 'the Goya that continues to sustain art in its myriad forms' remains important not only because of his powerful artistic response to particular atrocities, but because he embodies art's founding ambiguity. He is 'a person who felt the anarchic, unspeakable depths we carry within us and was able to make us recognize them.'<sup>51</sup>

Husvedt places her fictional woman artist in the lineage of Goya. Burden 'loved Goya. She called him "a world apart." "He was not afraid to look," she said, "even though there are things that should not be seen."<sup>52</sup> Burden attains this place alongside a number of actual women artists Husvedt admires and whose work compels the viewer to inhabit the same ambivalent terrain beyond secure ground. Two of these are Kiki Smith and Annette Messager. Of Smith's art, which frequently explores abjected states, Husvedt writes: 'To

look at Kiki Smith's work is to enter a borderland where the articulated lines between inside and outside, whole and part, waking and sleeping, human and animal, "I" and "not I" are often in abeyance'.<sup>53</sup> Annette Messenger's creations are particularly resonant for Husvedt because the artist shares her interest in mediating ambiguity, creative replications and maskings:

Messenger populates her work with these soft characters and stuffed corpses to great effect. They are ambiguous beings ... Variations on the mask theme come and go, along with their multiple associations and underground narratives that summon carnivals, masquerades, robbers, S&M games, and torture victims...Spikes and spear forms appear with their allusions to ceremony, ritual, and revolution ... These piercing forms contrast dramatically with the plump and vulnerable fur and flesh of the animals or the faceless humanoid forms Messenger calls replicants in an homage to the movie *Blade Runner*.<sup>54</sup>

There is no doubt that the *ménage* which is *Burden* includes the personas of many women artists and the elaborate fictional descriptions of her artworks draw upon aspects of their creative projects. However, Husvedt acknowledges a particular debt to one artist whose presence permeates the novel—Louise Bourgeois. Bourgeois has a special role to play in Husvedt's quest in her novel to represent the richness of ambiguity.

#### **IV. 'The Divine Louise Bourgeois'<sup>55</sup>**

Bourgeois is an iconic figure. As Mignon Nixon writes, she came to embody '*the woman artist* at the moment when such a figure was needed, when the investigation of women's art instigated by feminism needed a focus.'<sup>56</sup> *Burden* is Husvedt's embodiment of the creative woman, and she states that her 'chewed-up and digested Louise Bourgeois returned in the artist character.'<sup>57</sup> *Burden* plays out many aspects of Bourgeois' artistic struggles and her artistic interventions display many correspondences with Bourgeois' work. This is a deliberate contrivance: 'I wanted to make plain the debt my fictional artist owes to the real artist'.<sup>58</sup>

One of the most important ways in which a correspondence is manifest is in the way Bourgeois and her fictional counterpart both identify the art establishment as hostile to women's creativity—which in Kristevan terms draws even closer to the powers of horror than much male art. Bourgeois states that art is intrinsically bound up with gender and sexuality, resulting in the 'frustration of the woman artist and her lack of ... role as an artist in society'.<sup>59</sup> Husvedt writes that Burden recognises that 'women remain marginal in the art world' and shares Bourgeois' *rage* at this exclusion:

Louise Bourgeois said in an interview, "but ... I find great release in aggressiveness ... So I am violent and I have fantastic pleasure in breaking everything."...Harriet Burden writes in a notebook, "It's coming up, Harry, the blind and boiling, the insane rage that has been building and building since you walked with your head down and didn't even know it. You are not sorry any longer ... You are rising up against the patriarchs."<sup>60</sup>

The boiling rage expressed here is reflected in artistic work itself, in Bourgeois often producing scarred, wounded and threatening forms and regarding this as an integral aspect of her creativity: 'If I'm in a positive mood I'm interested in joining. If I'm in a negative mood I will cut things'.<sup>61</sup> Her 'She Fox' is one of many disturbingly mutilated pieces—vital and powerful, though decapitated and with a huge gash at the neck: 'I cut its head off. I slit its throat'.<sup>62</sup> Burden's art similarly reflects her anger through the production of mutilated and disturbing figures: 'the person, if it was a person, had cuts and slices in its mottled bronze body and hanging breasts'.<sup>63</sup> She even violently attacks and destroys her own creations: 'I saw Harry kneeling on the floor. She had a big kitchen cleaver in her fist and was ripping open one of her metamorphs'.<sup>64</sup> She rejoices that her Maskings project 'has bloody teeth'<sup>65</sup> and identifies herself as 'Medea mad with vengeance'.<sup>66</sup>

The reference to Medea is important in Husvedt's exploration of creative ambivalence through the figure of the female artist. Medea is the wronged wife and murderous mother. Whilst both Bourgeois and Burden raged against their artistic exclusion, beneath this lies the profound rage of the woman annihilated by patriarchal cultural structures in the family and relationships. Bourgeois is well-known for the enduring anger she bore her father, which became the source of artistic fantasies of vengeance and destruction. She is also equally well known for her ambivalent depictions of maternity. She declares herself possessed by a

'furious mother love'<sup>67</sup>, overwhelming but ambiguous which generated, amongst other works, her colossal maternal spiders and the monumental towers of 'I Do/I Undo/I Redo'. The latter represent the constructive and unravelling elements her art strives to portray. Each of these massive structures contains a small icon of motherhood: the first represents harmonious union between nursing mother and child; the second images the 'bad mother' spilling her milk upon the ground and ignoring her wailing offspring; the third displays mother and child ever-joined by an uncuttable umbilical cord that floats between them. In her late work, the mother is represented through the figure of 'She Fox' described earlier. A monumental beast endowed not only with breasts but a phallus.

Bourgeois believed that the creative artist must transgress gendered boundaries.<sup>68</sup> To intermingle and portray male and female genitalia in playful and challenging ways is a characteristic gesture in her work. It is also one that Husvedt borrows for Burden, whose giant construction 'Heathcliff' has female sex organs. Husvedt writes:

The real artist and the invented artist are both interested in sexual blur, in undoing the hard lines between the feminine and the masculine. The ambiguous body appeals to them both. Bourgeois made a career of the mingled body, of penis and breast and buttocks and openings ...that are neither one nor the other, not man, not woman. Bourgeois wrote, "We are all vulnerable in some way, and we are all male-female." When Burden builds a work with her second "mask," ...[a]mong the figures is a hermaphrodite creature who climbs out of a box.<sup>69</sup>

Not only does this particular art work contain a sexually indeterminate figure climbing out of its box, the Maskings project as a whole is about an ambiguous male-female artist seeking to escape the box labelled women's art.

In her critical writing on Bourgeois, Husvedt states that 'the aggression, the desire for vengeance created by the overbearing, dominating, and condescending ways of patriarchy' was translated by her into new artforms which employ the resources that are rejected in transformative ways. In the case of Bourgeois, the resource was her own body with its gendered markings and cultural inscriptions, but also its hermaphroditic openings onto other bodies.<sup>70</sup> Her bodily engagement with everyday objects becomes the substance of her later art—much of which is constructed from salvaged objects resonant with childhood

associations. Most of all, she produces art out of the endlessly ambivalent maternal body with its fierce mother love. 'My body is my sculpture', Bourgeois claims.<sup>71</sup> Hustvedt celebrates its many ambivalent incarnations:

The body of Louise Bourgeois is multiple and potent. It borrows from and transforms the vocabularies of modern art. It is feminine and masculine, terrified and bold, soft and hard. It speaks in the language of space and form and plays with both recognition and strangeness.<sup>72</sup>

Hustvedt also recreates some of these potent bodies in detailed fictional representations (*ekphrases*) of Burden's art.<sup>73</sup> These portrayals owe a particular debt to three of Bourgeois' artistic projects. The first of these are the 'Femme Maison' (the term can connote 'woman home'/'wife house'/'housewife') drawings of the early 1940s. These represent a woman naked to the waist with her upper body transformed into the architecture of a house—Burden's last sculpture takes the form of a 'house woman'. The second are her 'Cells', created in the 1990s. These are enclosed spaces constructed out of scavenged objects, including furniture, mirrors, and doors that evoke rooms which are both familiarly domestic and terrifying. Hustvedt regards these cells—'rooms that summon in the viewer both prisons and biological bodies, bodies that love and rage'<sup>74</sup>—as an entirely original Bourgeoisian poetic form.<sup>75</sup> She has Burden create similar rooms and enclosed spaces that viewers must travel through to encounter the familiar/*unheimlich*. Finally, there are the soft, sewn and torn, scarred and stuffed creatures of Bourgeois' later years, which Hustvedt calls 'dolls of loss and mortality'.<sup>76</sup> These reappear in Burden's creations—particularly her melancholy metamorphs.

## V. Mad Marge

Bourgeois is hugely important as a model for Burden. However, in the rich ambiguity of the novel, we should not regard the fictional artist as simply a mimetic representation of her iconic counterpart. There is also a mingling, a betweenness and an artistic alchemy, taking place in their co-joining that both mirrors and exceeds the Burden's identifications with male artists in the Maskings Project. Hustvedt has spoken of her novel as containing layers upon layers of encounters that extend its ambiguous operations, and this is one of these.

The introduction of another creative female figure, the seventeenth-century writer and natural philosopher Margaret Cavendish, provides a further layer and serves to extend Hustvedt's explorations of mingled creativity beyond the realm of art into the operations of the natural world.

In many ways, Cavendish is a congenial associate for Bourgeois and Burden. She was known as a difficult, uppity, even unstable woman who continually contested female exclusion from cultural, philosophical and scientific debate. She was also someone who blurred the boundaries of gender identity not only through her unwomanly pursuits but also by cross dressing.<sup>77</sup> Cavendish was childless and saw her extensive written works as, in some sense, her progeny. This identification meant that their rejection by the cultural establishment was particularly painful. Although distressed and angered by the failure of her contemporaries to respond to her work, she remained proudly assured of her own genius and that future generations would recognise its merits.

Hustvedt writes extensively about Cavendish in her nonfiction essays. She enjoys the extravagant interminglings her work contains. Cavendish's most famous text, *The Blazing World*, (the title both of Hustvedt's novel and Burden's artistic project after 'Maskings') is a wild fantasy containing:

romance, natural philosophy, theology, and a critique of optics and the microscope  
And it is populated with hybrid characters. The Empress heroine of the Blazing World rules over fox-men and bear-men, as well as bird-ape-spider-and-lice men. (There is no mention of animal women.) Each species of animal-men belongs to a different discipline, to philosophy, chemistry, mathematics, and politics, and they argue furiously among themselves.<sup>78</sup>

This work is sometimes regarded as the forerunner of science fiction, and its use of hybrid characters each with their own species-knowledge is an imaginative representation of Cavendish's understanding of relations in the natural world. Challenging the perception that humanity is supreme in understanding, she asks what creaturely knowledge might entail:

For what man knows, whether Fish do not Know more of the nature of Water, and ebbing and flowing, and the saltness of the Sea; or whether Birds do not know more of

the nature and degrees of Air, or the cause of Tempests; or whether Worms do not know more of the nature of Earth, and how Plants are produced?<sup>79</sup>

Castigating humans for their pride in considering themselves separate and apart from the natural world, Cavendish affirms rather our immersion and participation in a world of active matter: 'But I perceive Man has a great spleen against self-moving corporeal Nature, although himself is part of her'.<sup>80</sup> Carrying this insight to its radical conclusion, she articulates a form of material monism in which whilst it acknowledges different forms of matter (which can be animate or inanimate) asserts that they are so intimately mingled as to be inseparable. For this reason, Cavendish rejects Descartes' mind/body dualism and Hobbes' atomistic social theory—indeed any attempt to identify and distinguish simple, primal forms. Everything is mixed up! As Eileen O'Neill states, 'According to Cavendish, if we pick the smallest unit in nature, it would not be conceptually simple, it would be a composite blending of animate and inanimate matter. Thus, there cannot be atoms, which are by definition the *simples* out of which composite bodies are composed'.<sup>81</sup>

According to Hustvedt, the forms of agency that Cavendish believed radically dispersed in nature are partly to be interpreted as insightful and creative responses to the constraints she experienced:

[Was] Cavendish's position as a woman in that culture at that time unrelated to her idea that "man" is not the only creature in the universe possessed of reason? Isn't it reasonable to acknowledge that her marginalized position gave her a perspective most of her philosophical peers at the time could not share, but also insights to which they were blind?<sup>82</sup>

However, far from being frustrated feminine fancies, her understandings of relationality, complexity and something akin to mind operating in all matter now appear visionary. Hustvedt links Cavendish's thinking to that of David Bohm and Alfred North Whitehead whose work plays such a prominent role in those forms of theopoetics related to process theology.<sup>83</sup> Hustvedt also finds Cavendish an inspirational support in her own explorations of the ambiguous intermingling that constitutes creativity, and portrays her as playing an important role in Burden's later artistic development.

Burden deeply identifies with Cavendish's gender transgression, her experiences of cultural exclusion and her resulting anger and determination to battle onwards with her work despite rejection. As an artist/intellectual, who devours volumes of philosophical writing, Burden 'insists on *ambiguity as a philosophical position* and furiously denies hard binary oppositions'.<sup>84</sup> She is particularly inspired by Cavendish's thinking on the co-mingled nature of creativity: 'polyphony is the only route to understanding'<sup>85</sup> and she seeks to incorporate this into her creative projects. *Maskings* is 'hermaphroditic polyphony'<sup>86</sup> made manifest and her last work, the huge sculptural 'woman house', is named 'Blazing World' in celebration of Cavendish's brilliance. This is a work depicting artistic creativity itself in the form of a birthing woman who is 'home' to myriad tiny creatures visible within her skull and being born from 'between the labial folds of her giant vagina'.<sup>87</sup> The little figures are writing books, making music, having sex, killing and caring for each other. Burden's lover Bruno describes the sculpture in this way: 'Margaret, her Blazing World Mother creature ... the huge, grinning, naked, heated-up, pregnant mama with her hanging boobs ..This woman had worlds inside her'.<sup>88</sup> These worlds are yet other creative minglings—in an extension of Cavendish's insight that relational materiality cannot be untangled, Burden joyfully declares herself to be her art, to be multiple, to be all, to be lost to order sanity and reason, to be Margaret. 'I am a Riot. An Opera. A Menace! I am Mad Madge, Mad Hatter'.<sup>89</sup> Burden's last words are a poignant—and in this case deeply spiritual—echo of this cosmic and relational understanding through which she unites her religious heritage with her artistic vocation:

I remember I am a Jew.

I am multitudes...

I am made of the dead.

Even my thoughts are not my own any more.<sup>90</sup>

These words evoke an insight that Husvedt has articulated in her art criticism. This concerns the power of art to mediate what is absent. The ambiguity of creativity includes representing a relation between what exists and what is lost, absent or destroyed. Indeed, it is when she experiences absence, a void, through art that Husvedt draws closest to an encounter that she must reach for religious language to express. 'I am alone staring into something alien and incomprehensible ...I am alone with God.'<sup>91</sup>

## VI. Blazing Worlds

I have sought to convey in this article the many layers of encounter and intermingling that constitute Hustvedt's literary explorations of creativity through Burden's 'Maskings' project. This artistic intervention is itself a poetic possibility, replicated again and again the pages of the book—but also beyond them. As I have hinted, there are many ways in which Hustvedt herself is intermingled with her artist creation: 'Harry is an outpouring from regions of myself,'<sup>92</sup> she acknowledges. The author is also an 'uppity woman' who insists on writing about art, theory, philosophy and science rather than sticking to the accepted storytelling vocation of lady novelist. She also owns Burden's anger—'I dance, romp, howl, whimper, rage, lecture, and spit on the page'<sup>93</sup>—and the deep sense of being a creative multitude deeply implicated in the lives and works of others.<sup>94</sup> Hustvedt extends this creative mirroring to enfold the critical responses to her novel, some of which were hostile, into an extension of its artistic life.<sup>95</sup> I have continued this development by employing its insights concerning the ambiguities of creativity into a contribution to our theopoetic performances.

There are elements of Hustvedt's work that will resonate harmoniously with reflections on creativity that are already circulating amongst us. Theopoetics, with its elision of human and divine making, is hospitable to those deeply relational understandings of creativity Hustvedt offers. We are already attuned to what Donna Haraway describes as 'simpoesis'<sup>96</sup> and which Kearney beautifully represents in his introduction to *The Art of Anatheism*. Making, he states, is a sacred activity taking place between us—and theopoetics manifests this:

Making something out of nothing. Making something in the image of something else. Creators making creatures that remake their creators; in each other's images, shapes and songs, paintings and poems, dreams and crafts. One great game of holy imagination played with bodies and souls, with hand, tongues ears and eyes. Art as divine-human interplay, again and again.<sup>97</sup>

The vision Husvedt (with Cavendish) offers of creativity extending from the widest bounds of the cosmos, through the subjectivity of creative persons, to the smallest particle imaginable—itsself already actively intertwined and enfolded—is also represented within theopoetics. Keller's reflections in *Cloud of the Impossible* (particularly on Walt Whitman)

and her *Intercarnations* collection express similar understandings. ‘Any body, opened for closer observation, might break into a multitude,’ Keller writes. ‘It turns into a life, a garden, a collection, a collective, a movement, an earth, faster than you can say its name. It gets into you, into the flesh and force field of you.’<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, Keller’s panentheist process theology also enables her to look on darkness and contemplate that creativity might be ‘ethically ambiguous’; that the terms on which the universe unfolds have incorporated horror into the heart of things. Keller’s writing, from *The Face of the Deep* onwards, challenges us to place whatever understanding we have of divine generativity within this context.

What more does an engagement with Hustvedt’s deeply ambiguous representations of creativity represent? In one sense, very little. She complements rather than transforms the conceptual frame offered by Keller’s form of theopoetics, in particular, offers. However, in another sense she gives a great deal in returning us imaginatively to the challenges Keller raises.

Keller’s openings to the ambiguity of creativity have not become mainstream within theopoetics. Indeed, it could be argued that Keller shows a certain reticence in pursuing her own thinking on ambivalence too far in a context of so many urgent political and theological challenges needing to be addressed. To be sure, scholars such as Rivera and Rambo have witnessed to the capability of poetics to embody intense suffering and trauma—and this has included looking into the depths from which this human pain is born. However, understandably, their focus has been less upon the ethical ambiguity of creativity than the creative potential of theopoetics to testify and transform.

In this context, Hustvedt’s visceral incarnation of creative ambiguity through the body of a woman artist compels us to consider the birth of creativity in processes of abjection, pollution, rage and violence. The ambiguity of creativity may be easier to avoid when projected onto cosmic forces, or tchomic depths, than when encountered in the flesh in this way. I am aware, of course, that this is literary fiction about art, and elitist art at that. This seems to place it at far remove from the challenging and ambiguous creative experiences of everyday life—although many of these are also present in the text. However, because the

artist is a woman we cannot avoid recomposing dominant cultural understandings of creativity as a force of light issuing uncorrupted from its generative source. We are challenged to abandon ‘hygienic’ models of creativity, ‘of clean borders and sharp edges that delineate difference’.<sup>99</sup>

When our understandings of creativity become infected in the manner Husvedt challenges us to contemplate, it becomes more difficult to fall back on the notions of creativity we often routinely employ in our theopoetic work. Here creativity is often used simply as a cypher to signal distance from prosaic forms of philosophy and theology that have become sterile for us. We frequently evoke the creative past of primal sacred forms, and contrast these with the regulative forms in which ontotheological thinking is now expressed, without considering the ‘blood at the root’ of poetic making. We engage in cheerful poetic evocations of transformed futures, whereas Husvedt challenges us to contemplate that creativity may rather represent another mode of transfiguring our loss:

Another mode of expression is required, one that can hold painful contradictions and agonizing ambiguities within it. It becomes necessary to turn to the poetic image, one that splinters into semantic plurality, one that allows us to see, in Celan’s words, “ein Grab in den Lüften,” “a grave in the air.”<sup>100</sup>

The end of Husvedt’s *The Blazing World* is not, however, tragic. In keeping with the stubborn awkwardness the irascible Burden represents, it is darkly funny. After the artist’s death, the new age mystic, Sweet Autumn Pinkney, who is Husvedt’s holy fool, sees the ‘Blazing World’ in Burden’s studio glowing with light:

I just stood there smiling because the colors were still there—reds and oranges and yellows and greens and blues and violets—blazing hot and bright in that big room where Harry used to work, and I knew for certain that each and every one of those wild, nutty, sad things Harry had made was alive with the spirit. For a second there, I could almost hear them breathing.<sup>101</sup>

No austere cosmic awareness, no apophatic luminous darkness here. This is technicolour. Sweet Autumn’s visions are in keeping with her own ‘vulgar’ spiritual universe of auras and chakras and crystals. They are the corrupt creations of spiritual systems that we are meant to question and contest. But they enable her to apprehend something which is vibrant and

very beautiful as well. Whatever this creative power is, it is very blazing hot and bright. And yes. Alive with the spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Keller in Richard Kearney and Catherine Keller, 'Beyond the Impossible: Dialogue with Catherine Keller' in Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmerman (eds.) *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney Debates God*, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Siri Hustvedt, *What I Loved* (London: Sceptre, 2003), p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> Pioneers of theo-poetics Melanie May, Rubem Alves stress the significance of embodiment in theo-poetics – a theme that is now widely explored. See Melanie May, *A Body Knows: A Theo-poetics of Death and Resurrection* (Ann Arbor, MI: Continuum Press, 1995); Rubem Alves, *The Poet, The Warrior, The Prophet* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> See Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> David Miller seeks to make a significant distinction between theo-poetry which uses literary resources to reimagine theology and theo-poetics which does its work after the death of God. David Miller, 'Theo-poetry or Theo-poetics?', *Cross Currents* 60.1 (2010): 6-23. In contrast, Catherine Keller argues that the effervescence of poetry is essential for theo-poetics. See Catherine Keller, 'Theopoesis and the Pluriverse: Notes on a Process' in Roland Faber and Jeremy Fackenthal (eds) *Theopoetic Folds: Philosophising Multifariousness* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 179-94.

<sup>6</sup> For explorations of poetics in relation to embodiment and trauma see Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015) and Shelly Rambo, 'Theo-poetics of Trauma' in Eric Boynton, Peter Capretto and Mary-Jane Rubenstein (eds) *Trauma and Transcendence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018). Richard Kearney presents the hopeful celebratory image in Richard Kearney, 'Enabling God' in John Panteleimon Manoussakis (ed.) *After God: Richard Kearney and the Continental Turn in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 39-54.

<sup>7</sup> See John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013). Also see Richard Kearney, 'Epiphanies of the Everyday: Toward a Micro-Eschatology' in John Panteleimon Manoussakis (ed.) *After God: Richard Kearney and the Continental Turn in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 3-20.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Keller links theo-poetics to Eastern traditions of theosis—as does Richard Kearney. Kearney also draws upon radical Franciscan traditions mediated through Jesuit spirituality to explore a deeply incarnational

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understanding of theo-poetics particularly evidenced in the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. See Catherine Keller, *Intercarnations: Exercises in Theological Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), p. 107. See also Richard Kearney, 'Where I Speak From: A Short Intellectual Biography' in Daniel Veldman and Yolande Steenkamp, *Debating Otherness with Richard Kearney: Perspectives from South Africa* (Cape Town: AOSIS, 2018), pp. 31-61. Radical theology, however, sees theo-poetics as a discourse that takes place after the death of God. See Miller, 'Theopoetry or Theo-poetics'.

<sup>9</sup> These are not contradictory positions! For artistic engagements with theo-poetics see Richard Kearney and Matthew Clemente (eds), *The Art of Anatheism* (London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018). Keller argues that theo-poetics facilitates dialogue with progressive allies. See, for example, Keller, *Intercarnations*, pp. 105-6.

<sup>10</sup> As this article argues, most theo-poetic practitioners take this position. Keller explores the relation of theo-poetics to process philosophy and theology. See Keller, 'Theopoesis and the Pluriverse'.

<sup>11</sup> These are the perspectives of Caputo, Kearney and Keller respectively. See Caputo, *Insistence of God*; Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Keller, 'Theopoesis and the Pluriverse', p. 186.

<sup>12</sup> See Keller, *Intercarnations*, p. 117.

<sup>13</sup> Sheila Gallagher, 'Paradise Gardens and the Anatheism of Art' in Richard Kearney and Matthew Clemente (eds), *The Art of Anatheism* (London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), p. 92.

<sup>14</sup> Catherine Keller, 'Theo-poetics: A Becoming History' in R. Kearney (Ed.) *The Art of Anatheism*, p.29.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Catherine Keller, 'Kearney's Endless Morning' in John Panteleimon Manoussakis (ed.) *After God: Richard Kearney and the Continental Turn in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 360.

<sup>17</sup> Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 179.

<sup>18</sup> Keller, 'Kearney's Endless Morning', p. 360.

<sup>19</sup> *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney Debates God*, ed. Richard Kearney (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016)

<sup>20</sup> Richard Kearney in Kearney and Keller, 'Beyond the Impossible', p. 49.

<sup>21</sup> Catherine Keller in Kearney and Keller, 'Beyond the Impossible', p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Kearney and Keller play with the use of the term 'decent' in this conversation. Keller settles in the end for keeping God 'lovable' if not 'decent'. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>26</sup> See my own article exploring this issue. Heather Walton 'Sex in the War: An Aesthetics of Resistance in the Diaries of Ety Hillesum', *Theology and Sexuality* 12.1 (2005), pp. 51-61.

<sup>27</sup> Catherine Keller in Kearney and Keller, 'Beyond the Impossible', p. 54.

<sup>28</sup> Siri Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman or A History of My Nerves* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2010), p. 199.

<sup>29</sup> Siri Hustvedt, *The Blazing World* (London: Sceptre, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Siri Hustvedt in Claire Maniez, 'An Interview with Siri Hustvedt', *Transatlantica* 2 (2016:2), p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of the critique that Hustvedt does not sufficiently acknowledge the oppressive power Burden exercises over others, particularly over her surrogate Eldridge, and reaffirms binary gender categories see Klaus Lösch and Heike Paul 'Dimensions of Tacit Knowledge and Art(s) of Explication in Siri Hustvedt's Work' in Johanna Hartmaan, Christine Marks, Hubert Zapf (eds) *Zones of Focussed Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016) p. 147.

<sup>32</sup> Hustvedt, *The Blazing World*, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Hustvedt, 'Interview', p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> As a child, Hustvedt's neighbours were translators of Kierkegaard's works. She gave a keynote address at the International Congress celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth.

<sup>35</sup> Siri Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women: Essays on Art, Sex, and the Mind* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2016), Kindle location 9152.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Kindle location 9158.

<sup>37</sup> Hustvedt, *The Blazing World*, p. 272.

<sup>38</sup> This is reported by her friend Rachel Briefman. Hustvedt, *The Blazing World*, p. 251.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16

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<sup>41</sup> Here Husvedt is, once again, offering her readers through *Burden* the opportunity to engage with elements which have been hugely significant in her own creative life. She similarly experienced an ecstatic eradication of selfhood in the birth of her daughter. She also testifies experiences akin to melancholia when her own deep mourning after bereavement resulted in ‘a blur of betweenness or a partial possession by a beloved other that is ambivalent, complex, and heavily weighted with emotions I can’t really articulate.’ Husvedt, *The Shaking Woman*, p. 126.

<sup>42</sup> Siri Hustvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking* (London: Sceptre, Kindle Edition, 2012), p. 273.

<sup>43</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Leon Roudiez (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 134.

<sup>44</sup> Husvedt, *Woman Looking at Men*, Kindle location 6745.

<sup>45</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 18.

<sup>46</sup> Husvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 73.

<sup>47</sup> For Kristeva, mechanisms for separating from the maternal are more powerfully operative in the case of men than women. Thus, in her early work, she suggests that male artists are more equipped to survive potentially destructive encounters when engaging in the dangerous work of engaging with the semiotic. However, in Kristeva’s later work a new vision of ‘female genius’ emerges in which she celebrates distinctive characteristics that she believes can be identified within female creativity. These include a self that cannot be separated from its various attachments and a tendency always to return creativity to life rather than employing distancing mechanisms to abstract from life in the pursuit of ideal forms. Whilst now acknowledging the generative potential of these attributes, Kristeva continues to insist that the creative woman must be possessed of ‘mental hermaphroditism’ which will enable them to survive the vicissitudes of their creative journeys.

<sup>48</sup> Husvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 73.

<sup>49</sup> Madeleine Watts, ‘I Fall to Pieces’, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, July 2014. Online: <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/fall-pieces-madeleine-watts-blazing-world/>. Accessed July 30<sup>th</sup> 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Siri Hustvedt, *Mysteries of the Rectangle: Essays on Painting* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), p. 118.

<sup>51</sup> Husvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 335.

<sup>52</sup> Husvedt, *Blazing World*, p. 82.

<sup>53</sup> Husvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 270.

<sup>54</sup> Husvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking*, p. 296.

<sup>55</sup> Husvedt, *The Blazing World*, p. 255. Emphasis in original.

<sup>56</sup> Mignon Nixon, *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art* (Cambridge Mass: MIT University Press, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Husvedt, *Woman Looking at Men*, Kindle location 684.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, Kindle location 683.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, Kindle location 747.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, Kindle location 709.

<sup>61</sup> Louise Bourgeois quoted in Marina Warner, *Forms of Enchantment*, p. 97.

<sup>62</sup> Nast, Condé ‘The Spiders Web: Louise Bourgeois and Her Art’ *The New Yorker*, Feb 4<sup>th</sup>, 2002. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/02/04/the-spiders-web>. Accessed July 30<sup>th</sup> 2019.

<sup>63</sup> Husvedt, *The Blazing World*, p. 168.

<sup>64</sup> Husvedt, *ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>65</sup> Husvedt, *ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>66</sup> Husvedt, *Woman Looking at Men*, Kindle location 709.

<sup>67</sup> Louise Bourgeois in Warner, *Forms of Enchantment*, p. 97.

<sup>68</sup> As I have already discussed in note 47, Kristeva argues that mental hermaphroditism is a requirement of female creativity. A controversial position that Husvedt appears to assent to and explore through this link between Bourgeois and *Burden*.

<sup>69</sup> Husvedt, *Woman Looking at Men*, Kindle Location, 693.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, Kindle location 726.

<sup>71</sup> Louise Bourgeois quoted in Marina Warner, *Louise Bourgeois* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2000) p. 23.

<sup>72</sup> Husvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking*, Kindle location 3630.

<sup>73</sup> Gabriele Rippl argues that, ‘notional ekphrases’, i.e. descriptions of fictional paintings and photographs are central in Husvedt’s novels, lending them a striking visual quality’. Gabriele Rippl, ‘The Rich Zones of

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Genre Borderlands: Siri Hustvedt's Art of Mingling' in in Johanna Hartman, Christine Marks, Hubert Zapf (eds) *Zones of Focussed Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), p. 35.

<sup>74</sup> Hustvedt, *Woman Looking at Men*, Kindle location 727.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, Kindle location 674.

<sup>76</sup> Hustvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking*, Kindle location 3627.

<sup>77</sup> '[T]he Duchess sometimes wore men's clothes, vests and cavalier hats.' Hustvedt, *Blazing World*, p. 221.

<sup>78</sup> Hustvedt, *Woman Looking at Men*, Kindle location 5272.

<sup>79</sup> Margaret Cavendish in Deborah Boyle, *The Well-Ordered Universe: The Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 80.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>81</sup> Eileen O'Neill quoted in Boyle, *The Well-Ordered Universe*, p. 74.

<sup>82</sup> Hustvedt, *Woman Looking at Men*, Kindle location 6047.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, Kindle location 5575.

<sup>84</sup> Hustvedt, *The Blazing World*, p. 271. Emphasis mine.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 314-15

<sup>89</sup> Hustvedt, *Woman Looking at Men*, Kindle location 2427.

<sup>90</sup> Hustvedt, *The Blazing World* pp. 360-61

<sup>91</sup> The encounter with absence is described in relation to the work of Jean-Siméon Chardin and Juan Sánchez Cotán in Hustvedt, *Mysteries of the Rectangle*, pp. 45; 48.

<sup>92</sup> Siri Hustvedt in Katie Roiphe, 'It was really fun writing as an enraged person', *Financial Times* March 7<sup>th</sup> 2014. <https://www.ft.com/content/86fff80e-a3fd-11e3-88b0-00144feab7de> accessed July 30<sup>th</sup> 2019.

<sup>93</sup> Hustvedt, *Woman Looking at Men*, Kindle location 2427.

<sup>94</sup> Hustvedt explores her own experience of mirror-touch synaesthesia in which 'others are continually confirmed in us through bodily sensations that arrive just by looking at them, a heightened form of embodied simulation' as both a source, and metaphor for, her own creativity. Hustvedt, *Woman Looking at Men*, Kindle location 6697.

<sup>95</sup> Hustvedt states:

I treated the reviews as extensions of the novel itself, part of Harry's experiment in perception—what she calls "proliferations." I felt more like godmother to Harry's masking project than the author. I may never be as untouched by bad reviews as I was with that book. But when reviewers were irritated, when they sided with one character or another, when they missed the irony or complained about the references to scholarship in various disciplines, I felt every single response had already been anticipated by, often even described in the book itself. I noticed with amusement how annoyed some reviewers were. They were threatened because there is no single truth here.

Hustvedt, 'Interview', p.7

<sup>96</sup>An unpredetermined, developing and collective creativity. See Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

<sup>97</sup> Richard Kearney, 'God Making: Theopoetics and Anatheism' in Richard Kearney and Matthew Clemente (eds), *The Art of Anatheism* (London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), p. 1.

<sup>98</sup> Keller, *Intercarnations*, p. 1.

<sup>99</sup> Hustvedt, *Mysteries of the Rectangle*, p. 118.

<sup>100</sup> Hustvedt, *Woman Looking at Men*, Kindle location 848.

<sup>101</sup> Hustvedt, *The Blazing World*, p. 379.