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As Above, [So Below]*

Faith Wilding

Confession

I desired to have full fruition of my Beloved, and to understand and taste him to the full. I desired that his Humanity should to the fullest extent be one in fruition with my humanity, and that mine then should hold its stand and be strong enough to enter into perfection until I content him, who is perfection itself....To that end I wished he might content me interiorly with his Godhead, in one spirit, without withholding anything from me.... For that is the

[As Above], So Below

Critical Art Ensemble

Confession

More than anything in this world, I wanted to have a child. My gynecologist had always told me that I would never be able to conceive a child by natural means due to blocked fallopian tubes. She suggested adoption to me, but also suggested that if I was prepared financially, and psychologi-

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most perfect satisfaction: to grow up in order to be God with God.... In this sense I desired that God give himself to me, so that I might content him.... Then it was to me as if we were one without difference. So can the Beloved, with the loved one, each wholly receive the other in all full satisfaction of the sight, the hearing, and the passing away of the one in the other. After that I remained in a passing away in my Beloved, so that I wholly melted away in him and nothing any longer remained to me of myself; and I was changed and taken up in the spirit.

(Hadewijch of Brabant, "Visions," c. 1200s)

cally prepared for potential disappointment, I could possibly have my own child given proper medical assistance. I was prepared to do anything, and I did. The process was grueling both psychologically and physically, and the worst part was the harvesting of my eggs and their subsequent implantation. These procedures were as invasive as they were uncomfortable—all variety of surgical instruments cutting, puncturing, sucking, and sliding around my pelvic and vaginal regions. To stay sane, I just kept repeating to myself, "You are going to have a baby." At the end of the process, I cannot describe the excitement, pleasure, and relief when my doctor appeared before me in a glowing white lab coat and said, "You're pregnant." Life was inside of me.

(Anonymous, c. 1990s)

The Paradox of Creation: Temptation and Salvation

Medieval body maps reflect Christian beliefs about the human body as a microcosm of the macrocosm—the attunement of each organ to a heavenly body, of each bodily fluid to an earthly element. Medieval medical practice was largely based on the idea of homeopathy, that like cures like, and of correspondences: As above, so below. Though much homeopathic practice was based on ancient (pagan) sources of herbal knowledge, it was adapted to a Christian belief system that placed the (souled) human being at the center of God's great world plan, and at the center of the cosmos.

Medieval theology had to grapple with paradoxical conceptions of sexuality, reproduction, and the relationship between body and soul. On one hand, the body was

The Paradox of Reproduction

Capitalism has always had an ambivalent attitude toward the process of reproduction. On one hand, the economic system requires that labor and market populations be consistently replenished. On the other hand, the sexual activity associated with reproduction has been viewed as an unfortunate evil that can detract from the overall efficiency of the system—people engaged in sexual behaviors are neither producing nor consuming; rather, they are exercising personal sovereignty which, ipso facto, is counter-productive and confounds top-down hierarchies. This situation has led to a peculiar opposition in which the product is embraced but the process is rejected. Unfortunately, one requires the other, and the problem is doubled

regarded as a necessary evil which housed the soul during its sojourn on earth. In this view, the lapsed body inherited from Adam's fall is a site of temptation and sin; flesh is imperfect and decaying, and must be constantly monitored, controlled, and punished into submission and obedience. On the other hand, the human body was regarded as the pinnacle of God's creation; the body was a means of access to the divine and a means of salvation. As such, it exhibited the Creator's gifts to Adam and Eve—beauty, the senses, and the marvelous powers of generation. These paradoxical readings of the body had to be continually negotiated by the Church which sought to control both the believer's body and soul, and to control human sexual relations through the sacrament of reproductive, heterosexual marriage.

because engaging the process does not necessarily yield the product. In turn, various secular attempts have been made by power vectors to streamline sexuality in order to limit it to activities which have some benefit to the political economy.

The primary strategy used by institutions of authority to eliminate sexuality beyond that needed for purposes of reproduction is to label all other sexual practices as deviant, and thereby punishable socially and/or legally. With one mighty blow, gay, lesbian, and all varieties of fetishist sexualities are eliminated from "public" acceptability. While such measures in no way stop individuals forcibly placed in these categories from secretly or defiantly exercising their individual sovereignty, they serve as a reminder

The contradictory medieval conceptions of the body became particularly charged when they were applied to theories and images of sexuality and reproduction. Caroline Walker Bynum has pointed out that medieval body images exhibit a preoccupation with fertility and decay. The Church fathers needed to naturalize the idea of sexuality for reproductive purposes only, and to reinforce motherhood as a redemptive state for women. The figure of Mary was constructed to support this ideology. Modeled partly after desirable characteristics of local pagan goddesses, and partly constructed to accord with programs of religious body control, the image of Mary represents paradoxical and miraculous qualities. She is a virgin, yet fertile; mother of a divine son with whom she is also joined in mystic marriage; and she is an intercessor between heaven and earth. Mary was associated with mother, vessel, and

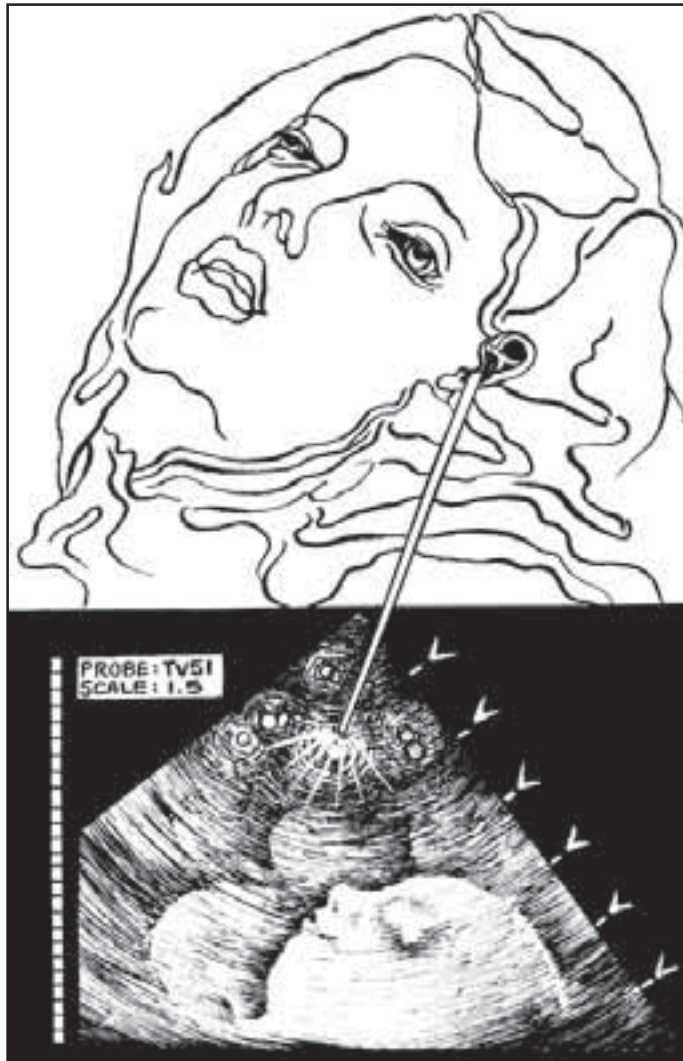
that participation in any activity not compliant with capitalist imperatives will bring punishment(s) from which there is no escape.

To intensify the situation, even straight heterosexuality is in a continuous process of streamlining. The methods employed by the capitalist power vectors against individuals vary in accordance with the person's class position. These methods are most visible in the US—the avant-garde culture of pancapitalist authoritarianism. For the underclass, punishment is aimed almost exclusively at women. The domestic labor required to produce a work force socially engineered to maintain a population intended for low-end service work and/or as a reserve labor army is not considered labor that should be

willing womb—characteristics and qualities that all women of the time were expected to emulate. According to Catholic dogma, as a reward for her virtue, Mary was never subject to decay and she was physically taken into heaven. Thus Mary was reconfigured to fit the Church's strategy to control the female reproductive process, while preserving the idea of the body as the site of purity and salvation.

The figure of Mary was always contrasted with the figure of Eve, who represented the body as a site of temptation and sexual pleasure. God punished Eve's sexual pleasure by afflicting women with painful childbirth, and by subjugating women to their husband's will in all matters. A woman could redeem her flesh only by becoming a mother in Church-sanctioned heterosexual marriage, or through celibate asceticism, in which the body was renounced with the

rewarded; rather, population production is punished in part due to its association with sexuality. In spite of the fact that having sex can yield a functional product, underclass women in the US are now increasingly being denied government subsidies for the necessary population production they contribute to the economy. Sexual pleasure is covertly taxed, and underclass women pay the tax by giving their domestic labor to the state free of charge. The current welfare reform acts intensify the situation by doubling the labor demands on underclass women. Not only must they pay their sexuality tax, but typically, they must also work in the service economy at jobs that pay wages below what is necessary to maintain the domestic labor space in which they are enslaved.



exception of its use to perform good works. The reward for bringing the flesh into spiritual submission was salvation in a heavenly life hereafter. It took rigorous institutional discipline and the creation of a mythology of self-sacrifice to naturalize the idea of separating sexual pleasure from reproduction.

Compulsory motherhood as a means of salvation, and as the only sanctioned way to experience sexuality, went hand in hand with a profound change in the development of medical practice in the Middle Ages. From the 5th to the 13th century, the Church consistently scorned secular intervention in bodily processes; during that time the peasant classes were often treated by women lay healers, herbalists, and midwives, while priests ministered to royalty and the aristocracy. In the 13th century—just as the

For the middle class, the situation is very different since wages are generally high enough to subsidize household maintenance. Middle class individuals in the US (whatever their sexual preferences) are threatened by civil law. For example, sexual harassment initiatives in the workplace are a tremendous aid to capitalist institutions in eliminating disruptive sexual expressions in the space of production. Since any unwanted sexual expression could be grounds for a civil suit that could cost the perpetrator he/r job and potentially all the wealth s/he has accumulated over he/r years of work, the only survival technique open to individuals is to repress themselves and behave as asexually as possible. To be sure, for capitalist agencies the sexual harassment initiative is a gift from heaven that helps to insure that all employees will engage only in rational and

cult of the Virgin Mary was reaching its zenith—university-trained male doctors began to turn medicine into a quasi-scientific profession from which women were completely banned, causing the loss of their extensive practical experience with and knowledge of the body. Though women still continued to act as midwives and herbalists for centuries thereafter, they were often condemned as witches and put to death for doing so. Thus dual controls, religious and secular, were put in place to ensure that like Mary, women would remain passive and compliant in their relationship to the body.

Even so, compulsory marriage and motherhood seemed a less desirable choice for a minority of women. This was especially true of literate women from the upper echelon of society who entered celibate female communities such as

instrumental activity throughout the working day. This situation is doubled with the emergence of victim-driven harassment policies. Here, any sexual behavior an individual witnesses that could be construed as “offensive” must be reported to harassment investigators (literally, bureaucratic sex police) on the premises. Failure to report what could be construed as an act of harassment leaves one potentially liable in the event of a civil lawsuit. In this case, one does not have to be the “victim” or the “perpetrator,” s/he only has to witness a sexual expression to be involved in the legal process. This way all employees in institutions with a victim-driven policy are coerced into becoming sex police.

Where then is sexual expression acceptable? It is alive and well in the spectacle. An individual can watch all the

convents or Beguinages. These communities were open to all, so on rare occasions, women of the peasant classes were also accepted into the communities. Some of the women, who practiced extreme voluntary asceticism, holy fasting, and mortification of the flesh as a means to resist compulsory motherhood, presented the Church fathers with a dilemma. On the one hand, in acquiescence to Church dogma, holy women renounced secular human sexual experience as the Church required of those who desired to save themselves from the sins of Eve. On the other hand, these women escaped the instrumentality of reproduction and used their bodies as a means to individual sovereignty and social power. In a truly homeopathic reversal, the body was reformatted as a site for autonomy. The flesh was explored as a means to freedom through sensual presence—female mystics physically embraced God in the

Hollywood passion s/he wants, or s/he can have all the cybersex s/he desires. As long as sex is out of the material world, and safely on the screen where it becomes an object of consumption or an object to motivate consumption, it generally stays within the bounds of public acceptability. Sex must not be an act of direct participation; it can only be passively witnessed during leisure hours, if an individual wishes to escape punishment. Hence, individuals of the middle class are caught between spectacular sexuality or state-sanctioned monogamous heterosexuality. By accepting the latter option, individuals are rewarded with relative tolerance of their private, useless sexuality. For the underclass, the situation is worse, as members of this class are limited to spectacular sexuality, because engaging heterosexuality only serves to

ensouled flesh of His decaying creations by tasting the wounds of lepers and the vomit of the sick, and in feeling the pain of their own emaciated bodies. Decaying flesh was transubstantiated in the holy fire of the mystic's desire to *independently* commune with God. These powerful (albeit rare) acts of spiritual rebellion were a theological knot that the Church patriarchy was at a loss to untie.

Flesh Redeemed: Separating Sin and Creation

In separating sexual pleasure (sin) from reproductive creation, the relationship of matter and spirit (body and soul) had to be articulated, and a means of mediating the two orders had to be created. In order to redeem sinful flesh, Christ had to become flesh in a redemptive act of creation—a

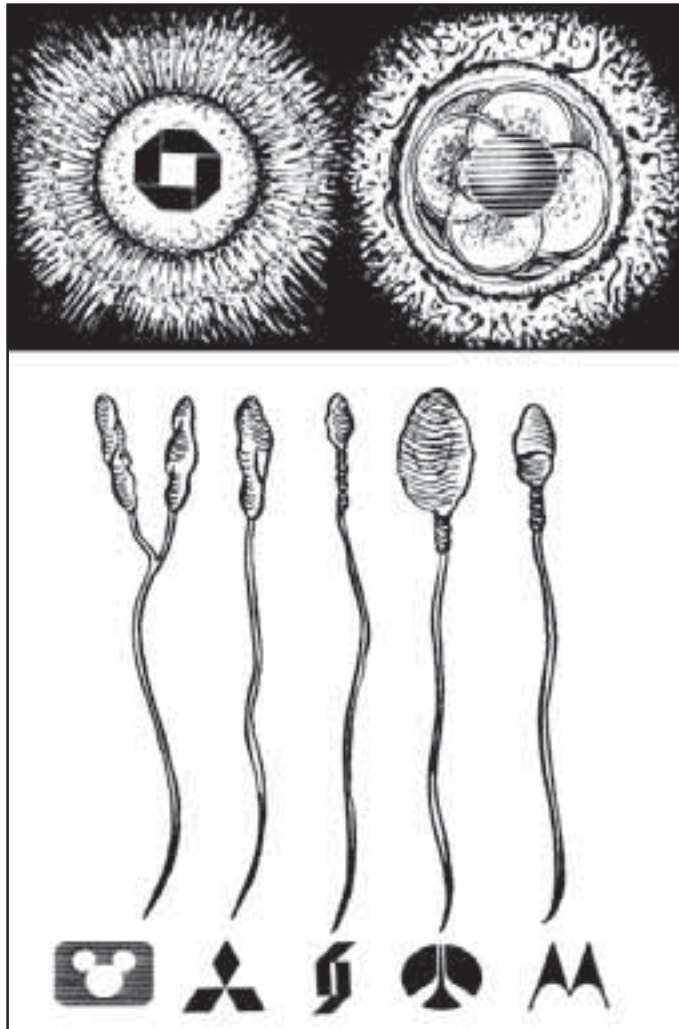
increase the probability of enslavement to the forces and spaces of production.

Flesh Redeemed: Separating Sexuality and Reproduction

While pancapitalism's Orwellian anti-sex campaign is certainly a success, it can always be improved. Improvement is partly measured by the degree to which sexuality and reproduction are separated. Once separation becomes a legitimized and accepted element of everyday life, totalized intolerance of sexuality can be initiated in the middle class. The first experiments in the practical separation of sexuality and reproduction are currently underway. (Sexuality and

homeopathic strategy. In a structure of correspondence, he became the new Adam and perfected human matter through his birth, death, and resurrection. Mary, as the reprogrammed Eve—the pure vessel, fruitful though not tainted by human fertilization—had the special task of redeeming female bodies, especially the organs of sexual reproduction (*materia mater*). Christ was a virtually conceived embryo that became both human and immortal (resurrected) flesh. Mary was the ethereal flesh machine (the hardware), who interfaced with God (the programmer) through the disembodied Word transmitted by the bodiless angel Gabriel (software). In terms of a reproductive narrative, this is an example of the creation of perfect flesh produced with perfect efficiency: no wasted sperm, no ovulation problems, no failed implantations or blocked fallopian tubes, and no repeated attempts at conception. As noted

reproduction have long since been separated symbolically by the division between psychology and biology). By obtaining volunteers for this flesh experiment from pools of individuals intent on having children of their own, but who are unable to do so without medical intervention, medical science hopes to demonstrate that a “better baby” (one better adapted to the imperatives of pancapitalism) can be produced through rationalized intervention. Once such a demonstration occurs, there are empirical grounds for the argument that medical mediation of the total process of reproduction is both desirable and necessary. The promise of a “fitter” child can act as a spectacular resource to convince those members of the middle class not in need of medical intervention to reproduce that separating sexuality from reproduction is beneficial to



above, after incorporating and giving birth to divinity, Mary's body too became metaflesh which did not die or decay as sinful flesh does, and was taken into heaven for eternity.

The Church understood the need for providing inspirational and concrete representations of the mysteries of divine creation. The narrative of Mary's miraculous conception and virgin birth was encoded in increasingly hyperbolic and beautiful images which served as exemplary and devotional guides for an illiterate lay population. In particular, the great medieval cathedrals dedicated to Mary—such as Chartres, Notre Dame, and Autun—provided ecstatic sensual environments in which soaring architecture, glowing rose windows, colored frescoes, ornate shrines bedecked with jewels and gold leaf, and sublime

both parents and offspring. Rather than letting nature take its course in reproduction, representatives of medical science are inserted as mediating efficiency experts. Hence, not only are sexuality and reproduction practically separated, but so are the parents. This way, reproduction better conforms to the capitalist necessity of efficiency: No useless activity occurs in the reproductive process, and less genetic material is wasted. Excess genetic material is reconfigured into a substance for commodified process, as opposed to becoming one of nonrational potential. In this manner, the reproductive process becomes practically reclassified as a purely medical process.

Since the market for rationalized reproduction had already been structurally established before the neces-

music exemplified the rewards of obedience, self-abnegation, and self-surrender.

By following Mary's example and becoming obedient wombs in sanctioned marriages, women could aspire to transcendence and salvation. In essence, women passively sacrificed their subjectivity to the church-state. In the ecstatic surrender of self to the divine order, the excess of sinful sexuality was transformed into the excess of instrumental reproduction. At the same time, the saints of this order could find solace in the knowledge that they were using their bodies to further providence, rather than satisfying their own selfish desires. The belief that they were producing new Christian souls (soldiers) to populate the earth and carry out God's plan for creation functioned to help many women endure painful cycles of endless pregnancy and childbirth.

sary methods and technologies became available, the initial volunteers for the rationalized reproductive experiments serve also to fund further investigation (as well as providing products for spectacularization). Here, research actually generates profits, but the essential element in this experiment is currently not so much profits as market share. With "nature" functioning as a prime competitor, seducing people away from constructions of natural reproduction will be difficult. This is why the product itself and its spectacularization are currently more important than profits. If the middle class is not persuaded to accept interventionist practices, the experiment will stagnate, and the desired practical separation of reproduction and sexuality will not be fully realized.

The mediation of the Church in this process was an extremely powerful instrument of enforcement, as well as an effective monitoring mechanism. If a woman did not produce a child every year or so, she was answerable to her husband, the priest, and ultimately the whole congregation. Statues and shrines of the Virgin Mary often were covered with the offerings and the messages of women praying for Her intervention in conception and childbirth. In surrendering themselves to the ecstasy of divinely-mediated reproduction, these saints were sustained by the vision of perfect flesh—the resurrected flesh—which was from the beginning the reward promised by Christianity to the devout. In the image of the resurrected flesh, paradoxical aspects of the body are finally transcended and resolved. Like the ecstatic mystic whose body does not decay after death, the resurrected mother's

Should the reproductive research wing of the flesh machine fail in its project, the loss to pancapitalism as a whole will be tremendous. The long desired production of a person who uses he/r body solely for purposes of production and consumption (and who is thereby perfectly orderly) will never occur. From the perspective of pancapitalism, nothing less than production of capitalist saints will do. The new Saints of the Pancapitalist Order will be those of perfect flesh. From their genetic code to their cultural code, they will reflect capitalist order and follow its commandments. They will sacrifice their minds and bodies to improve and refine the pancapitalist order. The Saints of the Pancapitalist Order will know a different kind of excess—not one emerging from convivial sociability or erotic, convulsive pleasure, but one dictated by commun-

flesh will be gathered up with the community of Saints to become one perfect body in eternity. And for this ecstasy no sacrifice could be too harsh. Today, this pervasive religious narrative of reproduction as a means of personal salvation and transcendence still lies at the heart of the compulsion for biological reproduction, even though the narrative has become secularized, and the interventions of science have replaced those of divinity.

ion with the means of production and by localized proximity to the commodity. The life of a Saint will be one of duty and service to the bureaucratic and the technocratic agencies from which one has received he/r genetic and cultural design. To act against these agencies will be to turn against the Creator—a lost cause suited only for the unfit. All of this the Saints of the Pancapitalist Order will do, and they will do it even if denied a reasonable share in the profits of their production. The reward for their holiness is a higher probability of genetic survival—a promise of life everlasting in which their redeemed flesh conquers the limits of mortality by spreading its canonized code across space and time.

Conclusion

The mythic structure separating sexuality from reproduction/creation has been fairly constant in the development of Western culture. The one major disruption is a directional shift in the ultimate purpose. Currently, the dynamic of this separation is moving toward the material rather than the ethereal, toward the rational rather than the nonrational, and toward the visible rather than the invisible. However, what is truly interesting is not so much the dynamics of the situation, but the manner in which contingent elements are replaced within the general mythic structure. The medieval vision of human corruption in need of intervention has remained. The contingent elements—the institution of intervention and the process by which successful intervention is obtained—have been transformed. Rather than the Church, with its connection to angelic saviors, acting as the institution of redemption in regard to the sin of sexuality and the finitude of the flesh, the scientific/medical establishment, with its connection to nature's Code, has become the institution of mediation for those who hope to achieve the grace of peaceful immortality. If maximum access to the secrets and mysteries of the Code is desirable, more is needed than faith in its omnipresent being. Devotees must also complete the expected round of works required of each individual. Works are no longer those of rigorous prayer, engaging the sacraments, pilgrimages to sacred sites, self-flagellation, and asceticism; rather, they have become repetitive work, power breakfasts, daily commutes (physical or electronic), fitness training, and sexual self-suppression. The drive toward immortality through successful reproduction of perfect offspring requires eternal vigilance and constant

institutional and self-surveillance. While diligently engaging in daily works in no way guarantees access to the Code, it is the only chance for grace. Yet those who are fruitful in their endeavors and collect the necessary assets can buy the desired access to the Code; this in turn, will assure their immortality. In spite of Luther's reformation, indulgences are still the primary currency of salvation.