

**Gendering Liberation: “Deprivatising” Women’s
Subjectivity in the Prayer-Poetry of Dorothee Sölle**

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Abstract

This study investigates the artistic expressions of women's subjectivity in the prayer-poetry of Dorothee Sölle (1929-2003). My aim is to develop a critical introduction of Sölle's poetry, in light of her theology and in conversation with literary theory, contextualising the reception of her work and the role of reception in subjectivity as these converge in her prayerful hermeneutic. In what I come to call "liturgical reception", I provide a perspective on Sölle's work on the basis of translations for an English speaking context. I draw on contemporary thought, ranging from feminism and liberation theology to hermeneutics, literary theory and philosophy, to shape the contour and scope of Sölle's work. Addressing feminist debates that consider the role of gendered subjectivity in relation to pervasive hetero-normative structures, I facilitate Mary Gerhart's notion of the "generic" and Luce Irigaray's work on the "sexuate" to clarify the issues arising in Sölle's poetry in the context of language and literature, as well as classic formulations of God and the Church. Thinking through gendered subjectivity allows liberation to emerge as a poetic process that opens up personal prayer for the wider community. In light of Sölle's early comments on "Deprivatised Prayer" [1971], I argue for a theopoetic conception of prayer which takes the Death of God not as an end point, but as a starting point for a consciously critical negotiation of gendered faith identity in community. The conditions of the Death of God, to Sölle a sign for the loss of immediacy in the sense of naïveté (Ricoeur) – and therefore a loss of unproblematic intimacy – require prayer to take into account its gendered situation, since prayer is never not embodied. Sölle's portrayals of woman-lover, mother and artist both rely upon and differentiate the relationship between emancipation and solidarity that I see addressed by liberation hermeneutics as the work of co-creation. Thus emerges a theopoetic vision that does not dissolve gender difference in favour of a "general" salvation, but offers a critique of the process of liberation itself tied into our gendered engagements with a theological reception of women at prayer.

**To my nieces,
Alicia and Amelie Louise,
who had to learn too quickly that**

████████████████████'

(Sölle, VL59)

Acknowledgments

In spite of all those named in acknowledgement of support, encouragement and teaching, writing this thesis has been exceptionally lonely. Whenever I am not with the poetry, I am missing the company of a woman I never met in person: Dorothee Sölle. She wrote [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (VL66, ll.41-43). And so the labour of this thesis has been tied to a genealogy of women who have taught and guided me in my religious education and practice and who have changed my life in significant ways: Dr Alison Jasper, Sieglinde Jung-Keil, Beate Hille and my mother, Käthe Neumann.

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I gratefully acknowledge the funding received from the Arts and Humanities Research Council which supported me not only through most of my PhD, but also my Master's studies. Without this, I would have taken a very different path in life. I also thank the DAAD (German Academic Exchange) programme for their funding of my research visit to Philipps Universität Marburg, under the care of Prof Ulrike Wagner-Rau. Alongside occasional labour undertaken towards the end of studies, I thank the generosity of friends and family for keeping me afloat during some very stressful times closer to submission. I hope one day I can return the kindness.

In one poem Sölle writes: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]' (VL69, ll.17-19). I recognise this thankfulness most vividly with my nieces Alicia and Amelie Louise Neumann, with Cameron, Humphrey, and Murrón Benitez-Quintana and the trust offered to me by Plato, Yami, Akira, Lizzy, Clara, Jake and Sammy.

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© Wolfgang Fietkau Verlag, Berlin-Kleinmachnow. Translated from "Jemandem sein glück glauben" [FL 25], ">>Denn alle kreatur braucht hilf von allen<<" [FL 69], "Penelope oder über die ehe" [FL 73], "Wünsche im garten der barbara hepworth" [FL 78], "Grünes gedicht" [BR 52], "Ich spiele gerade gitarre sagst du zu mir" [BR 81], "Pietà oder die shekinah gottes" [VL 47], "Die glaswassertheorie" [ZU 145], "Offene hände" [LL 36], "Levadia" [LL 87].

Abbreviations and Citation Conventions

Poetry

The primary source to this study are the seven books of poetry by Dorothee Sölle, all published by Fietkau-Verlag (Berlin-Kleinmachnow), which serve as basis of my analytical work. In order to identify my unpublished translations and clearly point to the copyrighted publication, abbreviations of the titles of the German books and subsequent pagination are used for reference purposes. Poems in close critical analysis are reproduced with kind permission by the publisher Wolfgang Fietkau – all rights to the poems in translation remain with Fietkau. The abbreviated references to the texts under discussion are as follows:

<i>meditationen und gebrauchstexte.</i> 1969.	[MG]
<i>revolutionäre geduld.</i> 1974.	[RG]
<i>fliegen lernen.</i> 1979.	[FL]
<i>spiel doch von brot und rosen.</i> 1981.	[BR]
<i>verrückt nach licht.</i> 1984.	[VL]
<i>zivil und ungehorsam.</i> 1990.	[ZU]
<i>loben ohne lügen.</i> 2000.	[LL]

Single lines of poetry are cited with reference to the poem-title if that poem has not been formally introduced in close analysis immediately prior to the discussion. For example: ‘...’ (BR52, l.3). The poem-title will be repeated if mention of another poem intersects in close analysis. Two lines of poetry are indicated in reference as ‘...’ (ll.12f.). A direct quote of three or more lines of poetry is indicated as ‘...’ (ll.25-27). An indirect reference to a segment of poetry of three lines or more is abbreviated as ll.25ff.

Dorothee Sölle Collected Works edition

The Collected Works (*Gesammelte Werke*) edition is given full reference in the bibliography where relevant English translations are appended. The choice against including each volume’s initial full references in the footnotes stems from the consideration that titles to these are at times synonymous with previous publications by Sölle, but may feature a range of texts from different publications under its cover. In footnotes I follow the following short-hand citation: Short title and year of original publication, Volume and page number of the Collected Works edition. Subsequent mention of the same text omits the year of publication.

Example: Sölle, “Stellvertretung” (1965), Bd.3, 35.

While most times I cite Sölle from the Collected Works edition for the German texts, occasional references had to rely on older publications as these have been omitted from the edited volumes. Individual essays and Sölle’s *Habilitationsschrift* fall under this category. I do not cite or cross reference poetry from the collected works edition (Volume 8).

Translations

Citations in the corpus of the thesis-text are given in English and unless they immediately are followed by a reference to an English publication these are always **my own** translations. I provide the German text and relevant citation in the footnotes to my translations.

Wherever possible I supply those quotations from Sölle central to my argument in their published English translation. Where I perceive a difference in emphasis, I give my own translation in the corpus of the thesis, with the German text with reference, and the published English translation in the footnote.

Sölle's *To Work and To Love* (1984), produced in collaboration with her assistant Shirley A. Cloyes, is referenced from its English publication, as it appeared in English prior to publication in German.

All biblical references are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Other abbreviations

- ApO – Außerparlamentarische Opposition (extra-parliamentary opposition)
- EG – Evangelisches Gesangbuch (Protestant Church hymnary)
- EKD – Evangelische Kirche Deutschland (Protestant Church of Germany)
- FRG – Federal Republic of Germany
- GDR – German Democratic Republic
- NRSV – New Revised Standard Version Bible
- SDS – Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (Socialist German Student Union)
- RAF – Rote Armee Fraktion (Red Army Faction)

Introduction: Prayer after the Death of God

o. Introduction: Prayer after the Death of God – A study of the Poetry by Dorothee Sölle

The writing career of Dorothee Sölle (1929-2003) starts out in the 1960s, amidst the climate of social restoration in Germany. For the most part, her reputation as a Socialist-activist and theologian supersede any serious literary attention. The political engagement, evident in Sölle's participation in protest movements and acts of social courage (*Zivilcourage*), however, have gained her a reputation as a politically controversial writer. Her conversational writing style and her anecdotal evidence suggests a writing that is experience-led¹. The existential situation that is at stake here is one of speaking truthfully of the context in which we – writers and readers – find ourselves (arrested by the textual situation). In this spirit we read Sölle's comment on prayer and poetry:

For me, praying and writing poetry, prayer and poem, are not alternatives.... The thought for example that every human can pray is for me an enormous affirmation of human creativity. Christianity presupposes that all human beings are poets, namely, that they can pray.²

Today as in most times, academic study of poetry appears as a peculiar pursuit.

'Bad time for poetry'³ wrote Bertolt Brecht (a key influence on Sölle's poetic work)

¹ Cf. Dorothee Sölle, *The Inward Road and the Way Back: Texts and Reflections on Religious Experience*, trans. David L. Scheidt (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978). Sölle, "Die Hinreise: Zur Religiösen Erfahrung. Texte und Überlegungen" (1975), Bd.2.

² Dorothee Sölle, *Against the Wind: Memoirs of a Radical Christian*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 153; "Beten und Dichten, Gebet und Gedicht sind für mich keine Alternative... ich empfinde ... den Gedanken, dass jeder Mensch beten kann, als eine ungeheure Betonung der humanen Kreativität. Das Christentum setzt voraus, dass alle Menschen Dichter sind, nämlich beten können" – Dorothee Sölle, "Gegenwind" (1995), Bd.12, 260.

³ Bertolt Brecht, "Bad time for poetry" in *Bertolt Brecht: Poems. 1913-1956*, ed. by John Willett and Ralph Manheim with the co-operation of Erich Fried, 2nd ed. (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), 331.

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and he is right, because we tend to “trivialise”⁴ poetry when denying its capacity for critical and creative engagement with the problems faced by the “more serious” disciplines. The puzzle set out by the above reflections of the late German Protestant poet, activist and theologian Dorothee Sölle, was the starting point for all that was to come to shape this thesis. I wondered at the hermeneutics involved were one to live this prayer, and at the inhibitions that a late modern and post-modern society poses for engaging in the crisis of prayer indicated by the “Death of God”. Sölle, to quote her friend Peter Cornehl, offers a voice that raises concerns in a ‘joyful, scoffing, provocative and creative’⁵ manner that alerts us to the profundity of our daring to speak out in truth – and speak out prayerfully – that recognises the personal as already social. This thesis, focussed on a reception-critical perspective, envisions a possibility for reading women at prayer after the Death of God articulated by Sölle, and thus to answer this poetry’s call.

0.1 Context of Study

Literature and Theology: situating prayer-poetry

It becomes apparent that literature and theology are ... commonly located on opposite sides of a binary schema through which meaning is generated in Western culture. Theology is placed on the side of spirit, reason, light, truth, order, God. Literature is associated with the body, desire, darkness, mystery, humanity. Theology is the place where God and ‘man’ meet. Literature, like Lilith excluded from the garden, endlessly seduces and gives birth. This binary and hierarchical division has been the unstated assumption

⁴ Sölle characterises the process of alienation as a dimension of suffering in a threefold succeösson: a subject becomes disappropriated from his or her suffering, suffering is trivialised, and in the course of this alienation, the subject is killed off from the life-sustaining context that would have previously called for that subject’s participation. Cf. Dorothee Sölle, “Leiden” (1973), Bd.4, 172.

⁵ Cornehl characterised Sölle’s strategically unsystematic engagement with literary forms in these terms as a crucial potential for developing the poetic character of liturgy, in broad or narrow conceptions which were at the forefront of my concern. Peter Cornehl, *Personal correspondence*, 19/10/2013.

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behind classical formulations of the relations between the disciplines⁶.

Heather Walton's portrayal of the disciplinarity that circumscribes "Literature and Theology" identifies an underlying (institutional) default position towards positivist values of normatively male formulation hidden behind the mask of over-inclusive generalities assumed in the capitalisation. Broadly speaking, this is a study in the field of literature and theology without the claim to universal applicability; hence their respective contents require careful assessment – especially when we are not only to recognise the "death of the author"⁷, but also have to reckon with the Death of God. On the literary side I present a body of lyric poetry written over a time period of 40 years, starting in the 1960s, by the late German Protestant activist, writer and theologian Dorothee Sölle, a poetry then that is marked by an awareness, theologically and literarily, that there is 'no poetic immediacy to Auschwitz'⁸.

On the side of theology I examine Sölle's theopoetic vision, expressed in her repeated reflection on prayer as poetry, or more accurately prayer-poetry. To Sölle the two are so intimately intertwined that a distinction becomes untenable. Prayer does not pose as poetry, nor does poetry pose "as if" it were prayer; the form and the content of prayer is synonymous with poetry, conceived here not as solely

⁶ Heather Walton, *Imagining Theology: Women, Writing and God* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 35.

⁷ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard, 49-56 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986).

⁸ "Es gibt keine poetische Unmittelbarkeit zu Auschwitz"; Dorothee Sölle in *Almanach für Literatur und Theologie*, Bd.2, Hrsg. Wolfgang Fietkau, Dorothee Sölle, Armin Juhre, Kurt Marti (Wuppertal: Hammer Verlag, 1968), 82; Sölle, in her kinship with the Frankfurt School and strong socialist and Marxist lines of inquiry, struggles with Adorno's famous dictum that 'it is not possible to write poetry after Auschwitz,' however much this phrase is qualified in Adorno's own writings – Theodor W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, Volume 2, ed. by Rolf Tiedermann, rev. reissue (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 249.

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textual but as performative phenomenon⁹. I do not hope to write a study of prayer informed by literary methods. Neither do I intend a study of poetry in reflection of theological significations. I want to write a study that puts pressure on the binary established in the very mention of “Literature *and* Theology”. Consequently, much of what follows to situate the methodological perspective of this study is hermeneutical. Prayer-poetry, as I see it, is distinct from both literature and theology, not by virtue of a claim on secularity or spirituality (however one is to define these in a productive manner, and without categorising them as binary opposites), but because prayer-poetry urges its participants to invest themselves in the search of their own, gendered hermeneutics as much as they have to divest themselves of the comfortable privacy of reading “by themselves”, to which, I argue, Sölle’s account on deprivatised prayer speaks. Prayer-poetry requires us to account for our own creative and creational involvements in (hermeneutical) praxis. It is the aim of this study to provide a critical space for reflecting the implications that Sölle’s theo-poetic vision facilitates in light of women’s subjectivity on the matter of praying after the Death of God – a death that has come to signify the break-down of the Absolute as positive point of identification for the modern subject.

Working out these concerns in relation to a representative sample of Dorothee Sölle’s poetry will offer a crucial contribution to the reception of this theologian, whose poetry thus far has been largely side-lined in scholarly appraisals, at least insofar as her poetry will generally be relegated as the test-case of an otherwise established argument. While this study will also draw extensively on Sölle’s theological works, these appear in conversation, not in systematic priority, with her poetry. Here Sölle’s own comments are decisive:

⁹ This synonymity is tied to an interpretation of “acting as representative” – representation by proxy (*Stellvertretung*) – treated in Chapter One, and the place of genre as a discourse on prayer-poetry, discussed in Chapter Two.

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Only when the theologian no longer hopes to retrieve the already named, only then does he [sic] get involved in the search without a head-start to the authors of poetry. ... In some sense the theological interest in literature treats poets like theologians, who work on the same subject, but in a foreign language that is yet to be learned.¹⁰

What Sölle states here in her article from 1969 has much weight for the present endeavour. While nobody would have to doubt that Sölle was a theologian, critics are less easy with her identification as a poet, precisely because such an act appears at the cost of dissociating her theological agenda from her writings. With reference to the extensive body of poetry in Dorothee Sölle's writings, I offer a careful reading of her understanding of prayer, not because her poetry needed to verify her theological integrity, but because her poetry shifts theological language onto a different register. Theo-logy in the turn to theo-poetry recovers the interaction between reader, author and text as a textual doing that *critically* blurs its respective (and respectable) boundaries. Insofar as I have not been specifically trained in theology (I trained in Religious Studies, English and Hermeneutics), my involvement in translation of her poetry *qua* poetry has given rise to a personal investment in the deciphering of my own theological concerns that reflect the demand for "translation" in Sölle's assessment of the relationship between the disciplines. Key aspects of the selections made from her poetry, a sizeable collection of 561 (533) poems¹¹, which explore and exemplify trends and characteristics of Sölle's theology in critical relation to the historical-political context and theological reception of her day, are evaluated along a contemporary

¹⁰ "Erst wenn der Theologe nicht mehr das Schon-benannte wiederzutreffen hofft, erst dann lässt er [sic] sich auf die Suche ein, ohne Vorsprung vor dem Autor der Dichtung... In einem gewissen Sinn behandelt das theologische Interesse an Literatur die Dichter wie Theologen, die in einer fremden, erst zu lernenden Sprache von der gleichen Sache handeln" – Sölle, "Zum Dialog zwischen Theologie und Literaturwissenschaft: Thesen über die Kriterien des theologischen Interesses an Literatur," *Internationale Dialogzeitschrift*, 2 (1969), 318.

¹¹ There are 561 individual prayers in the seven volumes of poetry; 533 if cycles of poems are counted as one poem.

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interest in situating Sölle's poetic work in relation to both her theological output and her literary and artistic engagement. As a popular theologian keenly interested in lay-involvement in both liturgical practice and theological debate, her prayer-texts serve a significant function in relating her socio-political commitments to her theo-poetic vision. Thus, this study advances a comprehensive case about the form and function that reading her poetry can offer to contemporary theology and aesthetics while bringing together research on Sölle's theological development and spurious writings of German theological scholarship on her poetry, making her texts accessible to an English-speaking audience – both theologically and literarily.

In the modern academy, studies in literature and theology have maintained a distinct profile, with changing emphasis and momentum in the UK and Germany. From historiographical projects to philosophy, the field spun by literature and theology ever invited other disciplinary tools to contribute to the interpretation. Given the ready cross-over between aesthetic studies on the imagination and theological reflection on creation, it may not be surprising that German scholarship in the wake of Friedrich Schleiermacher builds on the Romantics, such as the Schlegel brothers, Schelling, Eichendorff and Novalis when investigating literature and theology. Hölderlin, who next to Paul Celan and Bertolt Brecht is probably one of the most important poets to Sölle's own literary project, describes the poet's special relationship to God on account of a deep-seated pantheism that invokes nature in a search for the truth of God expressed in artistic creation. His "Patmos" points to a key element in Sölle's work in the opening lines: 'but no one by himself / Can grasp God,'¹² by which Hölderlin, and Sölle in her own turn, refrain from a self-absorbed poetic language. Academically, Sölle too builds on the Romantics¹³ in

¹² Friedrich Hölderlin, "Patmos," trans. Michael Hamburger, in *Hyperion and Selected Poems: Friedrich Hölderlin* (London: Bloomsbury Publ., 1990), 257.

¹³ German literary Romanticism can be loosely periodised from 1795 to 1830. Its literary project sits in strong correlation to a reception of the French Revolution and reacts to much of the turmoil of the

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her professorial thesis (*Habilitationsschrift*), which develops a dialectical understanding between literature and theology in post-Enlightenment German literatures but forgoes the literary concern with inspiration. Under the heading of “realisation”, the reality-building of the literary imagination as a “making fluid”¹⁴ of the status quo safeguarded by tradition (religious or otherwise!) is played off against a theological interest in addressing a so-called secular world that is in need of creational affirmation.

The achievement of Sölle’s notion of “realisation” may be seen in the fact that it is not derived from the prevalent idea given in secularisation by way of a negative determination of a “no-longer”, but that it builds a positive relationship to the present in the sense of a “a surplus of language, of possibilities for expression, of appropriated world” (Real, 30)¹⁵.

By this token, realisation and deprivatisation share a certain logic about the relationship between text and context, between subject and situation that will find

subsequent decades in the Napoleonic Wars and emerging resistance by the German states. The wish for a unified German nation state that is being articulated predominantly by German intellectuals for the first time, reverberates with and is explicitly driven by the writings of the Romantics in the making of a German national consciousness. See Gerhard Schulz, “From ‘Romantick’ to ‘Romantic’: The Genesis of German Romanticism in Late Eighteenth-Century Europe” in *The Literature of German Romanticism*, ed. by Dennis Mahoney, Camden House History of German Literature, Vol.8 (Suffolk: Camden House, 2004), 31f.

¹⁴ “Dabei [am Begriff der Theopoesie] wird insbesondere der von ihr [Sölle] geprägte Leitbegriff »Realisation« der gleichlautenden Habilitationsschrift von 1973 als Flüssig-Machen der alten biblisch-religiösen Tradition und zugleich ihre weltliche literarische Konkretion gewürdigt” – as Klaus Aschrich describes it in *Theologie Schreiben: Dorothee Sölles Weg zu einer Mystik der Befreiung* (Münster: LIT, 2006), 159.

¹⁵ “Die Leistung von Sölles Realisationsbegriff kann darin gesehen werden, dass er sich nicht aus Negativbestimmungen des »nicht-mehr«, im Gegensatz zu dem bislang vorherrschenden Säkularisierungs-Begriff ableitet, sondern, dass er im Sinne von »Gewinn an Sprache, an Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten, an angeeigneter Welt« (Real, 30) ein positives Verhältnis zur Gegenwart herstellt.” – Aschrich, *Theologie Schreiben*, 167.

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closer assessment in the course of this study. From Sölle's interpretation of Romantic literatures it is clear that she sees the question of a national consciousness playing deeply into the Romantic subject that required (and requires!) careful de- and reconstruction in Post-war Germany.

When Dorothee Sölle and others¹⁶ began to build a profile for Literature and Theology as a field of inquiry in the late 1960s, Germany was infused by the spirit of political radicalisation, not least as a reaction to the polemics of Cold War politics and the demonising of religious traditions in East Germany¹⁷. Although the journal *Almanach für Literatur und Theologie*¹⁸ was dominated by literary studies and commentary, the thematic selections (topics such as fear, death, violence, *Heimat*) reflect the editors' theological concern with current political affairs¹⁹. Theological commentary remains at a highly accessible level aimed at stimulating debates, an inquiry that mined literary texts for its relationship to Christian culture, broadly perceived. But Sölle was engaged in this cross-over between artistic production and prevalent Christian traditions in Germany also in practical, institutional terms. In critical reflection of ecclesial structures that would filter such theological reflection, Vatican II (1962-65) has to be named among the key developments in broad ecclesial engagement that aided the endeavours of both

¹⁶ The editorial board for the journal *Almanach für Theologie und Literatur* (1967-) featured a range of prolific names, aside from Sölle, such as Armin Juhre, Kurt Marti, Wolfgang Fietkau.

¹⁷ See for example the protest song by Bettina Wegener (1947-), *Über Gebote* (Germany: CBS Records, 1980). Her song critiques the excessive observance of laws, implicitly paralleling the claim by the government that religious education is indoctrination with government legislation itself. Thus, she creates a critical space where "religious" and "political" culture are exposed for their negotiations of power, where again literary expression draws on theological interpretation of the status and content of biblical texts in society.

¹⁸ Yearly issues ran, with changing editorial board, from 1967 up until 1981.

¹⁹ I do not wish to differentiate "political" in opposition to an apolitical space here. At this level "political" is merely an indicator of a prevalent discourse of power in whichever form it gained "public" attention at any given time.

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laity and clergy in deliberately pursuing creative expressions and critical reflection of current practice. It certainly set the pulse for Sölle's involvement in a collaborative liturgical task group (in 1966) who developed the initiative of "political night prayers" (*Politisches Nachtgebet*), bringing her into contact with many like-minded people²⁰. These meetings sought to contextualise and reflect theologically the current events of the day, beginning with the Vietnam War, for which some of Sölle's earliest poetry was composed. For this reason, her most sustained reception of poetry, theologically, orientates itself on the then current *agitprop*-poetry popularised by the work of Erich Fried, sidelining the concurrent emergence of women's literature.

Dorothee Sölle – source or context? Situating feminist reception

In an English-speaking context, Sölle is typically ranked amongst American Liberation Theologies, which mark her most sustained theological focus. Reflecting on her own theological project, which developed as a Political Theology, informed by the works of Rudolf Bultmann and Dietrich Bonhoeffer – but also deeply affected by Jewish thinkers such as Martin Buber – she declares that the language of Liberation Theology appeared much more appropriate to her political theological starting points²¹. Her approach, based on a biblical hermeneutics²² – figured in the metaphor of eating of the Psalms – also has implications for this study, even though I do not place my emphasis on the Bible but on an engagement

²⁰ It has been part of the criticism of these meetings that despite its aims to include people of every walk of life, the initiative's ethos appealed more strongly to the "Bildungsbürgertum" of the liberal and radical left (cf. Peter Cornehl, "Dorothee Sölle, das 'Politische Nachtgebet' und die Folgen," in *Umbrüche: Der Deutsche Protestantismus und die sozialen Bewegungen in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren*, Hrsg. Siegfried Hermle, Claudia Lepp, Harry Oelke (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 273).

²¹ Sölle, "Eine Erinnerung um der Zukunft willen: Zur Politischen Theologie" [1988] in "Mutanfälle: Texte zum Umdenken" (1993), Bd. 3, 273f.

²² See Section 0.2 below regarding Julia D. E. Prinz's work.

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with Sölle's poetic texts. My own relationship with Sölle (she has been part of my religious education from middle school onwards and I have continued to work with her text academically since my undergraduate studies) has built on her earliest publications in Germany that developed in the wake of Death of God-theologies in the 1960s and the growing political awareness fostered in the national consciousness grappling for a response to the traumatic events that led to Auschwitz. The wave of political radicalisation that swept over Europe in the late 1960s, stirred on by the polemics of the Cold War and its *Stellvertreter-Kriege* (proxy wars) such as Vietnam, but also in civilian responses to political tactics in the divided Germany, brought Sölle into association with activist circles. It is from that time period that the essay on so-called "Deprivatised prayer" [1971] originates, which serves as starting point to my theological reflections in Chapter One²³. While her first publication *Christ the Representative: An Essay in Theology after the 'Death of God'* (1967) [*Stellvertretung: Ein Kapitel Theologie nach dem "Tode Gottes"*, 1965] brought Sölle instant attention in Germany, criticism of her work in an English-speaking context seems to emerge only after her publication of *Suffering* (1975) [*Leiden*, 1973])²⁴. Much of Sölle's work developed out of her own

²³ I draw on Heidemarie Lämmermann-Kuhn's defence regarding Sölle's avowed preoccupation with the social (and social formation of personhood) that has been criticised by others: she proposes that Sölle's tenacious emphasis of the social is motivated by the hope to balance the prevalence of theological accounts that foreground the individual – cf. Lämmermann-Kuhn, *Sensibilität für den Menschen: Theologie und Anthropologie bei Dorothee Sölle*, Würzburger Studien zur Fundamentaltheologie, Bd.4 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 1988), 11.

²⁴ Sölle's work on suffering also retains sustained reception in diverse contexts – see Mary Hembrow Snyder, "The ideas of God and Suffering in the Political Theology of Dorothee Soelle" in *Pluralism and Oppression: Theology in World Perspective*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991); Gregory Baum, "Meister Eckhart and Dorothee Soelle on Suffering and the Experience of God" in *Light Burdens, Heavy Blessings: Challenges of Church and Culture in the Post Vatican II Era: Essays in Honor of Margaret R. Brennan*, ed. Mary Heather Mackinnon, Moni McIntyre and Mary Ellen Sheehan (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 2000); Darren C. Wood, "Suffering

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praxis, out of her living context (not least as spokeswoman for the German peace movement and cultural critic on radio and TV), and her reception reflects this on many occasions: critical commentary of her theological position (certainly in the earlier stages of her career) is often overshadowed by judgment over her tendency to simplify the terms that describe what is at issue is flagged up as systematic shortfall. More generous voices will attribute this to her concern for practical, “non-academic” contexts²⁵.

Despite her noted fame, the more conservative ranks of the academic institutions prevailed in denying Sölle an academic post in Germany (a fate that would change only with her retirement)²⁶. Instead, her inclusion in the German branch of the PEN-Centre in 1970 recognised her work as freelance writer²⁷. The

with Christ: The Function of the Cross in the Works of John Wesley and Dorothee Soelle” in *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Vol.45:Part 1, 2008, 184-202; Johann M. Vento, “Formation(s) of the Mystical-Political in the Age of Globalization: Suffering as Agentive Choice in Dorothee Soelle and Talal Asad,” in *Religion, Economics, and Culture in Conflict and Conversation*, ed. Laurie Cassidy and Maureen H. O’Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011).

²⁵ Michael Korte makes for an admirable exception: he observes in light of Sölle’s reception of Hegel – and the criticism it brought to her academically – that the ‘kritisierte Einseitigkeit oder Inkonsequenz der Interpretation ist also, umgekehrt gewendet, eine bewusst gewählte methodische Verfahrensweise, und eine Fähigkeit Sölles, ausgewählte Aspekte anderer Autoren aufzugreifen und für heute fruchtbar zu machen’ (onesidedness or inconsequence [for which Sölle’s] interpretation is criticised, is, to turn the argument on its head, a consciously chosen methodical approach, and an ability of Sölle to pick up on selected aspects of other authors and make them fruitful for today) – Michael Korte, *“Gott um Leben bitten hören jeden Tag”*: Zur Theologie Dorothee Sölles, *Hochschulschriften* 295 (Bonn: Pahl-Rugenstein, 2001), 39.

²⁶ She was awarded an honorary professorship at the University of Hamburg in 1994.

²⁷ It might be worthwhile pointing out that the president of the German PEN (an association for Poets, Essayists and Novelists with the aim for promoting and furthering freedom of expression and exchange) at the time was Heinrich Böll (1917-1985), German Nobel prize winner of literature (1972), whose acquaintance (and friendship) Sölle had made in the course of the Political Night Prayers. He moved on to become the president of PEN International.

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publisher of Sölle's poetry is Fietkau (Berlin-Kleinmachnow), the smallest publishing business amongst German publishing houses. It was founded in 1959, and run as a second occupation in the spare time of the publisher, but with great vision. The series "Schritte" (steps), to which Sölle's corpus belongs, to date comprises 39 volumes of first publications by "contemporary authors"²⁸ of poetry, short experimental writings, concrete poetry etc.²⁹ With 60,000 copies of Sölle's volumes of poetry in numerous print-runs produced and sold by Fietkau (excluding other publishers that offer reprints of her texts), we have over the years some indication of scale to her readership³⁰. Although other poets published with Fietkau have moved on to earn a living -- or in any case have become renowned in literary criticism for their craft -- Sölle's literary shadow-existence is relative: she is being read. This is not merely the case for the German context alone: numerous translations (of parts³¹) of her poetry exist, amongst others, in Dutch³², Italian, Spanish and Finnish. The only formal recognition Dorothee Sölle received is in 1982 when she is awarded the Droste-prize for lyric by the city of Meersburg -- the first, and for a long time the only prize available to women authors in Post-war Germany³³.

²⁸ Familiar names in a German context include Ute Erb, Armin Juhre, Margot Schröder, and Christa Reinig.

²⁹ cf. "Fietkau-Home," <<http://www.fietkau.de/>>, accessed 26/11/2013

³⁰ cf. "Fietkau-Story," <<http://www.fietkau.de/derverlag/verlagsstory.html>>, accessed 26/11/2013.

³¹ *Revolutionäre geduld* (1974) is one of the most widely translated works. I find this surprising, because, although Sölle was particularly fond of the image given in the phrase "revolutionary patience," it is not to my mind her most representative work of poetry.

³² Dutch editions exist of every book of her poetry except the last, while other languages, to my knowledge, have been less comprehensive (the Dutch title to *Verrückt nach licht* [crazy for light] is "De Moeder van Eva" [Mother of Eve!]). Published English translations only exist for the first two short volumes, combined in the volume *Revolutionary Patience* (2008 [1974]).

³³ The prize is aimed at female authors who are perceived to be sidelined from established literary reception [*Literaturbetrieb*]; cf. Kulturamt der Stadt Meersburg, "Droste-Preis der Stadt Meersburg,"

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Sölle was recruited to teach at Union Seminary, New York in 1975 to which she agreed on a part-time basis to accommodate her family commitments, being a mother of four. In a collection of lectures from her involvement with Union, central to much of my argument, entitled *To Work and to Love* (1984), her personable writing style is evident in the anecdotal approach taken to elucidating theological topoi in their societal relevance. Thelma Megill-Cobbler observes a growing eloquence in addressing feminist concerns in the course of her writings. Next to *To Work and to Love* this is particularly evident in *Thinking about God* (1990), where ‘virtually every traditional and nontraditional theological locus that [Sölle] treats has an explicitly feminist dimension’³⁴. Both are introductory text-books, out to facilitate a broad readership, which is not to say that Sölle’s project at large would not measure up to the nuanced critique from other scholars. While Sölle does not sit easily in a feminist corner to her German critics, it is necessary here to point out that her vision of liberation, contextualised as it is in her call for prophetic justice, always featured a kernel of the feminist imagination that understands the place of gender as indicative of the level of socio-economic justice. As a peculiar case, Sölle is not commonly identified as feminist in Germany, except by other feminist scholars. (This is all the more striking in the numerous attempts at commentating her biography³⁵). Instead she is cited for her public stance as a socialist and this

<<http://www.meersburg.de/153>>, accessed 26/11/2013. Sölle shares the honour with previous winners such as Nelly Sachs (1960), Rose Ausländer (1967), Hilde Domin (1971) and more recently Helga M. Novak (2012), most of whom have since established themselves in the German literary canon.

³⁴ Thelma Megill-Cobbler, *Women and the Cross: Atonement in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Dorothee Soelle* (Ann Arbor, MI: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1992), 195.

³⁵ Ralph Ludwig cites one of Sölle’s teaching assistants from Union Seminary, Karen L. Blomquist when reiterating that towards the end of the 1970s Sölle was not considered a feminist – in *Die Prophetin: Wie Dorothee Sölle Mystikerin wurde* (Berlin: Wichern, 2008), 83; acknowledging the historicity of poetic self-perception, but also the considerable feminist theological sensibilities present in Sölle’s earliest works, Renate Jost makes a case for the futility of such chronological assessment

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seems to fit neatly in her reception as political theologian. But Sölle was never entirely at ease with the vocabulary surrounding political theology, and it appears to me that dividing her socialism from her feminism serves merely to cement a view of feminism in Germany that is as coercive in its politics as the patriarchal system it attacks.

Already in Myra Marx Ferree's early comparative study on feminist politics in the US and West Germany from 1987 she points to the conflicts between feminists and socialists, in their perceived need to assert their autonomy from each other's goals in radical action³⁶. Developing out of a desire to democratise university politics, but also alert to dangers of a democratic deficit – i.e. a lack of opposition in the *Bundestag* – political representations (a claim on a political, public voice outside of electoral protocol) are made by the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition (*Außerparlamentarische Opposition*, short *ApO*) at the time of the Grand Coalition (1966-1969), a coalition government in control of over 90 % of the votes with a view to extending state control with a view to restricting civil rights. In this context, the query of women from the *Aktionsrat zur Befreiung der Frauen* (Action group for the Liberation of Women)³⁷ on gender relations presented to the national assembly of the German Socialist Student Association in Berlin in 1968

when it comes to understanding the vision or understanding the importance of Sölle's theology – cf. Renate Jost "Zur Bedeutung Dorothee Sölle für (m)eine feministische Theologie" in *Eher eine Kunst als eine Wissenschaft: Resonanzen der Theologie Dorothee Sölles*, Hrsg. Helga Kuhlmann (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 2006), 110f.

³⁶ Myra Marx Ferree, "Equality and Autonomy: Feminist Politics in the United States and West Germany," in *The Women's Movements of the United States and Western Europe: Consciousness, Political Opportunity, and Public Policy*, edited by Mary Fainsod Katzenstein and Carol McClurg Mueller (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 183.

³⁷ This was a group of women students, gathered on the initiative of Helke Sanders, who, in reflecting on their situation as mothers, planned measures to maximise their potential for fully participating in the student movement (identified as the *ApO*).

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sparked a nation-wide discussion of feminist issues and mobilised women to get informed, to provide support and to organise protests in campaigns for social change. Although their strategies for networking and engaging in action remained closely allied with that of the *ApO*, women's politics were at odds with all party-political and extra-parliamentary aspirations – because they categorically challenged the privilege of men in their access to power. On the side of socialist action in Germany, the intensification of the political (military and economic!) conflict between the “bloc powers” over the issue of the Vietnam War also sparked more militant activists into action, the Red Army Faction (*RAF*). Their founding members in 1968 were Ulrike Meinhof, Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Horst Mahler³⁸.

The group, in articulating their anti-imperial protest in “armed resistance,” was responsible for acts of vandalism, arson, and numerous murders. Sprung from prison after an arrest in 1970 Andreas Baader and his rescuers were on the run from the police. Given Sölle's prolific role in instigating the Political Night prayers on the issue of the Vietnam War in 1968³⁹, she was seen as a reliable contact by a whole range of activist circles. Sölle recalls being approached for refuge during the chase for Baader and Meinhof, which is indicative of the standing she held in socialist circles, and her refusal of support is not altogether determined by her concern for her children, but her sense of proportionate response. Sölle would not condone the *RAF*'s turn to terror tactics and radical violence that, to her, belied the socialist roots of the struggle in solidarity with the victims⁴⁰. However, around this time the organisers of the Political Night Prayers, Cologne came forward in a

³⁸ The group organised training with the Fatah in Jordan; most members of the group had previous involvement with radical and militant organisations.

³⁹ This will be discussed in greater detail in Section 1.2.

⁴⁰ Dorothee Sölle, Peter Bichsel und Klara Obermüller (Hrsg.), *Teschuwa = Umkehr: Zwei Gespräche* (Zürich: Pendo, 1989), 34ff.

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statement of solidarity with the socialist cause of the Christians in Chile under Allende⁴¹, marking a crucial juncture in their public involvement in the German political landscape of an increasingly conservative West Germany and pointing Sölle in the direction of Liberation theology.

Despite Sölle's involvement in protests against remilitarisation, nuclear armament and her role in petitions and mobilisation for Easter Marches, Sölle has faced accusations of abandoning the "struggle at home"⁴² in focussing and reporting on issues such as Vietnam, El Salvador and South Africa. Yet, her theology speaks of a more differentiated and more concerted effort in understanding the structural connections between these diverse sites of struggle. In the conflict between socialist activism and feminist circles, Sölle does not hold back in campaigning for causes dear to her heart, but reflects the motivations of her engagement carefully against her own positionality that does not separate feminist concerns from socialist vision. Poetically she expressed this some years later in a long poem on the visit of the grave of Karl Marx, published in 1984, where she notes the "difficulties" of approaching the rigid structures that institute and fortify a generically male judgment:

[REDACTED]

(VL 138, ll.85 – 90)

Similarly, while the consciousness-raising work of feminist groups appears as a given, the separatist tendencies prevalent in the German contexts of the Cold War

⁴¹ Aschrich, *Theologie Schreiben*, 82. Reforming the Political Night Prayers into the group "*Christen für den Sozialismus*" [Christians for Socialism] in 1972 gave the group a different focus and momentum from their earlier explorations. See also Peter Cornehl, "Das Politische Nachtgebet und seine Folgen", 275.

⁴² Sölle, "Gegenwind", Bd.12, 81, 173, passim.

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seem to mirror the desperate attitude that delivers its strength in radical action across socio-political platforms. I hold that Sölle's agenda has been highly compatible with feminist concerns even where these do not explicitly figure in her work initially. It is also important to note that Sölle's subsequent feminism, if we are to call it that, is largely informed by American women theologians⁴³, and even today sits strangely amongst the landscape of feminist debates centred on autonomy and self-determination in Germany⁴⁴. While Sölle's theological considerations of feminist concerns may not follow in the footsteps of the German debate, her poetic expression notably draws on women's experiences – lived through, reported or imagined – that reflect the institutional character of women's roles and duties, also in a German context. The lasting polemic against feminist groups, in their disparate organisational structures in Germany, did little in consolidating or coordinating a national response; any such efforts had to work by rallying support for specific causes, such as the debate ensuing around contraceptives and abortion.

⁴³ Susanne Scholz attests to three factors for the tendency of German feminist women theologians of the 1980s and 1990s to pursue their work outside of the German context: orientation on the US is more common in a cultural milieu with such strong American influence as Germany exhibits; the German theological academy is predominantly focussed on its own theological heritage; and university structures complicate the integration of feminist theology – “Going West: Zur Situation Deutscher Feministischer Theologinnen“ in *Zwischen-Räume: Deutsche Feministische Theologinnen im Ausland*, ed. Katharina von Kellenbach und Susanne Scholz (Münster: LIT, 2000) 56.

⁴⁴ Myra Marx Ferree sensitively parses the particularities of the women's movement in Germany in comparison to the US. She holds the political structures, and relative loss of a feminist movement due to the caesura posed by the Nazi-regime as key to the largely scattered approach by women's groups – *Varieties of Feminism: German Gender Politics in Global Perspective* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012). Sölle's work certainly follows the same developmental pathway – from consciousness-raising, grassroots projects towards a greater political lobby; she does, however, refrain from working through these questions in isolation from other gendered positions.

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Given the caesura of the Nazi era, engaging with feminist debates in Germany was fraught with extreme difficulties. Despite a solid basis for consciousness-raising instigated by the student movement, political pressure for change in the discussions sparked around the situation of mothers, and women's rights to self-determination only started to build in 1971, with a self-incrimination campaign to legalise abortions⁴⁵. The German magazine *Stern* had published a controversial issue on the initiative of journalist and feminist activist Alice Schwarzer⁴⁶ (following the French example earlier that year) with the title "*Wir haben abgetrieben*" [We had abortions] which featured a host of women "confessing" to having had an abortion⁴⁷. With reference to the debates about Paragraph 218 (the paragraph concerning abortion), Sölle indicates a critical perspective in a poem that links the rhetoric for legalising abortion with the campaign to end the atrocities of the Vietnam War:

[REDACTED]

⁴⁵ The campaign has only been partially successful, since the Federal Constitutional Court deemed the initial bill unlawful. Abortion was subsequently deemed unlawful but not punishable in West Germany, a bill still in force after German unification; East Germany's more liberal stance in the immediate post-war years changed in line with dropping birth-rates; cf. Lorena Anton, Yoshie Mitobe, and Kristina Schulz, "Politics of Reproduction in a Divided Europe: Abortion, Protest Movements, and State Interventions after World War II," in *The Establishment Responds: Power, Politics and Protest Since 1945*, ed. by Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Martin Klimke, Joachim Scharloth, and Laura Wong (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 107ff.

⁴⁶ Alice Schwarzer (1942-) is by far the most prominent feminist voice in Germany. During her studies in Paris she was party to founding the *Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes* in the 1970s. In Germany she provides a public forum for feminist discourse in her journalistic work such as her editorship of the magazine *Emma*.

⁴⁷ Ute Frevert, "The Politicisation of Private Life: From the Women's Committees to the New Women's Movement," in *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation*, trans. Stuart McKinnon-Evans (Oxford: Berg Publishing, 1989), 294.

[REDACTED]
(ll.6-10, RG29,2).

Sölle's poetry develops a very sensitive language surrounding the pressures and pleasures of motherhood, mothering and the instituting of family life that become an ever-expanding metaphorical tapestry. Despite a customary discomfort at classifying Sölle as a feminist (labels seem to serve merely to de-stress the radical nature of her projects), Sölle quite categorically points out that: 'For me feminism is a human endeavour and a necessity'⁴⁸. The emphasis on the common denominator of humanity here is indicative of the inclusiveness of all genders to strive for human flourishing. It is with little surprise then we note that at the time of initial legislation passed on the matters surrounding abortion, Sölle, in her characteristically contrary manner, published an article "Über die Unterdrückung des Mannes" (1977) [On the Oppression of Men]⁴⁹ assessing the negative impact of the patriarchal system on men, which does not seek to trivialise the concerns raised by feminist discourse, but articulates a need to differentiate perpetrators and victims of oppression more closely. Exclusivist tendencies such as many feminist projects of the time exhibited troubled Sölle.

The social (*soziale*) and societal (*gesellschaftliche*) orientation of Sölle's work follows through even in her mature work centred on mysticism. Sölle's so-called magnum opus, *The Silent Cry* (2001 [1997]), as well as her posthumously published *The Mystery of Death* (2007 [2003]), circumscribe different parameters for her project associated by Liberation Theologies of the '70s and '80s. While she continues to be involved, and emotionally connected to the cause of Latin

⁴⁸"Für mich ist Feminismus ein menschliches Unternehmen und eine Notwendigkeit" – Sölle, "Gegenwind," Bd.12, 128.

⁴⁹ Sölle makes a point about the oppression of men being particularly prevalent in the "private sphere" – Dorothee Sölle, "On the Oppression of Men" in *The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity*, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1984), 50.

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American struggles, her work here offers rich resources for the study of mysticism in a broad combination of sources, Jewish, Christian and others, revealing trends in her own work on liberation set in the dynamics between solidarity and emancipation, resistance and mysticism, within and outside the Christian tradition. With a more contemplative focus, this work does not feature strongly in my study, although elements of her understanding of mysticism undoubtedly offer great insight into her poetic work, while aspects of her early Christology no doubt are characterised by the language of mystical transformation. Neither the loss of self, nor the negation of the other are at issue, but their continued ethical relationship across time and space. Sölle wants to “democratise” mysticism, showing that the contemplative withdrawal will always render its subject back to the world.

0.2 Existing Criticism

Much of Sölle’s theology has been carefully documented over the years⁵⁰, with a renewed impulse and concern for her work since her death in 2003, even in

⁵⁰ Please refer to the relevant section in the bibliography for details. As a general trend, her early work was received with ardent criticism from the conservative ranks of academy and church in Germany, and her temperament would not mitigate the waves of criticism against her in the public eye. In her memoirs she draws on a particularly wide-reaching impasse between her, the church-governance of the EKD and the evangelical right upon her invitation to the Ecumenical council in Vancouver, 1983. While she was disappointed at the attitude of the church who had been voicing concern over her representative role for Germany, her assessment of the evangelical hate campaign is almost comical: ‘For more than thirty years, the evangelicals have portrayed me as a witch who should really be burnt at the stake’ (*Against the Wind*, 93); “Für die Evangelikalen bin ich seit über dreißig Jahren eine Hexe, die man eigentlich verbrennen sollte” (“Gegenwind,” Bd.12, 158). As the slogans invented to slander her, as I had to find out rather unexpectedly via my brother, are still alive and well, I feel compelled to point to the courage and integrity of her theological criticism in naming and shaming the abuse of power by the affluent global North, not in terms of generalities, but in concrete historical example. To my mind she offered real gestures of peace, even if they sparked long controversies “at home”.

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the English-speaking world. However, the implications of her poetic work has featured little in either German or English. Whereas some studies in earlier days have done excellent work drawing attention to Sölle's theology of prayer, the literary implications of her work at large have been granted attention only recently. Amongst the critical literature on Sölle available to date the following contributions require closer examination, and I will draw upon their insights with greater frequency throughout the course of my argument: Perry Lefevre, *Radical Prayer* (1982)⁵¹; Hans Jürgen Lübl, *Des Fremden Sprachgestalt* (1993)⁵²; Klaus Aschrich, *Theologie Schreiben: Dorothee Sölles Weg zu einer Mystik der Befreiung* (2006)⁵³ and Julia Prinz, *Endangering Hunger for God* (2007)⁵⁴ – the latter two developing out of extensive doctoral work with particular focus on Sölle – as well as insightful essays contextualising Sölle's theopoetic project in edited volumes by Sarah K. Pinnock, *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle* (2003)⁵⁵, and two German publications with a similarly contextual agenda by Helga Kuhlmann, titled *Eher eine Kunst als eine Wissenschaft* (2007)⁵⁶, and Hans-Martin Gutmann, Alexander Höner and Swantje Luthe from 2013, *Poesie, Prophetie, Power*⁵⁷. Given the extensive publicity

⁵¹ Perry LeFevre, *Radical Prayer: Contemporary Interpretations* (Chicago: Exploration Press, 1982).

⁵² Hans Jürgen Lübl, *Des Fremden Sprachgestalt: Beobachtungen zum Bedeutungswandel des Gebets in der Geschichte der Neuzeit* (Tübingen: Mohr und Siebeck, 1993). [The Gestalt of Language of the Unknown: Observations on the Change of Meaning of Prayer in the History of Modernity].

⁵³ Klaus Aschrich, *Theologie Schreiben: Dorothee Sölles Weg zu einer Mystik der Befreiung* (Münster: LIT, 2006). [Writing Theology: Dorothee Sölle's Path to a Mysticism of Liberation].

⁵⁴ Julia D. E. Prinz, *Endangering Hunger for God: Johann Baptist Metz and Dorothee Sölle at the Interface of Biblical Hermeneutic and Christian Spirituality* (Münster: LIT, 2007).

⁵⁵ Sarah K. Pinnock, *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle* (London: TPI Continuum, 2003).

⁵⁶ Helga Kuhlmann (Hrsg.), *Eher eine Kunst als eine Wissenschaft: Resonanzen der Theologie Dorothee Sölles* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 2007). [More an Art than a Science: Resonances in the Theology of Dorothee Sölle].

⁵⁷ Hans-Martin Gutmann, Alexander Höner und Swantje Luthe (Hrsg.), *Poesie, Prophetie, Power – Dorothee Sölle: die Bleibende Provokation* (Berlin: EB Verlag, 2013). [Poetry, Prophecy, Power – Dorothee Sölle the Persistent Provocation].

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of Sölle's career in Germany, and what appeared as a declining interest in her work at the end of the 1990s, renewed work on her theology is both encouraging and timely on both sides of her reception, English- and German-speaking.

Radical Prayer (1982)

Perry LeFevre discusses Sölle still under the rubric of Political Theology and interestingly combines discussion of her comments on prayer with a then highly influential text *The Inward Road and the Way Back* (1979 [1975])⁵⁸ that opened out a path into mysticism on the basis of identity politics. Developing from the existential theological tradition, accentuating attention (borrowing from Simone Weil) and experience (in the discipline evoked by the Mystics, particularly Suso and Meister Eckhart), Sölle articulates a struggle with God (in predetermined structures) that wants (lacks and longs for) God. What is lacking from this otherwise fair assessment of her understanding of prayer is any reference to the role of the poetic. LeFevre usefully contextualises the distinctly Lutheran precepts of Sölle's holistic approach to prayer, that all life in faith is prayer⁵⁹, in the discourse surrounding identity prevalent in her early works (*Christ the Representative, The Inward Road, Creative Disobedience* et al.). Interestingly, he identifies Sölle's understanding of prayer as one that champions 'a regression of the ego'⁶⁰, to speak, as he does, in "secular", psychoanalytic terms, as a turning away from the world by drawing near to God. By contrast, I have come to understand Sölle's poetry to speak of the wholeness of being as a conscious drawing upon the "world" in order to localise the ego as a relational entity. If we have moved past the initial mourning for God, and the melancholic dependency of continuing the conversation past the *exitus*, remaking the conversation into a living interaction, it is the world we have to turn to in prayer. 'The dialogue which we

⁵⁸ Sölle, "Die Hinreise," Bd. 2; Published in English as: *The Inward Road and the Way Back* (1979).

⁵⁹ Perry LeFevre, *Radical Prayer*, 23.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

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are'⁶¹, echoing Hölderlin, in post-theistic prayer, requires the doubled contextualisation of self and others, in order to address and perform the action (prayer) that will “justify” the difference⁶²; not as a sedative to privilege, but as a call to let go of the difference as defining qualifier for incurred injustices so that doing right by the other is not at the cost of that other’s difference.

Des Fremden Sprachgestalt (1993)

The more recent study on prayer by Luibl, although outlining the context of Sölle’s engagement with poetry, does not in the end develop his criticism of her work on the basis of her texts, but on the deviance from classical theology that he sees in her work. Again, drawing almost exclusively from her early involvement with the Political Night Prayers, even though drawing on texts with a later authorship, Luibl relegates Sölle’s work to that of a lesser poet with even less convincing theological significance⁶³. If anything, Sölle here is portrayed as a demagogue and relevant spokesperson in a historical context, but with little to offer the world ahead as regards the tradition’s insights into the life of prayer.

Modern subject emancipation in these prayer-attempts returns to its origin, prayer, without consciousness of the fact that this prayer is already realized and consequently lost [*verwirkt*]. The “bourgeois” authorization [*Bemächtigung*] of prayer situated in the precarious context of late modern history (such as Sölle’s example has illustrated) finds prayer emptied from that spirit out of which it lives itself.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid., 23f.

⁶² In my study, difference is brought to the foreground on multiple levels: in terms of gender, in terms of the perceived binary between human and divine, between and amongst ourselves as well as others, but also between us and the wholly other (Otto, Derrida) – the God who will not show him or herself in singular identity, but come to be in the act. Theologically, differentiation is not judgment of the kind that could disavow the other, but a critical engagement – an inter-action. Prayer returns to be communication.

⁶³ Luibl, *Des Fremden Sprachgestalt*, 235.

⁶⁴ “Neuzeitliche Subjektmanzipation kehrt in diesen Gebetsversuchen zu ihrem Ursprung, dem Gebet zurück, ohne Bewußtsein, daß dieses Gebet bereits verwirklicht und damit verwirkt ist. Die

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Luibl certainly has a point alerting to the danger that a self-referential prayer-practice would indicate: if God as recipient of prayer is negated, prayer returns its own reflection without therefore critically examining the context from which such reflection emerges. While the individual points of his very brief criticism, set in an otherwise lengthy and compelling study of theologians in the German tradition, will be raised during the theological discussion of Chapter One, I would like to note at this stage that Sölle is the only woman theologian treated in his text. And while other more respectable theologians are marked for their relative successes, and excused for any infelicities as a sign of the times, Sölle is castigated for serving a spirit not altogether consonant with the Christian God. Commenting on Sölle's faith in terms of orthodoxy, instead of in terms of her evident commitments, to my mind, is crucially misplaced. What is called for however is an understanding of the theopoetic texture that has potential, in the context of prayer, to elucidate the role of wishing and dreaming for a different language from that of scientific certainty and academic assumptions of superiority. It is not Sölle's authorship but the text that forms the living context we are to engage. Academic theology does not call the terms of what is to be constituted as real, or faithful. We do not live by academic merit alone. Thus, as I see her work's development, her continuous poetic output has to be read as an integral part of her theological vision and as such cannot be reduced to aesthetic judgments of the quality of her lyrical finesse, but neither can her literary approach step back behind doctrinal authority.

The Theology of Dorothee Soelle (2003)

Two sections in this collection of essays on Sölle's theology have provided sustained focus in contextualising and elaborating both Sölle's theological position, and my own: "New Forms of Theological Language", exemplified by articles from

'bürgerliche' Bemächtigung des Gebets in der prekären Situation spätneuzeitlicher Geschichte (wie es vor allem am Beispiel Sölles deutlich geworden ist) findet das Gebet entleert von jenem Geist, aus dem es selber lebt" – Ibid., 256.

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Luise Schottroff, Andrea Bieler and Martin Rumscheidt, and “Theological Liberation” with contributions by Rosemary Radford-Ruether, Carter Heyward and Beverly Wildung Harrison. Listing them at the outset not only points to the reception I pursue with my work – trained in an English-speaking academic context, if not a theological one per se – and the preoccupation with language which my study supplements with feminist literary theory, linguistics and philosophy. Schottroff, close friend and colleague of Dorothee Sölle from her earliest days in theology, offers a concise view of the hermeneutics of hunger, also central to Prinz’s work below, and comment on her essay will follow in relation to situating my methodology in Section 0.3.

Andrea Bieler in her account on Sölle’s ‘language of prayer’⁶⁵ searches for a common denominator between Sölle’s early considerations on the Death of God and her late work in mysticism, and identifies it in the language surrounding negative theology. While Bieler thus gives weight to a tendency present in much of Sölle reception, namely the move towards mysticism as a preferred point of investigation, my own analysis looks for a unifying thematic elsewhere. Her account offers a careful analysis of the way in which the Death of God, as a theological topos, carries over into Sölle’s discussion of theology after Auschwitz, and her work on suffering. In her emphasis on the *via negativa*, her assessment sits in close proximity to the understanding developed in Hans-Jürgen Lübl’s work where prayer in post-theistic terms of modern secular culture appears displaced by an ethics of work. True prayer here returns silence. Bieler, however, in contrast to Lübl, grants Sölle a share in this understanding, voiced in the paradox of the mystics that serves as title to Sölle’s late work, the “silent cry”. Noting the reciprocity between text and context, that moves her argument into a discussion of Hegelian dialectics with the Death of God, Bieler inadvertently points to aspects

⁶⁵ Andrea Bieler, “The Language of Prayer between Truth Telling and Mysticism,” in *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*, ed. by Sarah K. Pinnock (London: TPI Continuum, 2003).

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relevant to this study, despite its comparative neglect of the mystical points of reference in Sölle's poetry. Looking not at the "road inward", but at the "journey back", my study traces moments of affirmation, not negation. In a reflection on the practical applications of Sölle's work for worship practices within the Church where such dialectics are equally at work, Bieler notes: "The paradox of psalms of lamentation that pray to God against God are disturbing, yet they offer at the same time convincing examples of a prayer language that does not dissolve itself into the language of intimacy"⁶⁶. This moment of resistance as a residue of the mystical present in liturgical structures is the other side of the coin to my preoccupation with liturgy. Instead of rescuing oneself, in liturgical prayer, into a supposed intimacy with God that Bieler rightly points to as resisting mystical transformation, it is the divesting of oneself into the public space of this liturgy that acknowledges the intimacies inherent in this public encounter (which continues to be mediated by the liturgical community).

Boschki and Rehberger point to this trajectory of Sölle's work in her reception of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and under reference to the German Romantic Jean Paul (1763-1825)⁶⁷, in the paradoxical formulation of investing a "religious" language – public prayer – with the charge to counter its religiosity:

In dialogue with Jean Paul and others, [Sölle] pleads for an autonomous religious poetry that emancipates itself from a dominant Christian culture. Only thus can it be able "talk of God religionless" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer), in order thereby to save and pass on the core of "religion"... Both, theology and literature, have to find a new language; one which is linked to the longings of humanity strongly enough to "split the ice of the soul"⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Bieler, "The Language of Prayer," 67.

⁶⁷ Other writers that influenced Sölle's work are found amongst Jewish-German authors: Paul Celan (1920-1970), Nelly Sachs (1891-1970) and Franz Kafka (1883-1924).

⁶⁸ "In Auseinandersetzung mit ... Jean Paul und anderen plädiert sie [Sölle] für eine autonome religiöse Dichtung, die sich von einer dominanten christlichen Kultur emanzipiert. Nur so kann sie

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The hope for a religionless expression marks the attraction of Sölle's poetry as one that is not (necessarily) a "religious" interpretation of her texts. They are attempts at speaking about the human condition, in a divine horizon such that the two create a reality that is no longer legitimised by cultic boundaries, or self-serving religious observance⁶⁹. Identifying religious traditions with linguistic dialects⁷⁰, i.e. a certain kind of language behaviour, also indicates that any reflection on liturgy has to be taken in a much broader context than would immediately spring to mind in the context of the Churches.

Rumscheidt's contribution in the collection offers a combination of biographical and literary intersections narrated in almost anecdotal fashion. Starting from the often quoted comment by Sölle that we need to become 'more radical and more pious'⁷¹ he unravels Sölle's relationship with language and her literary inspirations that considers not only prayer, but also the genre of the sermon as points of critical reflection in the communicatory logic employed. The dialogic emphasis leads him to link Sölle's poetic with her assessment of the "call"

fähig sein, 'religionslos von Gott zu reden' (Dietrich Bonhoeffer), um gerade darin den Kern der 'Religion' zu bewahren und weiter zu geben. ... Beide, Theologie und Literatur, müssen eine neue Sprache finden, die mit der Sehnsucht der Menschen verbunden ist und die kraftvoll genug ist, 'das Eis der Seele zu spalten'; Reinhold Boschki und Claudia Rehberger, "Dorothee Sölle: Religiöse Poesie und befreiende Theologie," in *Theologien der Gegenwart: Eine Einführung*, Hrsg. Carsten Barwasser (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 225.

⁶⁹ In this times seem to have changed little since T.S. Eliot's observations in "Religion and Literature": 'A distaste for religious poetry is by no means restricted to those who may count themselves irreligious' – Eliot cited in David Jasper, *The Study of Literature and Religion: An Introduction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 10.

⁷⁰ Dorothee Sölle in *Welches Christentum hat Zukunft? Dorothee Sölle und Johann Baptist Metz im Gespräch mit Karl-Josef Kuschel*, Hrsg. Johannes Thiele (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1990), 56.

⁷¹ Martin Rumscheidt, "A Calling in a Higher Sense," in *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*, ed. by Sarah K. Pinnock (London: TPI Continuum, 2003), 76.

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as a literary quality (identified in Brobowski's work⁷² and shared in the Psalms) that 'is a kind of transcendence over the time of fear'⁷³. Curiously, this definition still holds within the context of this study, insofar as love and fear form the existential pivot by which faith and despair embody or alienate the call for raising our voices in prayer. Calling, one modality of the language of prayer, is a realisation of faith when 'this call for God is [...] a call to God [that] ... remains faithful to the earth'⁷⁴.

Theologie Schreiben (2006)

The study by Klaus Aschrich builds on a comprehensive review of Sölle's writings. He traces Sölle's theological project in light of her existentialist take on language and her poetic output, and proposes that, following Sölle's own metaphorical play with fluidity, "realisation" as both a making-liquid (Verflüssigung) and a concretisation operates for Sölle's life and work such that it can be read as a trajectory towards mysticism. Bringing in line her liberation theology with her late focus on mysticism, imagery surrounding the paradoxical nature of language gains particular currency, such as Sölle's much loved "silent cry". As a close textual study, the ambition of his project stands out for including

⁷² In *Almanach für Literatur und Theologie*, Volume 2 (1968) Sölle explores the lyric of Johannes Brobowski (1917-1965), who was a member of the Confessing Church in resistance to the NS regime and prisoner of the Soviet Union. Upon his release he worked as an editor in Berlin.

⁷³ Translated by Rumscheidt, "A Calling in a Higher Sense," 85 – quoting "Jeder, der ruft – und am deutlichsten die Gestalt des Rufers –, gibt sich nicht mit dem Gegebenen zufrieden, »rufen« ist eine Art Transzendenz aus der Zeit der Angst, und Rufenkönnen ist eine nicht jederzeit verfügbare Möglichkeit des Menschen" – Dorothee Sölle, "Für eine Zeit Ohne Angst: Christliche Elemente der Lyrik Johannes Bobrowskis," in *Almanach für Literatur und Theologie*, Bd.2, Hrsg. Dorothee Sölle, Arnim Juhre, Kurt Marti und Wolfgang Fietkau (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1968), 164.

⁷⁴ Sölle, "Stellvertretung," Bd. 3, 112; the published translation reads "summons" – Sölle, *Christ the Representative: An Essay in Theology after the 'Death of God'*, trans. David Lewis (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 128f.

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exemplary readings of three poems⁷⁵, which indicate the cross-over between theological reflection and literary creation, expressed in Aschrich's thesis that Sölle's work in content *and* form realises itself as a coherent whole⁷⁶. Nevertheless, it is a study that continues in the path taken by the reception of Sölle in German, which stays true to the historical-critical method in exegesis, and draws heavily on Sölle's authorship, and the meaning of her texts for their time. As a valuable resource for scholarship on Sölle's writings, Aschrich discerns theologically the poetic exchanges inherent in Sölle's writing as a kind of process-theology. Despite his keen awareness of the largely unsystematic corpus, Aschrich appears to defend a linear progression in Sölle's work couched under the rubric of mystical theology. This is where my own study differs most significantly from his, in that the poetry takes precedence over the utilisation and contextualisation of Sölle's theological output. Thus, while I facilitate Sölle's theology of prayer to contextualise my reading of her poetry, the poems for me do not exemplify *her* theology, or a perceived historical-theological project. Instead I look to account for my own reading strategy of her work as the context from which theo-logical reflection springs, orientated around the texture of her poetic work. That is, in working out the reception of her prayer-texts, I find myself in dialogue with a theopoetic vision that invites to invent, to co-create, rather than to discern.

Endangering Hunger for God (2007)

Julia D. E. Prinz's study, the first one to treat Sölle's theopoetic emphasis more extensively in English, focuses on the hermeneutics at play in "spiritual practice". Whereas the points of contrast and convergence between Johann Baptist Metz and Dorothee Sölle are of less interest to my study, Prinz's sensitivity to the poetic texts of Sölle, and her exposition of the biblical hermeneutic at work, are

⁷⁵ He chooses three early pieces with clear theological focus – "On resurrection" [FL 35], "Give me the gift of tears god" [FL 33] and the "Credo" [MG 24].

⁷⁶ Aschrich, *Theologie Schreiben*, 28.

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crucial. Drawing upon biblical scholarship, Prinz elaborates not only the crossing points in literary imagery and narrative from the biblical text, but explores Sölle's poetry in light of 'spiritual practices' associated with the study of scripture in order to elucidate a process of a liberation at work, carefully differentiating between various historical shifts in articulating such a hermeneutic. Thus, we are presented with three phases of development⁷⁷ in what Sölle calls a "hermeneutics of hunger". In its earliest articulation, praxis is central. Coinciding with the experiment of the Political Night Prayers, the role of intercession is given prominence here and is notably affiliated with the risk involved in taking responsibility without institutional safe-guards⁷⁸.

Sölle's friend and colleague Luise Schottroff is a major influence on Sölle for articulating the process of "doubled contextualisation"⁷⁹, a critical reflection not just of the biblical text, as Rudolf Bultmann's teachings had introduced, but of the reader's context as well. Schottroff 'is locating the motivation for the socio-political criticism in the life and praxis of the reader, not merely in academic reflection'⁸⁰. Inspired by the current debates surrounding relationship between literary criticism and biblical studies, reading here comes through as a truly dangerous task, insofar as it may suddenly reveal at least as much about the reader as the author. Within Sölle's work, this filters first through as an ideological critique of the questions asked of a text, and the intent behind reading. It is then the search for transformative encounter with the biblical text that brings Sölle to elaborate on reading in terms of a hunger, a desire for beauty that loves creation. Prinz brings

⁷⁷ Historically these fall into a) 1968 with the Initiative Political Night Prayers; b) 1970s under the impact of socio-historical criticism, and c) 1993 integrating a more creative component, hunger. But each development is also forming a concise moment in the structural framework of this hermeneutic.

⁷⁸ Cf. Prinz, *Endangering Hunger for God*, 27f.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

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this to the fore in exposition of Sölle's reading of the Psalms, emphasising Sölle's attention to the *hesychia* tradition, "chewing" on the bread of life, the Psalms:⁸¹

All of this beauty is a cry for liberation from the plunderers and proprietors, in which we are caught... Are our jailors right when they toss Psalms, poetic idylls and romanticism into the garbage can and pronounce their brutal reality as "real life"?⁸²

Reading or singing the Psalms, as is the practice of the liturgy of the hours, not only alerts us here to Prinz's insight on the role of prayer as a spiritual praxis in a *creatio continua*⁸³, it also indicates the relationship formulating in this study between the critical reception of prayer and the co-creative emphasis of prayerful "realisation" – both in the making fluid of that which appears in the text at hand, and its concretisation in the discourse it co-/creates.

Dorothee Sölle and her friend Luise Schottroff further explore the role of hunger, addressing the spiritual poverty of affluent nations as a form of anorexia⁸⁴. In sum, Prinz gives three critical moments in the process of Sölle's liberation hermeneutical practice that remain in close proximity with the agenda for the Political Night Prayers, though they are more differentiated than these. The Night Prayers were staged in three phases: information, meditation, and discussion (leading to action)⁸⁵. The hermeneutic of hunger, in the description offered by Prinz, derives from praxis, undergoes the transformation of the text, and renews its praxis in life. Lived context (literary or otherwise) informs a reciprocal process

⁸¹ Ibid., 39.

⁸² Sölle cited in Prinz, 235f. Taken from Luise Schottroff and Dorothee Sölle, "Grounding Heaven in the Earth: An Ecofeminist Approach to the Bible", lectures from the Pollock lecture series (Halifax, N.S.: Atlantic School of Theology, 18th- 21st October 1999). Manuscript of original presentation reproduced in Prinz, Appendix 1, 225-243.

⁸³ Prinz, *Endangering Hunger for God*, 41.

⁸⁴ Sölle, "Grounding Heaven in the Earth" cited in Prinz, *Endangering Hunger for God*, 227.

⁸⁵ It has to be said here that discussion also is a form of action.

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between reader and text. The doubled-contextualisation opens our analysis to a reading that “hungers” in solidarity with those places in the text where justice is broken. Prompting our “realisation” for action to recover its textual integrity, this doubling marks a renewed praxis (of reading and interpreting). In this sense criticism can be a movement of displacement (in violence to the suffering of the text) or a replenishing, a re-iteration of place to that voice of the text that has not found “home” (yet) and cannot dwell in/by itself (fulfilling the text’s desire for relation). Recontextualisation is a moment in transcendence of the text. While Prinz investigates such claims in Sölle’s biblical hermeneutic against the comparison with Johann Baptist Metz in light of a discussion on spirituality, the aim of the thesis is to develop on from her readings. Not the place of method in light of the Bible, but its applied practice in the criticism of prayer-poetry becomes the focus of my thesis.

Eher eine Kunst als eine Wissenschaft (2007)

The portrait given by this collection of essays of the German reception of Sölle’s theology of concern to the thesis falls under the sub-heading “Fähig werden zum Beten” [Habilitating for prayer]. The first piece by Jürgen Ebach develops how Sölle’s life and work can be read from the perspective of the Psalms, the basis of her hermeneutical praxis. Although his use of Sölle’s poetry remains at a more illustrative level, he makes an observation of more general importance to this study. He states: ‘Lament and resistance [Widerspruch] do not deny a psalm, a prayer, to be God’s praise’⁸⁶. While much of Sölle’s poetry is touched by sadness, grief and worry – in a compassionate intercession for victims of oppression (and

⁸⁶ “Klage und Widerspruch lassen einen Psalm, ein Gebet nicht aufhören, Gottes Lob zu sein”, Ebach, “Auch jetzt noch ist meine Klage Widerspruch (Hiob 23,2) – Rebellion und Frömmigkeit: Ein Grundton in Dorothee Sölles Leben und Werk,” in *Eher eine Kunst als eine Wissenschaft: Resonanzen der Theologie Dorothee Sölles*, Hrsg. Helga Kuhlmann (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 2007), 270.

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rehabilitating our imagination to stand with the victims against our own persistence in oppression) – her poems also carry over into the affirmation of praise. For my part I deliberately chose poems I felt contributed to a more optimistic side in face of the Death of God, in order to accentuate the strength of her poetry to speak about more than the actuality of suffering for which her theology has been renowned.

Second in line is a piece by Hans-Jürgen Benedict that seeks to contextualise and categorise Sölle's poetry in light of the German historical context, and the literary phenomenon of *agitprop*. As his argument will be discussed in detail in the course of genre-discussions in Chapter Two, suffice it here to note that his argument is heavily author-led insofar as Sölle's activist agenda trumps the finer nuances of her text. Where I trace ambiguities in the presentation of her verses, Benedict attests that Sölle's "will to teach" more often than not has gotten the better of her⁸⁷. That our divergent reception has as much an historical as an aesthetic basis will be shown in my evaluation of the category posed by prayer-poetry and the role of the lyric.

It is Ulrike Wagner-Rau's contribution then that offers a central point of departure crucial to this study: the connection between learning to speak and learning to have faith⁸⁸. While my personal journey with this doctoral research has been fraught with innumerable fears, the hope of being able to finally come to

⁸⁷ Hans-Jürgen Benedict, "Das Eis der Seele spalten – Dorothee Sölle als Gottespoetin – eine kritische Analyse," in *Eher eine Kunst als eine Wissenschaft: Resonanzen der Theologie Dorothee Sölles*, Hrsg. Helga Kuhlmann (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 2007), 284.

⁸⁸ Wagner-Rau's title quotes Sölle's comment: 'learning to believe also means learning to speak', (Dorothee Sölle, *Suffering*, trans. Everett Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 148) – Ulrike Wagner-Rau, "...weil Glaubenlernen auch Sprechenlernen bedeutet – Vorbereitungen zum Beten," in *Eher eine Kunst als eine Wissenschaft: Resonanzen der Theologie Dorothee Sölles*, Hrsg. Helga Kuhlmann (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 2007), 289.

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articulate my concern with prayer (something Sölle, echoing Tillich, points to in her definition of prayer as an act of speaking our utmost concern⁸⁹) is summed up in this nexus between faith and language. Wagner-Rau points to the necessity of querying the aim and direction of prayer, our relation and hope to connect with a transcendent reality evoked in prayer-practices, particularly after the so-called Death of God. In light of the role of criticism, central to the discourse built by any thesis, the “death of the author”, literarily and literally, has methodological implications: it means that writing this study is an exercise, if not in joining Sölle’s prayer, then in formulating my own theological position as well as discerning my literary subjectivity. Wagner-Rau’s exposition of Sölle’s theopoetic engagement with prayer also points towards a critical if (necessarily) blurry line in my argument, namely that the beginning of prayer coincides with a deprivatised awareness of the praying subject in the role of the believer. Determining the *Grenzerfahrung* (liminal experience) of the life of prayer (in wishing, loving, resisting and all its creative corollaries⁹⁰), in its paradoxical centrality to the life of faith, Wagner-Rau clarifies the need expressed in Sölle’s work for such prayer to enable a moment of self-affirmation that is not equated with narcissism.

In praying becoming less powerless, but more self-empowered and at the same time able to place the love of God above all that humans wish for or that they suffer from: not to undermine this paradox but to learn to repeat it ever better, is a substantial core of Dorothee Sölle’s theo-poetics of prayer.⁹¹

The ‘ever better’ repetition is not mimetic, in the same sense that the affirmation of self-empowerment is not narcissistic. Instead, prayer abides, invents and rejoices.

⁸⁹ Cf. Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

⁹⁰ Cf. Wagner-Rau, “...weil Glaubenlernen,” 297.

⁹¹ “Im Beten weniger ohnmächtig, sondern immer selbst-mächtiger zu werden und zugleich die Liebe zu Gott über alles zu stellen, was Menschen sich wünschen und woran sie leiden: Diese Paradoxie nicht zu unterschreiten, sondern ihr immer besser nachsprechen zu lernen, ist ein wesentlicher Kern von Dorothee Sölles Theopoesie des Betens” – Wagner-Rau, “...weil Glaubenlernen,” 291.

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Poesie, Prophetie, Power (2013)

This most recent collection of essays on Sölle's theology has a more experimental flavour. Orientated closely on the biographical context, but also on the impetus of her theology as a *living* context for discussion, we find a fuller exploration of Sölle's later projects. Next to a piece by Hans Jürgen Benedict, this time centring on Sölle's late work on mysticism, including her posthumously published *The Mystery of Death* (2007 [2003]), we find here a conversational piece between Johann Hinrich Claussen and Peter Cornehl. The staged debate between these two will find more detailed commentary in the discussion on genre in Chapter Two. Claussen champions a similar approach to that adopted by Benedict's essay from the earlier volume, where literary reception is guided strongly by the critique on Sölle's public persona. And yet, their debate brings something else to the table that previous discussions of her poetry by theologians have largely missed out: they allow the poems to speak back, to provide feedback, on their own stance as readers. This dialogue might be more problematic at times for readers wishing to contextualise Sölle's poetry with her own life, as such a conversation falls short of the playful invitations her texts have to offer. To be a conversation, our readings need to involve ourselves in the text, rather than looking to assert a persona external to the text whose intentions will remain perpetually oblique. Reading Sölle's texts should not remain stuck in dwelling on the author's life.

While theological considerations fall into the background in Claussen's argumentation, the activist press Sölle received in a German context dominates the overall evaluation of her literary quality⁹². Building an interesting contrast on this

⁹² While Claussen attests to having largely by-passed the "phenomenon Sölle", and asserting his genuine interest in approaching her work from an objective point of view (dubious as such categories are), his points of criticism seem largely guided by "taste", and an alertness to political polemic evident in her text that marks his aesthetic judgment more by the generation from which he speaks

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point, to some extent, is the work of Josef P. Mautner⁹³ who approaches “religious subject matter” from the vantage point of literary criticism. The conversation between Mautner and Sölle is what prompted Sölle to characterise poetry as sharing aspects with the liturgical. Since she never elaborates on this comment, I have taken the liberty to see in what form I can envision this notion to carry through in my work of criticism. From this perspective, my work, too, gives prominence to the theological implications of her literary output, even where at times I would have wished for the courage to break up my academic prose in favour of a more artistic expression. As it stands, this remains Sölle’s prerogative within the corpus of this thesis.

Directions for research

As these contributions highlight, there is a sustained engagement by theologians with Sölle’s literary work in the context of prayer, but also in light of her increasing mystical theological project. However, analysis is usually subordinate to factors other than the literary context in which her poetry is presented to the reader or the literary corpus in its diverse range of material. The emphasis has remained either on the early poems relating to the historical meetings of the Political Night Prayers, or her mature verse (*Loben ohne lügen*, 2000), or a combination of both, relative to a mystical topos. The language

than a consideration of the aesthetic texture this brings out. While this is a criticism no doubt to be levelled against my own readings, too, my subjectivity is not cloaked in dispassionate judgement.

⁹³ Josef P. Mautner (1955-) is an Austrian freelance writer as well as an editor for the series "edition solidarisch leben" by A. Pustet. After his studies in literature and theology, Mautner has become involved in various projects for human rights within and outwith the Catholic Church. His reconstruction of an interview with Sölle, held 18/12/1995 (published by Dorothee Sölle, Herbert Falken und Josef Mautner, *Himmelsleitern: Ein Gespräch über Literatur und Religion*, edition solidarisch leben, Salzburg: Verlag Anton Pustet, 1996), into a literary conversation between primary literature, pieces of analysis, and fragments of this conversation attests to the creative and literary focus of his work. Cf. Josef P. Mautner, *Nichts Endgültiges: Literatur und Religion in der späten Moderne* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008).

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surrounding silence and paradox, foregrounded in discussions by Bieler and Cornehl are not at focus in this study. Sölle's reception as activist and mystic⁹⁴ may correlate to my reading of the constructions of the personal as political, but my study elaborates this for our involvement in the course of reading, an act of critical reception of and responsive reflection on the text. Reception theory and reader-response criticism come together in my approach⁹⁵.

0.3 Method

Addressing the literary work of a woman theologian who offers rich commentary on the role and scope of prayer enables a theological perspective upon the role of women's subjectivity in the process of communication invoked by prayer. It also, as poetry, necessitates the transformation of theological discourse to not only make room for the poetic, but to dare to risk "its" life in it, namely its disciplinarity in discourse. Given Sölle's sustained engagement in writing poetry, she offers an exceptional body of work for reflection on the intersection between poetry and prayer that I want to elucidate for an English-speaking audience, developing and exemplifying the strength of reading her poetry in light of current feminist criticism and debates about the relationship of gender and sexuality. These conceptual focal points are a consequence of the need to situate the body of women, as well as the body of the text, in the dynamics of the discourse identified in prayer-poetry. The interest of this study, while author-centred, is not author-focussed. In fact, the differentiation between author, reader and text, as will

⁹⁴ Anne Llewellyn Barstow, "Dorothee Soelle: Mystic/Activist" in *The Theology of Dorothee Sölle*, edited by Sarah K. Pinnock (London: TPI Continuum, 2003), 189-201.

⁹⁵ My views are strongly informed by my readings of Wolfgang Iser and Paul Ricoeur. Especially: Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), and Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol.1-3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-88). While these treat the situation of the novel, their insights have been formative to my understanding of hermeneutics.

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become clear in this brief exposition on method, is inherently and critically unstable. Their respective authoritative positions become less and less important even where these may continue to offer unique points of entry into the discussion⁹⁶. Considering Sölle's material against more recent feminist achievements as these become relevant to the topics found in her poems sets a different direction from much of theological criticism, and in this my own theological point of departure differs from these critics. My hermeneutic is reception orientated in that it seeks to invite a reading of Sölle's work responsive to more contemporary criticism and concerns while remaining reflective of my personal involvement in the presentation of this study.

I propose here a methodological entanglement with Sölle's work that carries through on multiple levels, beginning from the basic premise of reception criticism, elaborated in Sölle's biblical hermeneutic of hunger as a doubled contextualisation. The context of a text is not only its historical production and redaction; it is also the reader's historically determined interest. Sölle's reception of Rudolf Bultmann's historical-critical exegesis identifies the necessity of an ideological critique on part of the reader⁹⁷: the questions we bring to a text determine the level of interaction with the text. Thus, next to a formal contextualisation of theological (Chapter One) and literary (Chapter Two) points of discussion, the role of this thesis as an exercise in conforming to academic standards also needs addressing (Chapter Four).

⁹⁶ We will come across a similar point of reference in the discussion on perichoresis within a reading of the Trinity, Section 1.1.1.

⁹⁷ I see this reflected in much of her interpretive approach. For example her identification of the "political Jesus" who calls us not to imitation but to discipleship: '[It is important to] recognise the tendency of his [Jesus] actions and to realise anew his aims in our world' ; "[Es kommt darauf an] die Tendenz seines [Jesu] Verhaltens zu erkennen und seine Ziele in unserer Welt neu zu realisieren" – Dorothee Sölle, "Politische Theologie" (1971), Bd.1, 82.

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Hermeneutics of Hunger (Sölle and Schottroff): Positioning Translation(s)

In the course of research I worked with a broad sample of 25 % of Sölle's poetry in my own translations, based on the Fietkau edition. The present study restricts detailed discussion to eleven core texts for analysis, in order to reflect a thematic concern central to my own theological engagement, while still showing the scope unique to each book of poetry, and writing periods discerned.

Translation is a peculiar act of communicating, as there exists a tacit agreement that (1) what is being translated pre-exists but (2) also equates to what the translation reads. Because neither of these presuppositions can be upheld uncritically in the context of *Stellvertretung*, I want to present here the hermeneutic at play in Sölle's own work to elucidate my position and "interference" with her texts in more detail (a closer reflection of the theological implication of such a positioning is to be found in Section 4.1).

Luise Schottroff makes a simple, but striking observation about Liberation hermeneutics: here is a hermeneutic that begins from context, not from *the Text*⁹⁸. And if we suppose, alongside Sölle, that poets and theologians speak of the same subject, but not in the same language, then the difference acknowledged in not knowing *the Text* is vital. Contexts for this study, aside from the context presented by the study itself, range from the strictly literary to the theological, but these also intersect with questions of hermeneutics, feminist literary criticism, philosophy, my own authorship and experience with reading Sölle's work. This means however, that the Text, in this instance, is not equivalent to the poem. On first reading Sölle's poetry, despite her insightful expressions of women's experiences, I felt disoriented with her work because – against my reading expectations – I could not objectively

⁹⁸ Luise Schottroff, " 'Come, Read with my Eyes!' Dorothee Soelle's Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation," in *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*, ed. by Sarah K. Pinnock (London: TPI Continuum, 2003), 50.

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point to women in her text: I could not hold a position of objective authority over women's subjectivity from the basis of my own subjectivity, and women refused to present themselves as objects in these texts. Similar to the 'poetic i' whose elusive presence is filtering the text for the reader, other women appeared, but would not necessarily form the imagistic focus or concern of the poem. More often than not, what is to be known of a woman in Sölle's poetry is precisely that, 'of a woman', pertaining *to* her – her situation or context. Despite a fair number of explicit portraits that address women, Sölle's poetry gives shape to women in a different way. This literary space is not women's negation; it is part of their linguistic affirmation: Sölle's texts prompt recognition – a change in the direction for reading, and a reflection of that process.

While affirmation carries positive energy, it is not positivist assessment. The aim and objective of a liberation hermeneutic, given by Sölle in her formulation on "hunger," speak of compassion and justice that are able to bear liberation, to bring peace. They do not speak of heavenly pacifiers:

It is the claim of liberation theologies that they bring a new hermeneutical orientation to the question of how theology can be done in a meaningful, that is, life-changing way. ... liberation theology starts with the context of our lives, our experiences, our hopes and fears, our "praxis." This is not to deny the power of the text and its spiritual quality, but to make room for it.⁹⁹

This "room" is not the void of absolute negation or similar expressions given by the mystics. Instead, "hunger", going back to its earliest formulation in an article for *Junge Kirche*¹⁰⁰, is lived-in space, filled with both pains and pleasures, but always in anticipation of a taste that promises newness of life. "The process of liberation is

⁹⁹ Schottroff quotes this passage, in altered translation from: Soelle, *On Earth as in Heaven: A Liberation Spirituality of Sharing*, trans. Marc Batko (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), x; Schottroff refers this back to the wording found in Sölle's contribution for *Junge Kirche* (see below).

¹⁰⁰ Dorothee Sölle, "Wie können wir Befreiungstheologisch Arbeiten? – Ein Vorschlag für einen Prozess in Vier Schritten," *Junge Kirche* 11 (1993): 607-608.

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shown here as the process of faith and not only as a method for reading scripture¹⁰¹. The participatory nature of Sölle's poetry necessitates discernment, necessitates recognition and solidarity. In having faith in language, we encounter the many women in her text (small t), as a work of translation that begins in the recognition of ourselves. With Sölle I feel can begin in facing the mirror raised by Simone de Beauvoir's question: 'What is a woman?'¹⁰² "Woman" is a work of art. It is up to the translator, reader, critic this woman aspires to be that will disrupt the boundaries drawn by such recognition in discourse.

Image and Discourse: Analytical Strategy

In the context of women's subjectivity the role of the reader in reception is primary to understanding the relationship between "hunger" and the discourse surrounding liberation insofar as gender serves to highlight a crucial point of identification in the interchange between the personal and the political (not understood as a distinction of public and private – see "deprivatisation" below) and between the individual and society. As a discourse that identifies our bodily and psycho-social conception, gender is a category of intense power struggles. Mary Gerhart's research on genre translates the situation of gender for the identity (and identification) of the text, offering in the neologism of the "genric"¹⁰³ a conceptual go-between indicative of the self-consciousness needed by scholarly attributions of genre inflected by negotiations of gender. Gerhart's use of "genric" then closely reflects the intersection of textual economy and reception. What Gerhart's term contributes to the framework of this study is a tool for differentiating a gendered sociality grounding our understanding of reception.

¹⁰¹ Schottroff, "Come, Read with my Eyes", 50.

¹⁰² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. by H. M. Parshley (London: Vintage, [orig. 1949] 1997), 13.

¹⁰³ Every subsequent use of the adjectival form 'genric' refers to the work of Mary Gerhart, *Genre Choices, Gender Questions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

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Hand in hand with this reading, I have chosen to expand on Luce Irigaray's use of the "sexuate" to mark out the relationship between the body and consciousness in light of issues raised – of the social embeddedness of the personal – by sexuality. "Hunger", here, comes fraught with Freudian allusions of sexual drives and desire that need careful unpacking in the way my thesis proceeds. Sexuality is primarily understood in the terms offered by Luce Irigaray. In her treatment of the psycho-analytic situation of sexual difference, she raises the question of our sexuate identity. As a term that has concrete biological significance in the context of sexual reproductive functions of the body, Irigaray develops the notion of the sexuate in its significance to a discourse on desire. Interested in identifying the ethical boundaries of an anatomically cogent but psycho-socially non-causal understanding of sexuality (anatomy is not destiny) she transposes the medicalised reading of sexuate identity into a psychoanalytic discourse that accentuates the psychological dimension of desire, the physiological dimension of attraction, and the philosophical dimension of mutuality. Sexuate identity bears on the ethical and economical (in the sense of "exchange" of affections) interdependence of these dimensions on the level of discourse: 'Sexuate identity rules out all forms of totality as well as the complete ownership of the subject (and of the *existentialia*). The *mine* of the subject is always already marked by a disappropriation: a gender'¹⁰⁴. Sexuate identity here indicates a particular entry-point into the discourse of gender that is rooted in the sexed body, without being entirely determined by its anatomical make-up. It provides, in the strict sense, for *perspective*, an orientation. This orientation projects gender for its subject, and thus fulfils an equivalent function to what the 'kingdom of God',

¹⁰⁴ Luce Irigaray, "You who will never be Mine," in *Luce Irigaray: Key Writings* (London: Continuum, 2004), 10. Rev. translation of *I Love to You*, trans. Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1996), 106.

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‘justice’ or ‘peace’ provide in light of a theologically viable, existential sociality in Sölle’s theological writings¹⁰⁵.

When women will be discussed in relation to three “representative” (see “Stellvertretung”, below) roles – lovers, mothers, and artists – all three feature a societal (in the case of the artist an intertextual and aesthetic) role in light of the matters of creation, re-production, and co-creation. To this end I have opted for a secondary focus alongside the roles of women in Sölle’s poetry – water. Already in the context of Sölle’s theological reflections, images of water appear with steady frequency in a metaphorical interchange with love. This inference (from water to love as a marker of faith) has literary, theological and psycho-analytic precedence.

Certainly in German literature, there is an affinity between women personae and water, between sexual play and death¹⁰⁶. The story of the Loreley, a siren beauty who is reputed to cause shipwrecks at a hazardous water-passage on the River Rhine near Bacharach (Germany) not only combines an association of women, water, desire and death, but also offers a curious reworking of themes present in the myth of Narcissus to which analysis will turn in Chapter Three¹⁰⁷. In

¹⁰⁵ Sölle links Carter Heyward’s emphasis on mutuality in *The Redemption of God* (1982) (Sölle notes this in her memoirs, Bd.12, 165) with a social conception of the individual that appears to borrow equally from Bonhoeffer’s *Sanctorum Communio* [1930], and Søren Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling* [1843] and *Sickness unto Death* [1849], all of which are heavily indebted to Hegel.

¹⁰⁶ From Clemens Brentano’s ballad “Zu Bacharach am Rheine”, more popularly known in Heinrich Heine’s adaptation “Loreley”, to Achim von Arnim’s adaptation of a ballad based on the Greek myth of Hero and Leander, “Es waren zwei Königskinder” – publicised in *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (Frankfurt: Mohr, 1806) – to Achim von Arnim’s (1781-1831) adaptation of a ballad based on the Greek myth of Hero and Leander “Es waren zwei Königskinder” set, amongst others, to a tune by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897).

¹⁰⁷ Loreley combs her hair at the top of a cliff, but it is the mirror she holds that, producing a blinding reflection, causes the shipwreck of passing mariners. It is not beauty itself that is condemned as death-bringing.

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preface to the close textual analysis, I explore the myth of Narcissus, as related by Ovid, with reference to a poem by Sölle. Such a reading lays open the role of reception as much as the relationship envisioned and problematised by the thesis – namely between co-creation and deprivatisation in light of the body-consciousness invited by the poem. In the context of Narcissus’ sexual identity, and Echo’s need for self-expression in face of the watery surface, my reading of Sölle’s poem foregrounds the analytic operations of the thesis. In light of its theological nuances, theologies such as Catherine Keller’s *The Face of the Deep* (2002) equally point to the deep-seated links between water, chaos and creation, one where chaos is not necessarily a negative in the role taken by water as source of life. The ambiguity of the “face” of water in theological discourse also filters through in Sölle’s poetic treatment.

In the Bible, too, we are reminded of the inherent ambiguity between the life-giving waters of creation (Gen.1) and the creation account it draws upon, where water is identified with the goddess Tiamat, women’s association with water (e.g. John 4:1-42; Lk. 7:36-50; John 20:11-18), and water as life-threatening (Flood account, Gen.7). In liturgical settings, water appears on two occasions, baptism (itself a ritual of life and death), and mixed in with the elements of the Eucharist. In this regard a late 19th century reference work offers a curious insight into the logic of the elements at work. In Charles Walker’s *The Ritual Reason Why* [1st edition 1866] the mingling of water and wine is explained thus:

it represents the mingled tide of blood and water which flowed from our Saviour’s side; and so reminds us (like that) of the two great Sacraments of the Gospel, Baptism and the Eucharist, the latter of which cannot exist without the former. It is likewise symbolic of the Incarnation: the wine ...representing our Lord’s Godhead; the water, as the inferior [element], his manhood; for which reason and also so as not

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to impair the nature of the wine, only a few drops of water are added¹⁰⁸.

As a pointer towards the incarnation, water serves a useful point of reference in the dynamics exposed of the liberation hermeneutics at work in Sölle's text, and complements her own understanding of (literary) realisation: 'theology is in search of the realisations of the new being, one such possible being is art'¹⁰⁹. In my reception of her work as a kind of liturgical reception (see below) it formally holds the place of literary, intersubjective and bodily consciousness. Although my study does not link water with manhood, but with associations to sexual politics discussed in light of women's subjectivities, the clear sensitivity to sexual signification that this passage brings to the fore is worth pointing out. Thus, in light of the terms adopted by Luce Irigaray, water brings the discussion of women's existential-aesthetic situation in prayer to critical focus amidst its social constructions.

Amongst the range of biblical imagery that pervade Sölle's text, references to nature dominate: trees, water, stones, earth and light return with assured regularity. While earth and trees may have warranted equal scope for reflection in a study on liberation hermeneutics, the choice for water, and its imagistic counterpoints, stones and light, offer a particular theological reading-strategy. Where faith is seen under the condition of love, disbelief is synonymous with despair, and despair is what stones, often, point to in Sölle's work. Thus, water and stones are modalities of the flesh. Matthew 7:9 builds a contrast between nourishing grace and lifeless stone: 'Is there anyone among you who, if your child

¹⁰⁸ Charles Walker, *The Ritual Reason Why*, 2nd ed., revised with corrections by T. I. Ball (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co. Ltd., 1945 [1919]), 100f.

¹⁰⁹ "Die Theologie ist auf der Suche nach den Realisationen des Neuen Seins, eine mögliche ist die Kunst" – Dorothee Sölle, "Das Eis der Seele Spalten" (1993) [partial republication of *Realisation*, 1971], Bd.7, 83.

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asks for bread, will give a stone'¹¹⁰. In Sölle's biblical hermeneutic, the Psalms are bread. Hunger identifies a search for a prayerful life in anticipation and realisation of liberation. Where Sölle's hermeneutics of "hunger" is a working process in projecting, in affirming liberation to come to be present, represented and presenced, a reception of such a process is not a disinterested account even where it may be possible to disconnect from the paths pursued in such a work.

Understanding Sölle's prayer-poetry in reference to the Psalms requires the thesis to maintain a living conversation, or else the bread that is passed here has become stale. Stones, for the most part then, mark a point of reference to uncreative discourse, an image for the unredeemed living present in the text, still in need for a creative and co-creative encounter that I identify with water. The thirst for liberation, which Sölle attributes with a vision for justice, is a necessary condition for a justifiable reception of the involvement prompted by her hermeneutics. The "thirst" in reception, however, is not the self-realisation in liberation; it is the animation of a living tradition encountered after the Death of God. Memory, embodied remembrance as the liturgy the church (ideally) helps to institute, is a touchstone for a communal reality-building that equally places its demands on the thesis.

In this I return to Sölle's own elaborations on "realisation" insofar as 'there comes a point where the outdated differentiations between theology and literature

¹¹⁰ cf. John the Baptist's assurance that God could bring stones to life, raising children from the stones in Mt. 3:9; 1 Peter 2 elaborates on the notion of living stone; already Ez. 36:26 promises the living spirit by replacing a heart of stone with a heart of flesh. The heart is a preferred image of Lutheran theology. Sölle uses it with reference to the penitential Psalm 51. Grace, water and penitence form an aesthetic unit that transforms the heart and stone by sanctifying the flesh. Two poems that are interesting for this point can be found at "Wherefore the classic tradition has condemned the flesh" [FL 33] and "A poem on the ice age / psalm 51 / the little mermaid and you" [FL 75].

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become irrelevant, even become perceived as trivialising¹¹¹. It is, then, the secondary focus on water that enables my study to “perform”, to project or to create its own refracting mirror to the poetry it interprets. As a study not written in poetic language, and by virtue of the demands on a thesis not written without judgment, the introduction of “water” as a focus to narrow down the extraordinary range of images in Sölle’s work, serves a primary analytic function that goes beyond imagistic references.

Liturgical Reception: Deprivatisation and Co-creation as Hermeneutical Keys

To detail the scope and dimensions of this study, it is worth noting that unlike Sölle, I cannot lay claim to a biblical hermeneutics. However, my study is informed by my reception of that hermeneutics on a number of levels, and combined with my particular focus on the sociality invited by her texts, I want to term this hermeneutic one of “liturgical reception”. This makes visible my place in receiving – but also participating in – a biblical hermeneutic in a wider intertextual frame of reference. My focus on “deprivatisation” develops the understanding that prayer is a dialectic movement between a personal subjectivity and its intersubjective construction(s). Sölle, as I indicated earlier, is seeking a perspective with the text that identifies the concern of the textual situation not only in light of its historical critical context, but one that necessitates a twofold ideological critique of the positions of power that both the production of the text as well as the interest of the critic maintain on the subject. This “doubled contextualisation” (Schottroff) forms the basis of the contextual elaboration necessary for receiving the text qua text. Narration and analysis are filtered according to the dimensions of discourse that the text finds itself identified or creatively associated with by the interpreter.

¹¹¹ “es gibt einen Punkt, wo die überkommene Unterscheidungen von Theologie und Literatur unwichtig sind, ja trivialisierend wirken” – Sölle, “Das Eis der Seele Spalten,” Bd.7, 99.

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The context identifies the groundwork necessary to proceed to the creative endeavour required of every critic and reader: deconstructing the dynamics of the text as these filter through the desire of its reader – a desire that reflects as much of the text as it inflects upon the subjectivity of the reader. Towards a liberation theological hermeneutics, Sölle and Schottruff call for solidarity with the powerless as a means to identify the required cause for justice, namely an interpretive and practical response to the text that lends the imagination of its author/ reader/ critic to the realisation of liberation (from and of the text) in an act of embodied remembering. Sölle's remarks on deprivatised prayer – proposed as a means to work through presumed immediacy of God in prayer and in the public engagement with liturgical formulae in worship, and to criticise the privatised vocabulary fashioned around personal acts of devotion – serve as a point of departure of a different kind in my theological concern for women's subjectivity, taking full recognition of their self-awareness, their gendered situation and sexuate identity. The Death of God scandalises naïve, private devotion. Deprivatisation, as a move to reveal the private – the excluded or passive – by participating in devotion, opens a path of inquiry that seeks to intercede in the “public” –prescriptive liturgical patterning – that is at the heart co-creational and affirming for women.

Lyric poetry, much like meditative prayer, is typically lauded for its intimacy in the privatised economy of modern reading culture. The doubled contextualisation necessary in my study is one of the public contextualisation of published prayer-texts that have not had their origin in authorised liturgical settings at church, but spring from the conscious reflection of personal experience amidst such public contexts, but also for re-use in such public contexts. Nominally dissolving the “private” as the othering discursive pole to the “public”, Sölle's essay on deprivatised prayer encouraged me to pick up the Lutheran theological legacy of the personal relationship to God *sola fides*. This is not to be taken as the opening gesture towards the modern *individual* (the individual here standing as the cipher

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of alienated being-in-the-world), even though I do see it as the beginning of the modern (theological) *subject*. Instead, a person-centred Lutheran theology such as Sölle's, in retaining the difference that is preserved in the claim to uniqueness in the process of representation by proxy (*Stellvertretung*), sustains the personal in resonance with all the *properties*¹¹² of the political as a "public" reality. Such a person is no less vulnerable in her experience of herself and torn between the expectations of societal roles and norms (which distort the personal in light of its institutional constitutions and dependencies) than non-theological studies of the individual in society would attest to. Adopting a rhetoric of the personal as political in differentiation to the public/private debates over the individual in society serves to distinguish the existential awareness of the person from the economic function of the individual in the corroborations of (capitalist) labour.

In the context of my own engagement and response to this hermeneutic, I have not sought the association of or guidance from the Bible¹¹³. Neither did I set out to align myself with a Liberation Theology, even though I find myself in solidarity with many of Liberationists' concerns. I had not approached this study as a theologian, and identifying as such has been a distinctly disquieting experience. Instead of a biblical understanding of justice, my study's point of departure rests upon debates surrounding women's subjectivity. Facilitating psychoanalytic discourse and feminist philosophy of language alongside the feminist theological voices that accrue around liberation theologies from Heyward to Isherwood, femininity and sexuality become critical points of investigation in the articulation of what I come to call a "liturgical reception" of prayer-poetry.

¹¹² This is as much a concern for the physical dimensions as well as those dimensions' economic implications (their interactive exchanges).

¹¹³ That biblical references feature in this study at all is testament to Sölle's close literary association with biblical language. While others (notably Prinz and Cornehl) may deem this biblical reception more central to developing an understanding of Sölle's poetry, this has not been my point of entry.

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To Sölle, the questions to be answered by a biblical hermeneutics of liberation derive from a perspective with the victims, in the silences – in those places, then, where peace and justice is at risk. In her schematic overview¹¹⁴ the question to be asked for Sölle is: “Who suffers”? And much of Sölle’s poetry indeed addresses sufferings encountered, reported or imagined. The question posed by this study is asking differently. The silences, taken metaphorically as the indeterminate spaces that enable literature its performative capacity (Iser), point me to the questions “who reads” and “who prays”? In the context of reception the question of the “who” always already prompts the “how”: how do we, as women, receive, conceive and give voice to prayer?. And what kind of relationships are envisioned, criticised or invited by the reception of her work? Prayer here understood as a praxis in a cycle of renewal, as a discourse that remains after the Death of God, and as a poetry that remains in spite of the atrocities marked by “Auschwitz”, is asking after its own realisation: its textual embodiment in the subject of and the subject at prayer.

What Sölle’s professorial thesis¹¹⁵ in Literature and Theology frames under the heading of “realisation”, namely a concretisation or presencing of the text in the process of reading, is addressed for prayer by the process of “deprivatisation”. Deprivatisation [*Entprivatisierung*] is the term Sölle introduced to reflect upon the experiences made with the Political Night Prayers and, as a critique of both public prayer (as the formation of an uncritical collectivity) and private prayer (as a purely self-referential, meditative praxis), signifies a departure from the modern

¹¹⁴ Under the headings “Praxis”, “Analysis”, “Meditation”, and “Renewed Praxis” (the first two pertaining to the context, the second two to the text), Sölle indicates actions and questions associated with each phase. Prinz offers a translated reproduction of the schematic outline in *Endangering Hunger for God*, 49. Originally published in Dorothee Sölle, “Wie Können Wir Befreiungstheologisch Arbeiten? Ein Vorschlag für einen Prozeß in Vier Schritten“ in *Junge Kirche* 11 (1993): 608.

¹¹⁵ Dorothee Sölle, *Realisation: Studien zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Dichtung nach der Aufklärung* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1973).

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juxtaposition of “public” and “private” that takes the secularisation thesis¹¹⁶ to its ultimate conclusion: if we are left with only one, this-worldly reality then any separation into “public” and “private” introduces a false (or at least inherently instable) distinction. The roles of women that my analyses portray function on both sides of such a binary, thus establishing a discourse that suspends with the dichotomous conception of the public and the private. Envisioned as a dialectical process, deprivatisation disempowers normative socialisation, and formulates the individual as participant in the making of community.

The movement from praxis in transformation to *renewed* praxis that build the hermeneutics of hunger, as I touched upon with reference to Prinz’s study, is given expression in the context of prayer: as a faith praxis that transforms *itself* in response to the Death of God and it changes those engaged in its work/wake. This holds true also for my study. In the movement from context to text to praxis, the text – as a place of contested boundaries – requires an informed analysis that has to proceed sensitively if it is not to offer a reductive reading, or harm the poetic performativity at play. Sölle’s own work offers me here a conceptual tool to mitigate these tendencies in her notion of *Stellvertretung* (representation by proxy). As a theological term, it denotes a process for representing, interceding or place-holding that carries soteriological significance¹¹⁷. It is also a term with great

¹¹⁶ In brief, the secularisation thesis, a hypothesis that has undergone numerous interpretations since the 1960s, is an attempt at interpreting modern social developments. Historically secularisation referred to the redistribution of property, of church lands appropriated by the emerging modern states in Europe. Conceptually, the thesis helps to explore the interaction and differentiation of social structures and societal institutions, often characterised in broad terms along parameters of the Secular and the Sacred, and as Church and State. For an overview on the interpretive range covered by proponents of the secularisation thesis, see Warren S. Goldstein, “Secularization Patterns in the Old Paradigm,” in *Sociology of Religion*, 70:2, 2009, 157-178.

¹¹⁷ Günter Röhser, Art. “Stellvertretung,” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Band 32, 1, ed. Gerhard Müller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 145.

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political currency in a Postwar Germany recovering from the experience with totalitarianism by the establishment of representational (indirect) democracy. Sölle's use and interpretation of *Stellvertretung* play into political rhetoric (accounting for some of the impact of her study at the time). *Stellvertretung* in my work operates on two levels: it indicates the place I give to the work of translation undertaken (insofar as my translations do not replace or substitute Sölle's prayer/text but bring her text into relation with another language), and the place of prayer-poetry as a discourse in the context of this thesis (which speaks on behalf of prayer-poetry in analysis without performing the same kind of prayer in its wake).

Stellvertretung also plays into the assessment of the terms by which analysis in this study proceeds. Respectful of the differences of our experiences – as women – my analysis remains orientated on representative roles that are never to be understood as fully commensurable with the place envisioned for women in Sölle's poetry. By addressing lovers, mothers and artists – women-lovers, women-mothers, and women-artists – women's "public" images, their roles, are set in contrast to the assumed, interiorised perceptions pertaining to the modern lyric criticised in Sölle's work. The reality of women is approached indirectly, approximated and critiqued in the poetic making of prayer deprivatised. The subject then is not (necessarily) Dorothee Sölle as the inferred embodiment of the poetic "I". 'When women writers are read from the unexamined assumption that what makes them important is their femaleness, the result can be... inappropriate'¹¹⁸. Introducing Sölle's poetic oeuvre is not an exercise in redressing a statistical gender-imbalance, and in many ways it is not even concerned with "correcting" a prevalent opinion about her literary quality¹¹⁹; Sölle wrote from the

¹¹⁸ Jan Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing*, 3rd ed. (London: Pandora, 2004), 62.

¹¹⁹ If anything her literary reception is sparse and occasionally scathing about the quality of her poetry (although such views are less often documented in print).

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context of the everyday, called her writing ‘exercises in flexibility’¹²⁰, but always in challenge of her readers to *actively* discern their own position with the text.

Reading is not an act of (passive) consumption! Each poem brings together the voice of the poetic I and its subjects differently, due to an underdetermined grammatical structure – lower casing throughout the poem (of major grammatical significance to German), no punctuation – and predominantly written in free verse. In the play between identifying the poem with authorial exactitude, and the necessity to judge each line as it falls, readerly involvement is never at the level of the spectator. Whether we read a word as noun or adjectival modifier, whether or not we envision the poetic I in the feminine, or find ourselves able to follow on from one metaphorical leap to the next, each poem makes us aware of the so-called political, theological and sexual dimensions in the act of reading.

0.4 Overview

Chapter One

Chapter One of the thesis sets out to clarify the theological perspective of the study and develop the critical terms for reading Sölle’s theological concerns with poetry. To this end, the chapter foregrounds the theological texts by Sölle that treat prayer, with references to the prayer-poetry predominantly serving illustrative purposes. As my argument posits deprivatised prayer as a key concept for investigation that structures the subsequent analysis, this chapter addresses more systematic concerns: about the role of address in prayer in light of the Death of God, and its liturgical significance. Insofar as prayer is provisionally understood as the life of faith, a study under the aegis of “deprivatisation” traces this life’s highly unsystematic, social implications, broadly conceived as liturgical act. Chapter One argues that deprivatised prayer leads to the affirmation of “co-creation”. Deprivatised prayer, itself a kind of liturgical activism undertaken by the Ecumenical Work Group Cologne, critiques and widens the institutional context of

¹²⁰ Fulbert Steffensky, *Personal Correspondence*, Phone-call, 08/03/2012.

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the churches. Thus, Chapter One clarifies key points of departure in structuring a debate on the institutional inferences upon gendered awareness of subjectivities in/forming personal identity and identification in prayer.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two offers a portrayal of the relationship between prayer and poetry. The emphasis on praxis (theologically) is paralleled by the linguistic potential for performance (to be) embodied in the lyric. With these concerns in mind, Chapter Two sets out the literary terms for analysis. Overall, Chapter Two identifies the male-dominated literary tradition in the context of reception of Sölle's lyric poetry, itself understood in terms of the literary embodiment of women's subjectivity. As there are no literary studies of Sölle's lyric in German or English, this chapter serves to contextualise Sölle's position with regards to not only a conceptual history, but a literary history. Mary Gerhart's genre-hermeneutics brings the gender implications for both the publishing context (2.1.1) and reception of Sölle's work (2.1.2) to focus in the wider context of Postwar German literatures. This enables me to draw out the textual and contextual place of the lyric subject in my assessment of Sölle's poetic strategies. Under reference of the work of Jean Paul¹²¹ (1763-1825) whose Romantic conceptions of aesthetics and wide scholarly reception are key to Sölle's "aesthetic-existential experience"¹²², this chapter points to the contentious issue of addressing "*prayer-poetry*" in the form of the lyric, arguing that much like prayer deprivatised, the lyric also comes to be deprivatised in the cross-fertilisation of prayer-poetry.

Chapter Three

Addressing the poems themselves, Chapter Three offers close textual analysis. The roles played in the conceptual framework by gender and sexuality to

¹²¹ Johann Paul Friedrich Richter, German Romantic writer and thinker reputed to have changed his name to Jean Paul in homage to Jean Jacques Rousseau.

¹²² Title to a poem, cf. BR41.

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women's subjectivity give way here to allusions with water for the analysis of three concrete roles women find themselves associated with in creational discourses: women lovers, mothers and artists. "Lovers" (Section 3.2), in the recurring reference to felicity (*Glück*), explores the expression of women's subjectivity in a reading of sexual pleasure for an existential-theological interpretation of *jouissance*. "Mothers" (Section 3.3) focuses on the complex heritage of gendered roles in the difficulties in replacing God the Father, the troubling veneration of suffering in the depiction of Mary, and the resolution sought out in a poem on the mother-son dyad. It is the section on "Artists" (3.4) that the transformational capacity indicated in references to water, aspects of desire, creation and co-creation blur the boundaries between the work of art and the role of the artist. In light of the artistic transitions exposed by intertextual and medial shifts in Sölle's work, the intimate relationship between recognition and artistic creation comes to light.

Chapter Four

The final chapter draws together what an understanding of prayer and an analysis of poetry bring to the work of the thesis as a particular genre of writing that nevertheless is in reception of prayerful praxis. That poetry as prayer gives way to prayer-poetry, a lyric that makes her readers conscious of its liturgical possibilities, in its co-creational constitution, is indicative of a transformative capacity in the text already at work in the act of translation from German into English, but also the translation and transformation of language shifting from one discourse (theology) to another (literature). Revelling in their intersections as future opportunities of the text, I close with a final reading of poetry, "Penelope or on marriage" [FL 73].

0.5 Conclusion

This study traces points of intersection across the two disciplines “Literature” and “Theology” and foregrounds their mode of engagement against feminist criticism, focussing less on a historical case study, or an aesthetic appraisal of Sölle’s poetic work. Reading her approach instead in the context of a feminist project shaped in the Anglo-American reception of French thinkers outlines issues in Sölle’s work that are not always at the forefront of her own thinking and argument, but which are nevertheless present. I argue that in broadening Sölle’s conception of deprivatised prayer, understanding it as a process that bears as much on theological as on literary criticisms, as well as faith praxis, we find ourselves in the encounter of a text that raises our consciousness of the sociality of gender that colours our experiences of liberation. Sölle’s poetry is not aimed at perfecting theopoetic discourse put forward as an aesthetic ideal; her prayer-texts have a strategic aim in the encounter with its reader to dare speak otherwise. We might no longer focus on the contemporary quality of her “political agitations”, but we learn here that the poetic vision that is carried through in such political debate has lost nothing of its potency for elucidating our present concern with prayer. It is Sölle’s prophetic vision for justice that reverberates with the stories her poetry tells of women who speak out, who become [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [LL87], – who here are remembered in a voice of their own that is neither present nor absent from the social identity ascribed to the divine to which Sölle’s poetic i gives testimony.

1. Chapter One: Deprivatised Prayer

Public prayer and prayer formulated in generalities remains not “deprivatised” [*entprivatisiert*] for as long as it has not gained presence – for as long as it remains rooted in the past and marked by its societal reality, commonly a feudal-agrarian one¹²³.

Sölle’s approach to deprivatised prayer, as programmatically set out in her essay

“Das Entprivatisierte Gebet” [1971], is social, embodied, critical and current.

Developing out of the context of her engagement with Political Theology (inspired by Rudolf Bultmann’s critical assessment of the secularisation process and his work on demythologisation) and the experiences gathered in the liturgical work group, “Initiative Politisches Nachtgebet, Köln,”¹²⁴ the text examines the shortfall of the language of public prayer in light of the recent German past: the horrors of Auschwitz cannot be bracketed out from the praise raised to God – our language needs to reflect our relatedness to the world in which we live today¹²⁵. The ‘generality,’ however, also addresses a dimension of language that is crucial to a discussion on gender: the general, as much as the grammatical neuter form, favours the male as its norm. Sölle’s unrelenting critique of the image of an all-

¹²³ “...das öffentliche und allgemein formulierte Gebet ist noch nicht »entprivatisiert«, solange es noch keine Gegenwart gewonnen hat, solange es in der Vergangenheit wurzelt und von ihrer gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit, meist einer agrarisch-feudalen, geprägt ist” – Sölle, “Das Entprivatisierte Gebet” [1971] published in “Das Recht ein Anderer zu Werden” (1981), Bd.1, 183).

¹²⁴ Commentary by Sölle is included alongside the reports of the work undertaken by the Initiative in Cologne and elsewhere in Uwe Seidel und Diethard Zils (Hrsg.), *Aktion Politisches Nachtgebet. Analysen, Arbeitsweisen, Texte und Politische Gottesdienste aus Augsburg, Berlin, Bonn-Bad Godesberg, Dinslaken, Düsseldorf, Köln, Osnabrück, Rheinhausen, Stuttgart, Trier und Utrecht* (Wuppertal: Jugenddienst-Verlag, 1971).

¹²⁵ In her memoirs Sölle phrases it thus: ‘...you can really only live properly if you root yourself in life such, that you live connected to those who came before us, and those who will be after us’ – “...man kann eigentlich nur richtig leben, wenn man sich so im Leben verankert, dass man mit den Menschen, die vor uns waren, und den Menschen, die nach uns sein werden, verbunden ist” ; “Gegenwind,” Bd.12, 205.

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powerful, typically male God, as a look at her earlier book on Christology reveals, has far-reaching consequences for the way in which deprivatisation can be understood to play itself out, not just as a critique on prayer, but as prayerful engagement in criticizing institutional power structures at large. The Death of God, central to Sölle's argument in *Christ the Representative: An Essay in Theology after the 'Death of God'* (1965), not only occasions a re-configuration of the Trinity reliant on mediation (a consequence of the secularisation process), but also becomes the shorthand for a Post-Auschwitz theology that challenges the institutional foundations of that theology (as discourse) in the datum of God's communication of "his" attributes¹²⁶. Her turn away from a logo-centric to a poetic engagement with theology is an expression of the search for a new religious language adequate to express women's subjectivities in their own idiom.

Consequently, this chapter will look to situate and examine in more detail what deprivatisation (*Entprivatisierung*) as a process accomplishes in theological reflection. Drawing particularly from her earlier writings, such as her essay collection, *Atheistisch an Gott Glauben* (1968), *Das Recht ein Anderer zu Werden* (1981), and *Stellvertretung: Ein Kapitel Theologie nach dem Tode Gottes* (1965), the purpose of this chapter is to indicate reference points of a theological praxis for women in the opening gesture or trajectory of her theological engagement with prayer. Taking Sölle's point of departure in the Death of God seriously, her understanding of *Stellvertretung* (representative action)¹²⁷ has concrete implications for the kind of discourse found in prayer: the work of prayer indicates

¹²⁶ Sölle curtails the conceptual debate due to her concern for *identificatio* within the framework of redemption - leading to her reassessment on the role of Christ.

¹²⁷ The emphasis here is on the action on behalf of another. *Stellvertretung* (representation) is not to be understood as mimesis, which is the usual association with the term. Taken over into Sölle's theology from a political awareness of democratic decision-making, the process of *Stellvertretung* does not look to permanently stand-in and effectively replace another, but to act on behalf of another as long as he or she is needed in that capacity.

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a loving relation to the subject (agent and content) of prayer that discerns our place in a wider community, in mourning, suffering, and also in rejoicing. While Sölle's early work was interested in a contextual critique, questions of gender and sexuality were rarely explicit. However, in her political awareness she stringently developed the personal as the political, the personal as an embodiment of social construction and site of reconstruction, which her work on *Stellvertretung* elaborates in the context of desire for identification with another (Christ, who himself is in the process of enacting a representative aspect of God in the Trinity). Thus, I will focus on the theological situation of prayer in its performative capacity before moving in Chapter Two towards a closer examination of the textual and poetic dimension of gender to such identification.

Fundamental to the argument put forward in her text *Christ the Representative*, Sölle maintains that a person is representable but irreplaceable¹²⁸. Whereas sameness allows for substitutions (Sölle identifies the logic of objectification, alienation and reification here), *Stellvertretung* (representation) is marked by two key conditions: it is temporal in nature and it is partial¹²⁹. Taking this claim seriously, a prayer after the Death of God cannot replace God as addressee, but simultaneously it requires that the means of representation have changed, namely, that this death has made a difference to the way in which faith is expressed in the world (this is true for a reflection upon divine being as much as for human existence faced by multifarious forms of annihilations). *Stellvertretung* is

¹²⁸ "Die Synthese aus Spruch und Widerspruch lautet daher: ein Mensch ist unersetzlich, *aber* vertretbar" (Sölle, "Stellvertretung," Bd3, 45) – "The synthesis of assertion and counter-assertion, of thesis and antithesis, therefore reads: the individual man is irreplaceable *yet* representable' (Sölle, *Christ the Representative*, 50). The Hegelian construction notwithstanding, Sölle conceptually follows in the footsteps of Bonhoeffer's examination on the significance of persons represented within the body of the church – Bonhoeffer seems to import portions of Hegel via Kierkegaard, cf. *Sanctorum Communio*, 172.

¹²⁹ Cf. Sölle "Stellvertretung," Bd.3, 17-20.

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temporal; we do not seek to be rid of the place attributed to the one being represented. It is also partial, as we have to take sides, become a part of the one and the many under representation. This partial nature implies – and this is where her critics find her work inconsistent with traditional Lutheran teachings, or with interpretations of the Death of God by modern Atheists – that the death of God cannot represent all there is of God¹³⁰. In the context of prayer, and deprivatised prayer, the historical fact of the Death of God marks a different task. Insofar as I understand prayer along the lines of the Lutheran tradition of an *oratio continua*¹³¹ as the horizon of faith, I read Sölle's work on *Stellvertretung*, her Christological foundation, in direct if paradoxical reference to the problems raised in her essay on deprivatised prayer (paradoxical given the negative attribution to generality in one, and the positive evaluation of commonality in the other). In *Christ the Representative* we read:

The Christian faith radicalized the idea of representation in an unprecedented way: it made representation the effective and potent basic event of existence. It elevated the Representative as the decisive figure of world history who bears all things – namely, the sin of the world. It removed the temporal and local limitations of the representation he carried out, and thus made it universal¹³².

¹³⁰ “Aber Christus hat zugleich die Differenz zu Gott gewahrt, er repräsentiert Gott nur, er ersetzt ihn nicht, und die Inkarnation wäre missverstanden wenn sie als ein vollständiges Sich-Ausgeben Gottes in der Menschengestalt verstanden wäre, so dass nun nichts mehr von Gott zu erwarten stünde und wir alles von ihm hätten” – Sölle, “Stellvertretung,” Bd.3, 120.

¹³¹ Gunnar Wertelius, *Oratio Continua: Das Verhältnis zwischen Glaube und Gebet in der Theologie Martin Luthers*, trans. Bernd Grosch (Lund: Gleerup, 1970), 21. That prayer by this token is significantly tied to the voice, as a performative space, will gain more focus in the subsequent chapters.

¹³² Sölle, *Christ the Representative*, 60; “Der Glaube hat den Gedanken der Stellvertretung in einem unerhörten Sinn radikalisiert: er hat Stellvertretung zum wirksamen und mächtigen Grundereignis des Daseins erklärt, er hat den Stellvertreter zur entscheidenden Figur der Weltgeschichte erhoben, die alles – nämlich die Sünde der Welt – trägt, er hat die Stellvertretung, die er leistete, zeitlich und räumlich entgrenzt und sie zu einem Allgemeinen gemacht” – Sölle, “Stellvertretung,” Bd3, 52.

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The *figure* that I see similarly marked in the *death* of God is the *question* of representation par excellence. Prayer, also in a post-secular age, stands in as an act of faith that profiles the very horizon of faithful activity¹³³: its material presence, reflection and agency is an approximation (but no consummation in and of itself) of the reality of faith in language (or other forms of performative actions). Whom or what is prayer to represent, and how, if prayer needs to take into account that it cannot replace God, but neither can it find a representation of “his” *death*? A theological justification in form of a correlative doctrine of atonement to the Death of God witnessed in Christ only defers the crucial reconciliation with death as death to which a non-metaphysical interpretation would point. Within a metaphysical frame of reference, with its ontological basis in God, death is the antithesis to meaning (as that which points beyond itself). Where God is understood as the foundation to language, translating “his” loss into the work of mourning, is both a fundamental function of language and danger to the speaking subject caught up in inconsolable grief¹³⁴. A *functional* interpretation of the Death of God, in the “Christ event,” supplements agency of the dead (precisely where death has a function for others, but not (necessarily) for the person dying) only by

¹³³ Sölle liked to emphasise with Theresa of Avila, ‘that God has no other hands than our own’ [1], and the symbolic folding of our hands in prayer should not be identified as apathy (one of Sölle’s classifications of the social dimension of sin [2]), but a joining of our efforts as a community of faith. ‘Prayer is an all-encompassing act by which people transcend the mute God of an apathetically endured reality and go over to the speaking God of a reality experienced with feeling in pain and happiness’ [3].

[1]: By Sölle and others, the phrase is popularly ascribed to Theresa of Avila – Sölle, “Gegenwind,” Bd.12, 56. It is, however, not documented amongst Avila’s complete works.

[2]: Cf. Dorothee Sölle, “Schuld – Ein Sinnloses Wort?” (1971) in “Das Recht ein Anderer zu Werden,” Bd.1, 163.

[3]: Sölle, *Suffering*, 78.

¹³⁴ Cf. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1989), 42.

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way of a *sacrificial* logic inherent in teachings on atonement¹³⁵. If death is to retain agency outside of a metaphysical frame of reference, death truly has to be "of God" by finding itself again in the context of a prayerful engagement with the God who died. This is the performative challenge of deprivatised prayer in search for an ethically defensible – i.e. accountable (justified) – position of prayer that may interpret the Death of God, and the post-metaphysical societal reality from which it emerges.

Insofar as death typifies the ultimate objectification of life – the living is reduced to a corpse without agency or the projection of a future participation with the living (memorials and tombstones are *Stellvertreter* placed to caution against forgetting the departed) – the Christian faith of Sölle's interpretation denies death the power of that alienation. In "On resurrection" [FL21] she renders this view thus: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]' (ll.3ff.). Perry LeFevre, one of the few sympathetic (and earliest) commentators on Sölle's work on prayer, usefully contextualises this theological concern exemplified in the poem:

For Soelle there is in religious faith something which stands as a critic of those who would see the human condition as representable by a one-dimensional analysis concerned only with "facts", with what can be objectified, with what can be dealt with by instrumental reason. Meaning transcends facts... He [man, sic!] needs a language which can express and interpret what cannot be grasped or understood by scientific language.¹³⁶

Prayer is not a mere functional tool for faith. Sölle's theo-poetic concerns¹³⁷ afford a playfulness that exceeds instrumental reason. In light of prayer as communicatory

¹³⁵ Sölle invokes Hegel in the critique of moral imputation at this point; "Stellvertretung," Bd.3, 68-73.

¹³⁶ Perry LeFevre, *Radical Prayer*, 17.

¹³⁷ Noted already in the Introduction, Section 0.1. A range of concerns regarding poetics and aesthetics are scattered throughout Sölle's theological writings and will come to the forefront in the

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event¹³⁸, the prayer-text remains as the representative existence of the believer¹³⁹, but prayer cannot be reduced to the intentionality of such an event (i.e. to be harnessing God's power for example). As performative text prayer points to the framework cast by representative action, as Sölle proposes and discusses it in *Stellvertretung*. If corporate prayer is eventing God – in the presence of an intersubjective recognition of the need to re-enact what has been lost – then prayer after the Death of God translates each individual's involvement in the process of reconciliation that is the focal point of liberation theological thought. It is important however to retain the (at least) dual focus of prayer as process and product – but a product never fully presented in its textual (mimetic) representation. Prayer cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional, even if faith-related, analysis; it has a creational core – deprivatised prayer is at heart co-creational¹⁴⁰, as I understand Sölle's sense of our role as *Cooperator Dei*¹⁴¹. Prayer, to speak the language of Sölle's poetry once more, [REDACTED]' (FL42, 1.5) and thus points beyond itself in the very process of its own self-reflexivity. In the

course of this study. For translated work with more sustained poetic focus see for example "Part IV: Transformations," in *On Earth as in Heaven*, 79-100.

¹³⁸ Prayer as communication with God is a widely shared premise amongst theologians, and is set in conceptual proximity to the work of J. L. Austin's *How to do Things with Words*, 2nd ed., ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975).

¹³⁹ Here I differ from Hans-Jürgen Luibl's assessment who asserts that at most Sölle's work is able to keep awake the memory of the fact that prayer is in crisis, but cannot poetically come to be identified as prayer (Luibl, *Des Fremden Sprachgestalt*, 250), whereas I see Sölle's work as part of an intercession that requires our involvement in bringing prayer to the reality of our despair. In this sense prayer remains always possible.

¹⁴⁰ Sölle's first use of the term stems from her time with Union Seminary New York; cf. Dorothee Sölle and Shirley A. Cloyes, *To Work and to Love: a Theology of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). Despite a common distinction drawn in reception between Sölle's theology and the work of Carter Heyward or Catherine Keller for example, their projects increasingly overlap.

¹⁴¹ Sölle, "Das Entprivatisierte Gebet," Bd.1, 187.

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cross-over between articulation (identification) and action, the body of prayer is itself always already a performance of discourse.

Within a theological perspective (1.1) I discuss the role of prayer in the conception of the Death of God that Sölle pursues as conditional to a late Modern and postmodern sensibility (1.1.1) and that prompted Sölle's reflection on deprivatised prayer. Focussing on *Stellvertretung*, the limits of theo-logising death, of mourning, and of articulating absence introduce the dawn of a renewing (hermeneutical) practice that affirms its difference from and its solidarity with the envisaged other (hermeneutics of "hunger"). This other one, as Section 1.1.2 shows, is neither distantiated into a metaphysical other-world ("God"), nor uncritically subsumed in the collective built by public prayer ("Church"). *Communitas* is recognised as mediated relation that requires our sharing of speech (or other actions) as testimonies of our own deprivatised situations. I argue that Sölle paves the way, already in her early theological articulations, for understanding prayer as a co-creative, and therefore liberating faith practice. Exploring participatory structures evident in Sölle's approach, I develop Sölle's programmatic conception of deprivatised prayer as a process by which the individual formulates herself in critical context of a sociality that is under continuous transformation.

1.1. Prayer in Theological Perspective

Typically, prayer is defined as communication with God. In this light, prayer is at risk of substituting for rather than drawing near to God – in whichever form we might like to think the reality of God. Hans-Jürgen Lübl criticises any such inversion, as derived from Bonhoeffer's theological emphasis on mediation, saying that 'in Bonhoeffer's theology the reality of God that was the condition for the corresponding human possibility of prayer has become the reality of prayer as a

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condition for the possibility of God'¹⁴². He elaborates: 'The real problem, namely to burden prayer with the proof for the vitality of faith or the existence of God, rests in the fact that prayer is made into the unmediated carrier of and guarantee for faith and God'¹⁴³. The only mediation this prayer provides, according to Luibl, is a new saving immediacy by making prayer part of the longed-for divine presence¹⁴⁴. When I say that prayer is an expression of faith, that it is its experiential reality, this has far-reaching methodological consequences, but does not, as Luibl suggests¹⁴⁵, aim at dissolving prayerful discourse into the context of the modern search for identity, even when precisely this identity of the believer has to be put in question after the Death of God. I understand prayer as an index for the life of faith, without therefore meaning to indicate that prayer should displace either God, self, or community, or that it should lose its *intermediary* status. Thus, although I would agree that prayer is the very horizon of faith, as a discursive reality it maintains the indirection that Sölle – and Bonhoeffer – ascribe to it as medium.

¹⁴² "...aus der Wirklichkeit Gottes als Bedingung der Möglichkeit des menschlich-entsprechenden Gebets ist bei Bonhoeffer die Wirklichkeit des Gebets zur Bedingung der Möglichkeit Gottes geworden" – Luibl, *Des Fremden Sprachgestalt*, 237. Luibl here parses Barth's analysis of Bonhoeffer here respective the role of mediation in prayer.

¹⁴³ "Die eigentliche Problematik, dem Gebet die Beweislast für die Lebendigkeit des Glaubens oder die Existenz Gottes aufzuladen, besteht nun aber darin, daß das Gebet damit unvermittelt zum Träger und Garanten von Glaube und Gott wird" – *ibid.*, 239.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁴⁵ In his discussion of prayer from the beginnings of what is commonly called Modernity, to the late and post-modern period, Luibl sets a theological discourse against the Enlightenment project of (a Kantian) subject emancipation. His assessment of the role of "work" as that which displaces our ontological search for God (*Ibid.*, 300ff.) certainly serves as an explanation of the crisis experienced when we find ourselves incapable of prayer. It also, however, attests to the impossibility of the modern (emancipated) subject to have faith outside of a work-righteousness. It seems to me that Luibl does not believe that we could have faith when we have come of age, in which case he would join in precisely that modern differentiation he holds problematic, of reading faith praxis in light of a scientific paradigm that rejects faith as unscientific.

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This is not yet giving prayer over to bear the burden of *proving* the existence of either God or faith (which would depend on content and direction of prayer under the lens of *analysis*¹⁴⁶), but this gives prayer over to *in/forming* the context in which we find ourselves *at* prayer. Prayer provides the possibility – and practice – for us to join in co-creation and only in that sense does prayer open us up for the reality envisioned by God being *for us*.

In contrast to other theological voices (Luibl et al.¹⁴⁷), the crisis of prayer to Sölle is not its fundamental unavailability, but the challenging inception of a life of prayer conscious of its sociality starting in the Death of God, namely in the death of immediacy¹⁴⁸. Insofar as Sölle poses her theological discourse on *Stellvertretung* as a *preparation* for prayer¹⁴⁹, she tells us that not only ourselves, the world and God require our critical awareness, but prayer too, since it is not unmediated reality. Sölle's conception of prayer does not posit God's presence as that which alerts ourselves to our sociality, but that in the sociality with which we come to pray, it is our task to discover the needs of God represented in this world. The interest in Sölle's prayer-poetry, and with it the concern for pursuing subjectivity in this thesis (as developed in Chapter Two and beyond), rests on the communication of the promise of liberation that renders the subject of prayer in a co-creative intersubjectivity. In celebrating co-creativity, Sölle does not pose the believing (and at times disbelieving) "lyric I" as that which aims at assimilating God, thus sharing in divinity through immediacy. Characteristic of Sölle's understanding of mysticism as a form of ethical relation with the divine she asserts: 'In such

¹⁴⁶ Here I see the project of theology as a discourse of analysis at fault. In its orientation towards the logos of God it presents an inherently problematic relationship with the direction offered by the kind of poetic prayer Sölle articulates.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 234f., Luibl cites Wilhelm Herrmann, Emanuel Hirsch, Horst Bannach and Karl Barth in support of the general agreement amongst theologians on this matter for the late modern context.

¹⁴⁸ Sölle, "Stellvertretung," Bd.3, 13; 116.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Sölle's "Afterword" from 1982" in "Stellvertretung," Bd.3, 138.

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mysticism of prayer, the relationship of domination between God and humans has been transformed into one of love. That is precisely the mystical transformation that happens to prayer of supplication¹⁵⁰. Instead of a poetic immediacy, she poetically intercedes with the world on behalf of a love for God, thus sharing *out* divinity. Nevertheless, prayer understood as a general marker of faith for theology on the one hand, and as signifier for the *Sitz im Leben* for the praying subject, in his or her socio-economic and psychological specificity on the other hand, necessitates a critical examination of the place and modality of God in this discursive formation.

1.1.1. Prayer and the Death of God

As a recent study on the Death of God observed, ‘it remains meaningful to speak about the death of God, namely as a powerful metaphor for the fate which transcendence suffered under the impact of secularization in the West’¹⁵¹.

Depoortere traces the conceptual history of the popular phrase, usually attributed to Nietzsche’s madman, via Hegel back to the wider context of German religious thought¹⁵² as far as Luther (if not in the coinage of the phrase, but certainly its sentiment¹⁵³). Interestingly, Sölle -- aside from her theological reflection on redemption -- invokes the work of the poet Jean Paul whose dead Christ attests on judgment day that there is no God (what this has to say about her poetic

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Sölle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 292-98.

¹⁵¹ Frederiek Depoortere, *The Death of God: An Investigation into the History of the Western Concept of God* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 174.

¹⁵² Here he relies on the research undertaken by Eric Von der Luft, “Sources of Nietzsche’s ‘God is Dead!’ and its Meaning for Heidegger,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45/2 (1984): 263-76, cited in Depoortere, 156.

¹⁵³ The Lutheran hymn “O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid! (Ein trauriger Grabgesang)” (Johannes Rist) that typically is identified here does not literally use the phrase “death of God”, but works from a liturgical reference to the entombment of Jesus – cf. Depoortere, 156.

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conceptual framing will be addressed in Chapter Two). The second impulse in her investigation on the Death of God comes from the indisputable certainty that in witness of the Holocaust theological justifications of fate were unmasked as delusions. An episode of Sölle's life that makes this point very powerfully is described in her encounter with the Jewish thinker Elie Wiesel¹⁵⁴, who reflected that “Auschwitz” was not the end of the Jewish faith, nor of the Jewish people, but of Christianity as a viable faith¹⁵⁵. In search for a different face to the Christian faith that could bear witness to the shame of its past today, Sölle's theological project, in holding on to the possibility of prayer, and to the expression of genuine poetic language after Auschwitz, may just as well be the mad desire to hold out, also for God, the kind of redemption necessary to recover God from his omnipotent nightmare. Not the “eia-popeia” of an otherworldly heavens (Heinrich Heine¹⁵⁶), prayer after the Death of God issues as a public act of mourning that transcends personal grief¹⁵⁷. In this sense I do agree with Hans Jürgen Luibl's assessment: ‘*The reality of prayer is its crisis*’¹⁵⁸, insofar as prayerful discourse maintains an unstable boundary between the faith it professes and the despair in the world

¹⁵⁴ Elie Wiesel (1928-) is a Jewish American writer, academic and activist who was prisoner of Auschwitz, Buna and Buchenwald concentration camp. Invited to public debates and active in the Jewish community, Wiesel made a significant impression on Dorothee Sölle.

¹⁵⁵ Sölle, “Gegenwind,” Bd.12, 226f.

¹⁵⁶ 'The song of renunciation she sang, / the heavenly eia-popeia, / Wherewith the people, the booby throng, / Are hush'd when they soothing require' (Caput I), in: Heinrich Heine, *Germany. A Winter Tale*, Bilingual edition, trans. Edgar Alfred Bowring (New York: Mondial, 2007), 3.

¹⁵⁷ An illustration of this can be found with “John 20 vers 13” [ZU 136]. Written in the style of a meditation, Sölle's verse pleads for the solidarity offered in the question “Woman, why are you weeping” (John 20:13 [NRSV]) and identifies tears with the healing afforded by being able to (physically) express loss. The role of tears will be noted further in analysis of Section 3.3.

¹⁵⁸ “*Die Wirklichkeit des Gebets ist ihre Krise*” – Luibl, *Des Fremden Sprachgestalt*, 234 (italics in original).

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which it reflects¹⁵⁹. In Sölle's lyric it is not only the despair; it is also the ecstasy of pleasure and the joys of hope (true to the biblical model of the Psalms) that emerge as breaking points in prayerful discourse from the excesses of its language and that point to the transcendence of the body.

Dorothee Sölle invokes prayer alongside a pressing awareness that God has died (even though God is not altogether lost as point of reference¹⁶⁰), which interferes not only with the way in which we may approach God in prayer, but also restructures the way in which God self-relates¹⁶¹. God's self-identity is interrupted by the difference encountered in the transformation of the second person of the Trinity. What appears here as a reference to mortality may very well be extended to the questions posed by the body – and its gender-discursive iteration, as for

¹⁵⁹ Poetically “pain”, and theologically “shame” play a crucial role in Sölle's work. True to a conscious engagement with poetry after Auschwitz, Sölle does not poetically obliterate pain (in the same way that she does not obliterate the personal in the collective). If in mourning we face up to both, our desolation in loss and our restoration to the joys of living, then we are not asked by Sölle to forget or forgo the path that informs that situation. Turning from the passions to compassion, the language of prayer seeks to find means of expressing and sharing our experiences.

¹⁶⁰ Sölle, “Stellvertretung,” Bd.3, 120.

¹⁶¹ *Kenosis* and *perichoresis* stand in dialectic relation to each other. In this assessment I follow the dogmatic position of the old church that reads the subject of *kenosis* as the becoming human of the divine in the person of Jesus (cf. Paul Althaus, Art. “Kenosis” in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch der Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, Band 3, 3.Aufl., Hrsg. Hans Freiherr von Camphausen, Erich Dinkler u.a. (Tübingen: Mohr und Siebeck, 1965), 1244). Both terms derive from dogmatics on Christology. *Kenosis* describes the divestment of Christ's power from divine to human nature that is characterised as a principle act of divine love which in turn renders Christ's identity as both human and divine. This relates to the dogma on the *communicatio idiomatum*, the communication of divine attributes, that finds theologians speculating on the relationship and distinct natures of the three persons of the trinity whose mutual indwelling, *perichoresis*, is problematised by the death of God.

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example Sarah Coakley's work pursues it¹⁶². God, instead of becoming confounded in the need for self-sameness (which Sölle would still adhere to in *Creative Disobedience* [1968]¹⁶³), is given the freedom to embrace difference – a rhetoric more akin with *Das Recht ein Anderer zu Werden* [1971]. This has direct consequences on the means and approach taken by prayer. Deprivatised prayer belongs to the order of intercessory prayers because God – as direct recipient – has been lost to us irrecoverably, and so we need one another to invoke the reality of our belonging to God *in the world*. Prayer will not replace God, but conceives of itself as a context for coming to communion, and to act in *Stellvertretung* of those missing. In this, the person at prayer does *not* set out to forget herself¹⁶⁴.

Stellvertretung has had a wide reception amongst German theologians¹⁶⁵ and I do not here look to enumerate all their findings. I will however draw on exemplary issues that find themselves repeated from the earliest reception of

¹⁶² Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: an Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 58.

¹⁶³ Sölle does not consider self-identity as an abstract, stagnant absolute. In her discussion on Jesus' "but I say to you", that is not founded in the authority of any sign or signifier pointing beyond himself, she elaborates the self-identity of Jesus with an act of creative disobedience. – Sölle, "Phantasie und Gehorsam: Überlegungen zu einer künftigen Christlichen Ethik" (1968), Bd.3, 177.

¹⁶⁴ I prefer the reference to "missing" to that of "absence" because it indicates a desire for relation on behalf of the subject lacking in the term "absence".

¹⁶⁵ Early examples can be found in Helmut Gollwitzer, *Von der Stellvertretung Gottes: christlicher Glaube in der Erfahrung der Verborgenheit Gottes; im Gespräch mit Dorothee Sölle* (München: Kaiser, 1967); Otto Reidinger, *Gottes Tod und Hegels Auferstehung: Antwort an Dorothee Sölle* (Berlin: LVH, 1969). Later texts include Thelma Megill-Cobbler, *Women and the Cross: Atonement in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Dorothee Soelle*, Thesis Microfilm (Ann Arbor, MI: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1992); Jeannine M. Graham, *Representation and Substitution in the Atonement Theologies of Dorothee Soelle, John Macquarrie, and Karl Barth*, Thesis University of Aberdeen, 1993 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Don Schweitzer, "Jesus as Revealer: Karl Rahner, Dorothee Sölle, Roger Haight," in *Contemporary Christologies: A Fortress Introduction* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2010), 7-32.

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Sölle's text to later considerations. In "Das Entprivatisierte Gebet" [1971], Sölle announces that the 'basis for articulating oneself... is information, and we should no longer allow ourselves in public, political prayer to pray without being informed'¹⁶⁶. While the *need* for self-formulation will be addressed further in Section 1.1.2, the crucial point at present rests with the role of information as a preliminary condition of public prayer deprivatised (i.e. public prayer authenticated in the living, embodied practice of those at prayer). Information and analysis, part of the methodological praxis of the Political Night Prayers, is not eclipsed by the discourse *of* faith any more than it would be by the theological predications made *on* prayer. Careful contextualisation is required of both. Martin Haug and Hans Jürgen Lübl in the context of Sölle's articulations on prayer, and Otto Reidinger in the context of Sölle's theological reflections on identity, share the criticism that Sölle's argument is caught up in circular, meditative self-reflection that mistakes itself for the presence of God in the aim of coming to identity – they consider her prayer essentially narcissistic¹⁶⁷. However, I maintain that neither her theological reflections (despite theology's predisposition to reflect), nor her poetic expressions make the mistake of falling into themselves in an attempt to assume – presume – the presence of God.

Identifications with God in the play between death and absence of God, and between anonymity and realisation (actualisation) of Christ will have to be situated

¹⁶⁶ "Die Basis der Selbstformulierung aber ist die Information, und wir sollten es uns im öffentlichen, politischen Gebet nicht mehr erlauben, zu beten, ohne informiert zu sein"; Sölle, "Das Entprivatisierte Gebet," Bd.1, 187.

¹⁶⁷ Lübl identifies her articulations on prayer as a largely self-fulfilling prophecy (Lübl, *Des Fremden Sprachgestalt*, 250), Martin Haug's conservative assessment of the first Political Night Prayer attacks her dogmatic foundations (Martin Haug, "Das Glaubensbekenntnis von Dorothee Sölle und das Credo der Kirche," *Calwer Hefte* Nr. 104 [Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1969], 26), and Reidinger's interpretation of Sölle's '*Ichverhaftung*' in her use of Hegel that he deems a tool to install ideology in the place of metaphysics – Reidinger, *Gottes Tod und Hegels Auferstehung*, 63.

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in the concrete concerns about the role given to a Trinitarian theology from the perspective of prayer, as a praxis of faith, before questions on the intent and consummation of prayer can ever be raised. A fundamental theological systematisation of Sölle's assessment of the logic of redemption in light of the Death of God seems to be missing the point. In this instance, it appears to me that Sölle pursues a *practical* functionality of the metaphor found in the Death of God – scoping out its metaphorical *flexibility*.

Sölle's text then, while predominantly dealing with our relation to Jesus (Christ), alternates between three ways of addressing the vocabulary “God”: God as being absent¹⁶⁸, God as un-consciousness¹⁶⁹/powerlessness (*Ohn-macht*)¹⁷⁰, and God as being dead¹⁷¹. God is absent insofar as she requires representation; God cannot be thought of or experienced in immediacy¹⁷². God is unconscious insofar as he cannot or does not verify (show agreement with) the ways in which his role is played in the world; God is also powerless to show God's self by itself and for itself, that is to say God only appears in the recognition of another's representative action for the sake of God. God is dead for as long as the need of his powerlessness has not found recognition and led to action. While Sölle expresses a certain

¹⁶⁸ Sölle, “Stellvertretung,” Bd.3, 113.

¹⁶⁹ Given her frequent allusions to the work of Hegel, I find the double meaning of the German word “Ohnmacht” (literally without-power) significant. Her translators typically render this word with powerlessness, but in the context of a conception of God I find that un-consciousness conveys something of the potentiality, of the dreaming and future promise inherent in Sölle's considerations on God. It also marks out the relationship God holds to abjection (Kristeva) in this non-object status. While Sölle does not note Kristeva's work, she appears to arrive at these concerns via Simone Weil. Cf. Simone Weil, “To desire without an object” and “He whom we must love is absent,” in *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge, 1952), 67ff.; 162ff. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

¹⁷⁰ Sölle, “Stellvertretung,” Bd.3, 131ff.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 113-119.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 13; 116.

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ambivalence to using the metaphor of the Death of God in a sustained manner, she nevertheless starts out from a position of radical secularity. If God cannot be thought in the context of this world, then God ceases to have a meaningful (i.e. living) relationship to the being of the believer outside of the performative context of representative action (and not the deadening image of mimesis). This renewed living relationship however is not a recovery from death as such, but a living relationship to the dead. Death is given back a social context. This is why God will only "appear" in interaction, in mediated presence. That this is not at the same time a rejection of attributing transcendence to God's character is rarely understood by Sölle's critics: God retains transcendence both in light of his or her future possibilities with humankind, as well as within the context of the Trinity.

Fixating the discussion on the Death of God as a reality in the process of prayer under deprivatisation implies at least two things: (1), that the praying subject cannot look for God as an affirmation of personal identity, and (2), that the context of this world, in which the praying subject articulates herself, appears in despair unmitigated by extra-mundane redemption. If God's absence, theologically, can be thought as God's being-for-the-world¹⁷³, then in God's death we likewise can become an answer to God in taking up the responsibility in *Stellvertretung* of God to the world. As Sölle notes: "The aim of all representatives is the self-sublation of representation"¹⁷⁴, indicating a dialectic process between acting and being that remembers the point of negation (death) as the starting-point for negotiating an embodied and ethical relationship with the world. By doing so

¹⁷³ Sölle discusses the dynamic between human responsibility and God's dependency on *Stellvertretung* with reference to Bonhoeffer's Christology. Identification emerges as a critical case for human identity in recognition of the absence in death that shares with the for-structure of existential thought. Cf. "Stellvertretung," Bd.3, 81ff.

¹⁷⁴"Das Ziel aller Stellvertreter ist die Selbstaufhebung der Stellvertretung" – Sölle, "Stellvertretung," Bd.3, 83.

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we are not replacing God in the action, but letting God be cast forward as the intersubjective horizon of our interaction. I hold the Death of God to be a programmatic position of God in deprivatised prayer, because it is a prayer that seeks out the awareness of the inherent danger in mistaking prayer with magic, and that thus reinstates God in the place of an institutionally overpowered and atoning function¹⁷⁵. But what awareness is needed to defy (theological) trivialisation¹⁷⁶ of the causes of the divine (and all-too-human) death? What stops deprivatised prayer from succumbing to "mere self-reflection" or an uncritical assimilation into the collectivity presented by the church that forgets, or neglects, its ontological uprootedness? Here Sölle returns us to Hegel:

The theological expression of such changed psychosocial conditionality is the role of the "death of God" as experience of the end of a general, objective but also subjective and private, at any rate unmediated certainty. To those people who remain within the horizon of this experience of the death of God, it indicates that which Hegel calls the "infinite pain", namely the "feeling on which the religion of the new age rests, the feeling: God himself is dead"¹⁷⁷.

¹⁷⁵ Sölle, "Das Entprivatisierte Gebet," Bd.1, 183.

¹⁷⁶ Sölle points to the kind of petitioning prayer that addresses the suffering in the world at a distance from personal involvement, in a move of romanticising the poor for example – Ibid., 185f.

¹⁷⁷ "Der theologische Ausdruck solcher veränderter psychosozialen Bedingtheiten ist die Rolle vom "Tode Gottes" als Erfahrung vom Ende einer objektiven, allgemeinen oder auch subjektiven, privaten, jedenfalls aber unmittelbaren Gewissheit. Den Menschen, die im Horizont dieser Erfahrung vom Tode Gottes bleiben, ist das vorgegeben, was Hegel den "unendlichen Schmerz" nannte, nämlich "das Gefühl, worauf die Religion der neuen Zeit beruht, das Gefühl: Gott selber ist tot". (Sölle, "Stellvertretung," Bd3, 13); "The phrase "the death of God" is meant to give theological expression to these changed psychosocial conditions. It points to the experience of the end of all immediate certainty, whether objective and universal or subjective and private. Those who remain within the scope of this new experience of the death of God cannot escape the "infinite pain", as Hegel called it, "the feeling on which the religion of the new era rests, the feeling that God Himself is dead" – Sölle, *Christ the Representative*, 12.

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Since the Death of God (be that understood as Jesus on the Cross, or as the conceptual paradox of the first person of the Trinity) cannot serve to reveal God, but is a consequence of a prior revelation of God in the incarnation, we have to ask what the Death of God reveals about the world in light of the triune self-relation¹⁷⁸. (This I see as a genuine contribution Sölle makes in *Stellvertretung*, even though it is not her methodical position, nor a systematic concern for her writing; it remains, however, as the crucial point of divergence between many of her critics and her own theological direction¹⁷⁹). The "infinite pain" of the realisation of God's death is indirect affirmation that truly we understand our ontological displacement in God's humiliation in death. Insofar as this pain asserts that something has changed for us, its grief secures our continued orientation towards God after the Death of God; mourning here is the very opening gesture of prayer¹⁸⁰. In light of the "world" we have to return yet again to the status of representability of (more accurately, the possibility for taking representative action for) the dead. In light of the Trinitarian self-relation, the emphasis shifts towards the locus of power of the divine, and its transference, harnessed as it commonly is by the institutions.

¹⁷⁸That the death of Jesus on the Cross typifies the cruelty of the world is not new. That it should mark a fundamental change to the way God relates to the world – outside of the rhetoric of a sacrificial theology – is commonly voiced in discussions on the coming of the Spirit, at Pentecost. However, the crucial interim period, i.e. between the dying and the spiritual representative, holds significant for both, the world's ability and mission to pray, and the divine economy in its self-relation.

¹⁷⁹ Sölle seems to be closer to the position held by Zwingli than that held by Luther on the communication of attributes, which critics such as Otto Reidinger flag up as inconsistency within her work, even though they pin this on her reading of Hegel instead.

¹⁸⁰ As Brecht put it in "The question of whether there is a God": "I advise you to consider whether, depending on the answer, your behavior would change. If it would not change, then we can drop the question. If it would change, then I can at least be of help to the extent that I can say, you have already decided: you need a God." – Bertolt Brecht, *Stories of Mr. Keuner*, trans. Martin Chalmers (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2001), 14. In this need or desire for God we have the root for our continuing pain in the absence of God signified by death.

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Precisely this non-object status of God assures a believer's continuous identification with God – and gendered identification at that: 'When the object that I incorporate is the speech of the other – precisely a non-object, a pattern, a model – I bind myself to him [sic] in a primary fusion, communion, unification. An identification'¹⁸¹. Julia Kristeva's insightful comment has much to inform – if not a definitive assessment of the triune relationship, then – a conceptually inherent logic in the teachings on *perichoresis*. The pattern that connects the Triune persons is commonly acknowledged as a model of love (even in sacrificial theological thinking on the Trinity), and the subsummation of the life and death of Jesus into the resurrection of Christ is a point in case: the disciple's identification of Jesus with Christ due to his living witness to God exceeded his life. When we come to read this pattern back into the very conception of God, in case of the attributes of the first person of the Trinity, we have to consider what point and purpose an identification of God's *non-object status* (assured by "his" death) serves in the context of the model of faith¹⁸². Where God is thought of in process terms (as Sölle's use of God as interpersonal event would indicate), emphasis is given over not to God as object, but to God as agent, who may or may not be conceptualised in terms of personhood. Thus, a discussion of God's non-object status perpetually risks clinging to the status, i.e. the *role*, of power in any attachment to God, instead of squaring up to the non-objective, the preconscious potentiality of its power to transform interceding agents, at the heart of the Trinitarian exchange.

¹⁸¹ Julia Kristeva, "Freud and Love: Treatment and Its Discontents," in *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 26.

¹⁸² In other words: if an identification with God is possible by virtue of his non-object status, and such identification reveals the love assumed in the communication of attributes, then to be focussing the question on the identification of the non-object status should allow for a discussion of the means of communication that love necessitates.

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God's transformative character escapes representation, so that death is both synonymous with God's non-object status, as much as with the only object that retains constant currency: "his" demise. Concretising this thought in a this-worldly perspective of Christology, to see and valorise Jesus' death as a death brought under the care of God, by considering his death as factual representation (and yet, still no more than a representation) of the dying God, truly transforms the relationship to be envisioned with divinity on earth¹⁸³. Consequently, Sölle formulates the praying subject faced by the ontological despair of the Death of God in the collective identity in comradeship to Christ, not in obedience to the power of divine command: 'Pacifist by faith I am, because the most earthly man from Nazareth called Jesus has already, together with his brothers and sisters – and this reality of solidarity [or cohesion] we call "Christ" the disarmed life, lived the freedom from wanting-to-kill and the freedom from having-to-kill'¹⁸⁴.

When Sölle states that 'a Christian prayer should realise a piece of resurrection and not remain in a position prior to Easter'¹⁸⁵, she shifts the

¹⁸³ Two conditions have to be achieved in order to transform the situation that renders God incarnate to us as other than God-self (that is, as other than power in condescension) and realise transcendence as a powerful transference, a means to empower one another without which it will never be possible to think of speaking for another in intercession without also substituting (overpowering) that other. In order to recognise God's transcendence as a form of surrender – emphasised in Sölle's reflections on God's powerlessness – instead of a form of condescension, God has to suffer the denial of salvation (the cry on the cross for having been forsaken). In order to recognise God's incarnation as a form of (mutual) empowerment, God (capital G) has to die in order that god (lower case g) may be remembered in the Eucharist as a form of epitomising mourning as a creative and creational act.

¹⁸⁴ "Pazifist aus Glauben bin ich, weil der höchst irdische Mensch aus Nazareth namens Jesus zusammen mit seinen Brüdern und Schwestern – und diese Realität des Zusammenhalts nennen wir "Christus" das waffenlose Leben, die Freiheit vom Tötenwollen oder Tötenmüssen bereits gelebt hat"; Sölle, "Nachwort" aus "Stellvertretung," Bd.3, 136.

¹⁸⁵ "Ein christliches Gebet sollte aber ein Stück Auferstehung realisieren und nicht in einem Zustand vor Ostern verharren" – Sölle, "Das Entprivatisierte Gebet," Bd.1, 188.

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emphasis of our mourning away from the object and objectivised God, and “his” power. Instead, we mourn the danger of jeopardising God’s future – a future we would grant him even in death, committing ourselves to the responsibility for the “heavenly kingdom”. Hence, embodiment – as a site of empowerment, with the onus on action/agency – is crucial in understanding Sölle’s theology and ties in with the role given to participation in her hermeneutics and her engagement with activism. In Sölle’s move from the death to the absence of God, as the God incognito, is a very different kind of resurrection: for one, God is rendered gender-ambiguous. Here God truly divested himself into the world in such a way that we have been given the power to gather together Godself, eventing the divine in continuous transformations such that we begin to honour life even unto death, and life in its fullness – its diversity and difference. For God there is never a return to pre-incarnate divinity; divinity itself has changed face absolutely. The means of resurrection (incarnation) are what is at stake to the mourning prayer of God, a prayer no longer directed directly at God, but at the community with which the believer is enacting what is God’s (performative, gendered embodiment). Liberational faith lives from solidarity. Communitative action, the realisation of deprivatised prayer, resurrects.

1.1.2. Prayer and Community

The critique of prayer opens up its clearer localisation: prayer resides not in the borderline situation, but in the heart of life. Prayer remains not as a last resort, when nothing else is left. Reassurances of this kind, in a secular world, can be negotiated without the auxiliary construction “God”¹⁸⁶.

¹⁸⁶ “Die Kritik des Gebets eröffnet seine genauere Ortsbestimmung: nicht die Grenzsituation ist der Ort des Gebets, sondern das Inland des Lebens. Nicht: für den äußersten Notfall, wenn es nicht weitergeht, bleibt noch das Gebet. Rückversicherungen dieser Art lassen sich in der säkularen Welt auch ohne die Hilfskonstruktion “Gott” abschließen” – Sölle, “Beten” [1966] in “Atheistisch an Gott Glauben” (1968), Bd.3, 241.

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A critique of prayer, that is both a critical reflection on prayer and prayer's critical reflection of the world, locates prayer as something other than an escape mechanism, or an appeal to God's omnipotent saving action: 'the *discussion* too happens coram Christo and belongs to the language of prayer, because like discussion, prayer provokes, reveals and promises'¹⁸⁷ (my emphasis). Prayer, to Sölle, has not been left behind in the age of the Enlightenment subject (in the Kantian sense), but has believers reflect critically on the need of the world outside of self-serving, narcissistic interests (what Rudolf Vierhaus discusses under the rubric of the emancipated subject of the late modern era¹⁸⁸).

Section 1.1.1 has identified the absence of a unified Godhead and the awareness of God's death as a realisation of difference that sponsors our abject relation to divine power (played through in the role attributed to divine judgment or reclaimed by our solidarity with the divine in experiences of empowerment). The question remains how we are to articulate prayer in community as it is presented by the process of deprivatisation in light of its critique against institutional – public – prayers commonly practiced at Church. Sölle does not radically deny prayer the language of earlier ages, the language of tradition, but she does deny its uncritical *reception* as if we merely had to function to attain to a general, universal sharing of speech. She remarks:

That we cannot "simply" copy them [prayers of a pre-industrial, differently informed society] does not exclude us from taking them over "dialectically": spoken on the basis of our current level of information, heard against the backdrop of our own reflection, the old texts precisely gain a new earnestness. Precisely when we have gained from information a new stance in our own world, when we have

¹⁸⁷ "...auch die Diskussion geschieht coram Christo und gehört in die Sprache des Gebets hinein, weil sie wie diese provoziert, aufdeckt und verspricht" – Sölle, "Das Entprivatisierte Gebet," Bd.1, 190.

¹⁸⁸ Rudolf Vierhaus (Hrsg.), *Aufklärung als Prozeß* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1988).

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found a piece of self-expression, then can we also allow ourselves the aid of the language of our fathers¹⁸⁹.

Handing down prayers, or any other aspect of tradition, in any tradition of faith is not to be mistaken as a case of mechanical reproduction, or ‘obsessive litanies’¹⁹⁰. Elsewhere Sölle points to Simone Weil on the role of attention¹⁹¹, which builds on a love in the final analysis opposed to the despair that information identifies in the world¹⁹². This attention, if its earnestness is given to understanding, i.e. to critical reflection, entices us to a co-creative engagement with the old texts. Thus, the “taking over” dialectically does not have to find itself in necessary agreement with the old texts (troublesome as much of Scripture and no less the traditional articulations of liturgical prayer and theology for women can be and have been); it demands critical examination. This critical and creative task however is not achieved in individuated abstraction. ‘When God’s cause in prayer truly becomes our own, then this happens *extra me*, not out of my own good will, but within the society and amongst the people with whom I live’¹⁹³. An unreflected exodus from the tradition is not an emancipated response.

¹⁸⁹ “Daß wir sie nicht »einfach« übernehmen können, schließt aber keineswegs aus, daß wir sie »dialektisch« übernehmen können: Auf der Basis unserer heutigen Information gesprochen, gehört vor dem Hintergrund unseres eignen Nachdenkens, gewinnen die alten Texte gerade einen neuen Ernst. Gerade wenn wir durch die Information neuen Stand in unserer eigenen Welt gewonnen, ein Stück Selbstformulierung gefunden haben, dann können wir auch der Sprache der Väter erlauben, uns zu helfen” – Sölle, “Das Entprivatisierte Gebet,” Bd.1, 186f.

¹⁹⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 33.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 105ff.

¹⁹² Sölle, “Das Entprivatisierte Gebet,” Bd.1, 185.

¹⁹³ “Wenn Gottes Sache im Gebet wirklich unsere Sache wird, so geschieht dies *extra me*, nicht aus meinem guten Willen, sondern in der Gesellschaft und unter den Menschen, mit denen ich lebe” – Sölle, “Das Entprivatisierte Gebet,” Bd1, 189.

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Instead, [p]rayer is an attempt to speak differently, such that the separation of public and private in fact becomes redundant or no longer plays a role¹⁹⁴. The process of deprivatisation is a necessary point of departure from meditative, “private” prayer-practice in light of the transformational encounter with the community it addresses and engages with. Before an emancipated, a liberated, response can come into view we have to be – as Sölle would phrase it in Political theological idiom – ‘identifying with the tendency of a political decision’¹⁹⁵. This identification negotiates our subjectivities in the context of one another (also in the context of literary performance). This forming of relationships, and its public con-formations in the institutions, are particularly delicate (not just as theoretical issues) when situated in a *theologically* normative context. Interceding in institutionally prescriptive liturgical form the praying subject performs the body of the church by charting out its discursive boundaries. Deprivatised prayer asks after the role of collective and mature participation of those praying. If we take Sölle’s late concern for co-creation seriously, in light of deprivatised prayer, then the character of worship, also for the purpose of analytical categories, cannot solely be identified in reference to God alone. God, too, remains part of a dialectical and paradoxical relationship within the context of worship that cannot be presupposed as a stable or uncritical point of reference. The crisis here is to be truly confronted by the numinous (Otto), a liminal space in which nobody has assumed identity (yet). The ecclesial community, too, has to discover its agency interdependent on the world it reflects.

¹⁹⁴ “Das Gebet ist ein Versuch, anders zu reden, so daß die Trennung von öffentlich und privat tatsächlich überflüssig wird oder keine Rolle mehr spielt” (Dorothee Sölle) in “‘Das Christentum setzt voraus, daß alle Menschen Dichter sind, nämlich beten können’ – Gespräch mit Wolfgang Fietkau über die Sprache der Poesie, das Beten und das Schreiben von Gedichten,” in *Dorothee Sölle im Gespräch*, Hrsg. Theo Christiansen und Johannes Thiele (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1988), 91.

¹⁹⁵ “Der Beter identifiziert sich mit dem Problem und sodann mit der Tendenz der politischen Entscheidung” –Sölle, “Das Entprivatisierte Gebet,” Bd.1, 189.

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In a prognosis on the situation of prayer within the churches, Sölle makes the point:

Prayer, especially in forms of pure devotion, in praise, appears as a behavioural relic of immediacy to God. Nevertheless also for prayer goes that, in whatever shape it may survive in a post-Christian world, the vision created here onto God's future takes its starting point from the identification with the world in which we live. It [prayer] calls God into this world, but this call for God is only there a call to God where it remains faithful to the earth; otherwise it becomes the call for a substitutional gratification or sedative manoeuvre – an act of replacement. Prayer is “before God” when it is in the world¹⁹⁶.

“Pure devotion”, albeit a tenuous description of worship that is deemed apolitical and highly emotionally charged, serves here as a short-hand for the kind of public prayer Sölle's text on deprivatised prayer had attacked: a dangerously banal pastime. By way of a similar criticism, Sölle's lyric has been sidelined for its emotional charge in theological reception¹⁹⁷, which offers us here a good indication of the ways in which praise and intercession relate in Sölle's consideration of deprivatisation. Within the context of public worship, liturgical prayers are not

¹⁹⁶ “Gebet, vor allem in den Formen der reinen Anbetung, des Lobes, erscheint als ein solches Relikt unmittelbaren Verhaltens zu Gott. Dennoch gilt auch für das Gebet, wie immer es in nachchristlicher Welt überleben wird, dass der Blick auf Gottes Zukunft, der hier getan wird, seinen Ausgang nimmt von der Identifikation mit der Welt, in der wir leben. Es ruft Gott in diese Welt hinein, aber dieser Ruf ist nur dort Ruf nach Gott, wo er der Erde treu bleibt; andernfalls ist er Ruf nach einer Ersatzbefriedigung, Beruhigungsmanöver – kurz eine Ersatzleistung. Das Gebet ist “vor Gott”, indem es in der Welt ist” (Sölle, “Stellvertretung,” Bd.3, 112) – ‘Prayer, especially in form of pure adoration and praise, seems to be one such survival of a direct relationship to God. Yet even here, in the case of prayer, it remains true that, whatever may be the forms in which it survives in a post-Christian age, the reference made in prayer to God's future has its starting point in identification with the world in which we live. Prayer summons God into this world; but this summons is only a call to God when it remains faithful to the earth. Otherwise it is simply a cry for a substitute satisfaction, for a sedative – in short, for compensation. Prayer is “before God” only when it is in the world’ (Sölle, *Christ the Representative*, 128f.).

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Section 2.1.2.

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only there to assure participation by the congregation in the on-going proclamation, but also indicate to the believers the location within the ceremony; they *inform* the believer of their location vis-à-vis other congregants (confession), the world beyond the consecrated space and time of the celebrated liturgy (intercession), and God (witness). The prescriptive or pre-scripted nature of this sort of prayer may invoke the criticism that the body of the congregation remains entirely passive, unthinking or at least ill-equipped to re-present themselves in the context of hierarchically ordained location in worship. Self-expression, or self-investment, is kept at surface level, to a minimum in the timed silent prayers of intercession. That precisely the *freely* articulated prayers of intercession are silent in the course of a traditional service (even though silent prayer has been a development of Western modernity) has been a challenge to the pedagogical mission of developing and enabling the congregants' self-expression of faith, criticised also in the liturgical initiatives by Sölle and others¹⁹⁸.

It is not merely the informational content that is found lacking in ecclesial culture of intercessory prayers for Sölle; it is also the awareness that being able to identify with God's need¹⁹⁹ is crucial to refrain from self-alienation. Prayer in the above quotation is understood to be linked to this representational economy by way of directing attention to our commitments in the world. In prayer, the 'decisive question ... is whether the person is concentrated on his ego or whether this prayer opens him [sic] up for the world'²⁰⁰. As a sheer mental process without effecting a

¹⁹⁸ The wave of liturgical explorations following the Second Vatican Council may have been comparatively short-lived. Nevertheless, it offers an opportunity to critically reflect the relationship between institutional (and gendered!) power and the consolidation of creative flexibility in the context of faith praxis.

¹⁹⁹ A phrase made explicit in her poetry and elsewhere: 'You shall help him / that is faith' (ll.10f.) "When he came" [MG 10].

²⁰⁰ "Im Gebet übernimmt der Mensch die Verantwortung für das Kommen des Reiches Gottes, und zwar auch in dem Gebet, das individuelle Nöte, Sorgen oder Glück formuliert. Die entscheidende

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change in praxis, “purely” meditative self-reflection is not yet Christian prayer for Sölle²⁰¹. But neither is an uncritical, if latent submission to the role given to the believer in the liturgical procedure, if the believer does not emerge or recognise him or herself as emancipated subject. If God is a commitment in the world for us, if we are interested in furthering a vision for God, this requires prayerful reflection of the *need* in which we see *God* expressed. In this sense, *receiving* prayer by the “mute” (uncreative) repetition of liturgical protocol, in an act of ‘spiritual anorexia’²⁰² or alienated consumerism, renders the performative capacity of liturgical prayers defunct. The believers’ submission to the power and authority of an ecclesial verdict debilitates the believers’ negotiation of the institutional position this actualises; the believer him or herself becomes reduced to the representative image (here not in the dynamic sense of *Stellvertretung* used by Sölle). To those for whom it is opportune to align themselves with the ruling powers of that institution (in all its gendered political and economic investments), this form of obedience circumvents uncomfortable self-reflection. The believer fulfils his or her function (is alienated in this manner) by submitting entirely to the *role* given to her or him by the institutional formulation of prayer. It eradicates the personal (not yet differentiated into public or private persona) for the sake of the general, and it prevents the development of (and the risk attaining to) an embodied, incarnational articulation of prayer in community. Any sign of difference here would indicate exclusion from grace²⁰³.

Frage ist dabei, ob dieses Gebet den Menschen auf sein Ich konzentriert oder ob es ihn aufschließt für die Welt” – Sölle, “Das Entprivatisierte Gebet,” Bd.1, 189.

²⁰¹ Ibid., Bd.1, 189.

²⁰² Sölle, “Grounding Heaven in the Earth” cited in Prinz, *Endangering Hunger for God*, 227.

²⁰³ While genuine speechlessness (in the metaphorical sense) appears to require an element of led prayers, as means of teaching, unreflective consummation of such routines may result in a false consciousness of grace, a false (self)-righteousness.

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Sölle, following in a method of indirection, shares in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's positioning of prayer as 'mediated prayer'²⁰⁴. As we have seen in Section 1.1.1, the negation of a direct, unimpeded communication with God, in prayer, for Sölle cannot be undone once the Death of God is grasped as an existential reality. Whereas Bonhoeffer emphasised Christ as mediator to both God and humanity in prayer, Sölle focuses on *our* task in this mediation. As she alerts her readers, Jesus wanted *us* to pray, but for those numb with fear, Jesus may very well be the person to enable us to raise our voices, even though this does not restore immediacy to those prayers:

This one [the representative, Christ] affords inter-cession, but we ought to learn to speak ourselves. This one hopes, where we are without hope, but this is not the end of [history] the story. The spirit which represents us in "unspeakable sighs" (Rom. 8,26) does not dream of replacing our prayers. However, the spirit does represent those whose only prayer is that they do not know how to pray. Through this representation the spirit leaves them the place open so that they may not lose it²⁰⁵.

²⁰⁴ "Thus, every true prayer is mediated prayer. There is no such thing as unmediated praying" – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* [1937], trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works Volume 4, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelley and John D. Godsey (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 153.

²⁰⁵ "Dieser [der Vertreter, Christus] leistet Für-Sprache, aber wir sollen selber sprechen lernen. Dieser glaubt für uns, aber wir sollen selber glauben lernen. Dieser hofft, wo wir hoffnungslos sind, aber das ist nicht das Ende der Geschichte. Der Geist, der uns mit "unaussprechlichem Seufzen" vertritt (Röm. 8,26), denkt nicht daran, unser Beten zu ersetzen. Wohl aber vertritt er die, deren einziges Gebet es ist, nicht zu wissen, was sie beten sollen. Durch seine Stellvertretung halt er ihnen die Stelle offen, so dass sie sie nicht verlieren" (Sölle, "Stellvertretung," Bd.3, 89) – 'Our representative speaks for us, but we ourselves have to learn to speak. He believes *for* us, but we ourselves have to learn to believe. He hopes when we are without hope, but that is not the end of the story. The Spirit who intercedes for us with "inarticulate groans" (Rom. 8:26) does not intend to replace our own praying. But certainly he represents those whose only prayer is ignorance of what to pray for. By his representation he holds their place open for them lest they should lose it' (Sölle, *Christ the Representative*, 104).

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Prayer is the representative action by which I identify with my capacity to affect the world in the process of actualising my being as a being-in-relation with others in the context of the liturgy. In recognition of my subjectivity as the locus of mediating the interchange between my physical presence and my psychosocial connectivity with others prayer locates my intersubjective role in a spatial and agentive dimension. Sölle addresses this issue when she says:

More importantly it would have to be questioned factually what actually happens when I say myself to someone in this world. ... this kenosis corresponds to a making-of-memory, this leaving a coming back, the gained distance a renewed honesty. The speaking alters the speaker and this not just in the sense of clarity of consciousness. Not we make language, but language makes us to others²¹⁰.

In the kenosis, or transformation, indicated by Sölle's interpretation on prayer, otherness is the source of renewal: not simply for a liberated future to come, but also for the making of memory that it invites. I change according to what I reflect myself against. The means of such reflection, language, is only ever partially under my control. This notion of prayer points us to the *Stellvertreter*-function of language by which we have become identified, to us and others, as participants of liberation.

1.2. Conclusion: Raising the Subject of Prayer

In one of Sölle's later reflections on prayer, troubled by communicating the ongoing shame experienced over the reality of Auschwitz to the next generation,

²¹⁰ "Wichtiger wäre, sachlich zu fragen, was denn eigentlich geschieht, wenn ich mich in meiner Welt jemandem sage. Was ist das, sich aussprechen? Ich gebe mich aus der Hand, überstelle mich dem, dem ich mich sage, ich entäußere mich, gehe von mir weg, indem ich mich ausspreche. Aber dieser Entäußerung entspricht eine Verinnerung, dem Fortgehen ein Zurückkommen, der gewonnenen Distanz eine erneute Inständigkeit. Das Sprechen verändert den Sprechenden, und dies nicht nur im Sinne helleren Bewusstseins. Nicht wir machen die Sprache, sondern die Sprache macht uns zu anderen" – Sölle, "Gebet," Bd.3, 245.

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she formulates her earlier concern for deprivatised prayer in broader terms, reflected against the passage of time:

Prayer is resistance [*Widerspruch*] against death. It means to gather oneself, to reflect, to gain clarity on the question of where [sic] we are living towards, what we want with our lives; having memory and therein becoming more and more akin to God; harbouring wishes for ourselves and our children; to voice these wishes audibly and silently, together and in solitude, and thereby becoming more and more akin to the human person that we were intended to be.²¹¹

In this passage, as in the course of this Chapter at large, we can trace an interesting and peculiar *poesis* which helps shape and articulate a methodological pathway, from the political subject towards an engagement with creation that is not tied to economic utility in the process of deprivatisation: a vision for Liberation Theology able to contextualise the diversity (and gendered difference) of its participants. This marked the Death of God as an existential moment, not merely for the grief experienced by Jesus' followers, but also to the situation of this fellowship as a community of conscience and in intersubjective consciousness where the dead and their memories are received alongside the dreams of the living. In the discussion around *perichoresis*, as a restructuring of the Trinity in the Death of God, this death has taken on a public, and communal reality. Against the backdrop of mourning its loss, the purpose of intercession reflects the ethical responsibility of the believer into a co-creative engagement with the world. Sölle's notion of deprivatisation develops from an understanding of the reification of the "person" in the public/private dichotomy and from recovering the collective basis of social action that finds itself pointing back at our interdependent subjectivities. Sölle recovers the personal as the political in the dimension of the collective action given

²¹¹ "Beten ist Widerspruch gegen den Tod. Es bedeutet sich zu sammeln, nachzudenken, Klarheit zu gewinnen, wohin wir eigentlich leben, was wir mit unserem Leben wollen; Gedächtnis zu haben und darin Gott ähnlicher werden; Wünsche zu haben für uns und unsere Kinder; die Wünsche laut und leise, zusammen und allein zu äußern und darin immer mehr dem Menschen ähnlich zu werden, als der wir gemeint waren." – Sölle, "Gegenwind," Bd.12, 221.

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in prayer. Hence, prayer is not a discrete action, but an ongoing activity, that formulates itself in (performative) acts. What this may mean in the world of literature will be the focus of the next chapter.

2. Chapter Two: Prayer-Poetry

This chapter is concerned with the literary conception underwriting Sölle's theo-poetic vision and its role in the reception of her prayer-poetry. Having just established a sense of prayer in Chapter One that breaks away from modernity's self-obsessive focus, Sölle's connection between prayer and poetry does not, at first sight, aid poetry's rehabilitation for a post-Auschwitz theology. George Lukács' understanding, that the 'fragmented, lyric and reflective, subjective literature of Romanticism, with its recognition that this innocent reconciliation of individual and totality is impossible in modernity,'²¹² paves the way for Sölle's own reception of the nationalist strands of late Romantic writers, and her own lyric production, to move beyond sentimental self-reflection or aesthetically pleasing art-works. Sölle's stance on prayer-poetry links a persisting claim to truth (albeit a notion of truth given not by an objective absolute, but in the literarily mediated expression of historical experience) with the role of subjectivity in the making of prayer that renders the ethical subject in the role of the poet:

For me, praying and writing poetry, prayer and poem, are not alternatives.... The thought for example that every human can pray is for me an enormous affirmation of human creativity. Christianity presupposes that all human beings are poets, namely, that they can pray... When people try to say with the utmost capacity for truthfulness what really concerns them, they offer prayer and are poets at the same time. To discover this anew, to bring it into reality or to make it known, is one of the goals I pursue in my poems.²¹³

²¹² Nicholas Saul, "The Reception of German Romanticism in the Twentieth Century" in *The Literature of German Romanticism*, ed. by Dennis Mahoney, 327-359, Camden House History of German Literature, Vol.8 (Suffolk: Camden House, 2004), 339.

²¹³ Sölle, *Against the Wind*, 153; "Beten und Dichten, Gebet und Gedicht sind für mich keine Alternative... ich empfinde ... den Gedanken, dass jeder Mensch beten kann, als eine ungeheure Betonung der humanen Kreativität. Das Christentum setzt voraus, dass alle Menschen Dichter sind, nämlich beten können... Wenn die Menschen mit der größten Wahrhaftigkeit, deren sie fähig sind, das zu sagen versuchen, was sie wirklich angeht, dann beten sie und sind zugleich Dichter. Das

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Let me draw out some of the ‘alternatives’ against which Sölle positions herself here. As Marcia Falk suggests: ‘For some readers the main difference between poetry and prayer comes down to use: poetry may become prayer when it is spoken or read in particular places at particular times. Intentionality, too, plays a part’²¹⁴. This understanding “by use” implies not only an intentionality on part of the author, but also necessitates a responsible and responsive reception of the text by its reader, commonly a norm is given by his or her denominational allegiances. However, Sölle remains suspicious of institutional boundaries where they are uncritically taken over by participants. Mere reiteration, empty echoing out of words, is false prayer and bad poetry. What we have already discussed in terms of deprivatised prayer in Chapter One is a poetic, transformational process of making space in the world for our concerns, and that means for our relationship to the world we live in.

Sölle’s affirmation of human creativity is conditioned by the ultimacy of concern (what Heidegger would address in terms of care²¹⁵) for a kind of realism that stands in paradoxical relationship to the task of practicing grand wishes, of “be[ing] reasonable [by] demand[ing] the impossible” (ZU 133)²¹⁶. Sölle, as will become clear in the course of this chapter, does not have time for world-renunciating asceticism – not even in the context of her articulations on mysticism. Her position is that good poetry, that is, poetry that expresses the reality –

wieder auszugraben oder zu realisieren oder bekannt zu machen ist ein Ziel, das ich mit meinen Gedichten habe” – Sölle, “Gegenwind,” Bd.12, 260.

²¹⁴ Marcia Falk, “Prayer as Poetry, Poetry as Prayer: A Liturgist’s Exploration,” in *Feminist Theologies: Legacies and Prospects*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 140.

²¹⁵ Part 1 Chapter 6 of Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), especially 235ff.

²¹⁶ A quote attributed to Che Guevara, but also a reference to the 68er movement where this phrase had been painted on the walls of the Sorbonne, Paris.

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envisioned or present – that truly *shares* a concern in the world, is prayer. Thus, at times her poetry reflects the prayers of others as a way to share in their work²¹⁷. In people’s desire for the ‘utmost capacity for truthfulness’²¹⁸ we discover a glimpse of the poetic, namely in the desire for being at one in our doing with that which we represent to others. To Sölle the fundamental problem at the heart of this wish is how to share our experiences with the world in the world. Only there does poetry in truth transmit – transform – that which tradition had so long attested to it, namely *communitas*, where we begin to engage with this world creatively and responsibly.

Insofar as prayer-poetry is a complex issue for both theological discourse and literary criticism, Mary Gerhart’s hermeneutics interrogating genre choices with gender questions is elucidating²¹⁹. With a view to the etymological family of the terms “genre” and “gender”, she asserts two general senses: ‘the categorical and the productive’²²⁰, but also qualifying their ‘quite different relationships within different fields of meanings’²²¹. We have noted above that Sölle does not view prayer as categorically distinct from poetry, but that their interchange is nevertheless vitally productive or creative. Read in terms of genre as an ‘autonomous religious poetry which emancipates itself from a dominant Christian

²¹⁷ “And i saw a man on 126th st” [BR 118], speaks of a man sweeping the street which is given the signification of prayer, which Sölle included in various publications, also in translation (not mine); e.g. Sölle, *Against the Wind*, 152. Aside from my own reading of poems (implicitly or explicitly) as prayers, there are those that actively identify and observe others at prayer; these include: FL10, FL62, BR81, BR84, VL10, VL83, VL169, ZU111, ZU146, ZU147, LL98, LL108. I refrain here from citing full titles.

²¹⁸ Sölle, *Against the Wind*, 153; the phrase goes back to Paul Tillich’s ‘ultimate concern’ in, *The Dynamics of Faith* (1957).

²¹⁹ Mary Gerhart, *Genre Choices, Gender Questions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

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culture'²²², Chapter One indicated the role of deprivatised prayer as a critical shift in emphasis: with the Death of God we find ourselves bound to a this-worldly context that nevertheless retains the hope of the incarnation witnessed in our potential for transcendence. As an embodied faith praxis, questions of gender have remained largely implicit to this study's emphasis on women's subjectivity in prayer. Deprivatisation there offered the categorical markers of a process, locating the personal and the political in the creative work undertaken by prayer-poetry (in light of a theological reception of *Stellvertretung*) that aimed theologically at the sharing of *communitas*. However, this emphasised the theological status of co-creation for the reception of Sölle's aesthetics, without identifying the implications such a reading has for critically addressing the corpus of Sölle's texts as literature. The creative processes involved in reading and reception (as we shall see in Chapter Four, also in translation) under the lens of deprivatisation become highly influential to the way the text is reproduced and performed in discourse. To this end, Mary Gerhart offers a ready vocabulary to filter Sölle's theological considerations into a literary perspective. Gerhart's observations on genre and gender – and their intersections – facilitate an underlying aesthetic that is not formalistic, but performative: author, reader and text provide moments of solidarity and resistance to the situation by which we find ourselves contextualised in writing.

2.1. Genre and Gender: conceptual boundaries

Gender as a discourse descriptive of the performative work of a body tied into social, or at any rate societal, context has been a well documented insight of

²²² "In Auseinandersetzung mit ... Jean Paul und anderen plädiert sie [Sölle] für eine autonome religiöse Dichtung, die sich von einer dominanten christlichen Kultur emanzipiert" – Reinhold Boschki und Claudia Rehberger, "Dorothee Sölle: Religiöse Poesie und befreiende Theologie," in *Theologien der Gegenwart: Eine Einführung*, Hrsg. Carsten Barwasser (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 225.

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feminist research. Mary Gerhart expands this understanding of the body in discourse to the body of literature in discourse, when she says:

Genres and gender identifications result in praxis. If we understand reading to be isomorphic with authoring, it becomes clear that the reader can no longer be regarded as the self-evident recipient of text signification. The critical role of genre and gender is to transform speech about the text into a reconstruction of the text as a condition for the possibility of the text's having an effect in the world²²³.

Gerhart challenges the literary conception of the work of reception in reading. Not only does she propose that there is no linear progression from author via text to reader, but she also charges reception with the task of productively engaging its critical vocabulary (such as genre and gender) for the sake of reconstituting the text these categories seek to describe. Both propositions highlight Gerhart's acute awareness of a textual integrity if reception is to proceed from the text rather than predetermine the text. Thus, the trajectory she voices is one of a changed praxis in light of the text's actualisation that conforms closely with Sölle's view of a necessarily socially engaged artist²²⁴, and the solidarity afforded in the communal event, co-creation, through the act of reading.

By this token, the intentionality of the text is no longer exclusive to the author, but bespeaks the life of the text and the situation of its genre as an incomplete text without origin (beginning) and finality – the text, as opposed to the literary piece of art, is characterised by the participation in an unending referential play that knows no temporal circumscription. Thus, the text no longer is representative of authorial intention, nor textual intention, but is a framework that conditions the possibilities of the text's reception as literature, claiming for itself a self-critically multidimensional identity which plays with the transference of literary subjectivity by its reader. And for both genre and gender within this textual

²²³ Gerhart, *Genre Choices, Gender Questions*, 9.

²²⁴ More about this in Sections 3.4. and Chapter Four.

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play of representation, it becomes true what Sölle states concerning *Stellvertretung*: “The aim of all representatives is the self-sublation of representation”²²⁵ – that is, each member of a genre or a gender aims to be fully identifiable but never reduced to its genre or gender (and this is the crux of Sölle's determined stance on irreplaceability). Inherent in the representative action (the task, or labour) is a cancelling out of itself insofar as it claims to be unique to the responsibility – on behalf of another – undertaken by the representative.

It is important to realise that my study acts as representative of the prayer-poetry, and does not speak on behalf of its author, Dorothee Sölle. In the context of German reception, it is near impossible to detach the poetic I of Sölle's poetry from the presence of her public persona. I did not encounter Sölle in person, but in my schooling²²⁶. What I know of her I know from the literary persona of her texts, evinced in autobiography, her numerous writings and the public awareness of her person in Germany. Let it be said from the beginning: this is not a study of biography through the lens of poetry; it is however a study of literary subjectivity in which both poet and reader (as well as translator and critic) require some accommodation vis-à-vis genre and gender. We cannot do justice to Sölle's text, and in fact we diminish its creative potential, if we limit our readings and reception to a revision of the life of the author. Instead, the poetic potential that forms the legacy of Sölle's literary work with its nuanced literary conceptions competing in our various readings of her poems resides in its playful invitations. Interest in Sölle's poetry has more to offer than poetic affirmations of her theological stance, or shortened (auto)-biography.

²²⁵ “Ziel aller Stellvertreter ist die Selbstaufhebung der Stellvertretung” – Sölle, “Stellvertretung,” Bd.3, 83.

²²⁶ I first encountered Sölle's texts, age 13, in religious education class. At the time a disturbing encounter with the death of God, whose presence had been the one source of stability in my life.

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As a literary genre prayer-poetry shares of its author and dares its readers to reflect on their relation with the text; it aims for creative engagement with the fluid boundaries of “its” text (whether in fact textuality is truly neutral would point to a completely different debate). If Sölle's prayer-poems deprivatise our subjective concerns, making them visible beyond their historical, geo-political context, then Sölle's intention for them *as* prayers is not the determining factor for our literary analysis. Instead, it is the text's performative – and by that token also gendered – capacity that transcends our subjective concerns in reception and invites an intersubjective consciousness that can *actualise*²²⁷ the text as prayer – as a poetic text with a ‘window / to heaven’²²⁸ in the here and now²²⁹. With a concern for reception this highlights the critical role of the poetic persona in determining the boundaries of genre and the significance of gender for the performative *work* of the text. Retaining a literary persona, a poetic speaker, is important because ‘without a consciousness that desires, suffers, and chooses, there is no ethical or political

²²⁷ ‘That the text – and I mean fundamentally every text – can become event and is not merely reified object, is indicative of its authority which is logically only finding realisation in time’ – “Dass der Text – und zwar grundsätzlich jeder Text – Ereignis werden kann und nicht bloßer verdinglichter Gegenstand ist, das macht seine sich folgerichtig nur in der Zeit realisierende >>Autorität<< aus” – Dorothee Sölle, “Politische Theologie”, Bd.1, 50. We find this use of the term ‘realisation’ again in her professorial thesis.

²²⁸ Cf. “The religious dimension of the so-called peace movement” [VL 167]. Sölle uses the image of the window to heaven also in the context of activism in criticism of the arms race with its rhetoric on security; hence the title of her subsequent publication *The Window of Vulnerability: A Political Spirituality*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1990).

²²⁹ My readings may be anachronistic at times in dehistoricising Sölle's literary and theological development, but this is not to say that they cease to be historical in their own right. If the text is the ground zero for our readings, the texts are available to be read in any order. It will need to be determined what, if anything, makes my reading strategic in light of the present discussion.

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model for the reader'²³⁰. Given Sölle's entry-point into publishing, many of Sölle's poems do in fact play off her public image, that is, they play with the readers' presumptions on her person²³¹. But more than that, Sölle's work emerges at a crucial point in German literary history – a diverse literary culture witnessing profound societal shifts and mass politicisation in the newly formed democracies (however we are to judge either the attempts at this in East or West). The following section contextualises Sölle's literary development alongside German literary developments at large and in reflection of existing reception of her work by theologians. This points the discussion on genre and gender, the explicit focus of Section 2.1, towards conceptualisations of the lyric in the working practice of Sölle's texts under deprivatisation, and in my reception as a liturgical reception in Section 2.2.

2.1.1. The German Literary Context

What *Trümmerliteratur*²³² has achieved for the novel in repositioning the German literary project, the German lyric was yet searching for: both in terms of a new relationship with its form and its literary subject matter. 'It is indicative of the literary evolution of the 1960s that this is not a mere splitting off from "schools", but that all trends and genres have to redefine themselves before the changing horizon of the socio-political and cultural context'²³³. Hermann Korte traces a

²³⁰ Alicia Ostriker, "Beyond Confession: The Poetics of Postmodern Witness," in *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography*, ed. by Kate Sontag and David Graham (Saint Paul, Minn.: Graywolf Press, 2001), 319.

²³¹ "Answer to the crooked leftist friends on why we pray" [MG 26], and "When my manuscript was rejected five times" [VL 115] are examples of this.

²³² "Literature in the ruins," as William Grange translates it in *Historical Dictionary of Postwar German Literature* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 66.

²³³ "Es kennzeichnet die literarische Evolution in den 60er Jahren, daß sie keine bloße Ablösung von "Schulen" darstellte, sondern daß sich alle Richtungen und Genres vor dem Horizont eines sich

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number of interrelated shifts in the literary expression and reception of poetry. In contra-distinction to an idealised image of German literary achievement, tied to the romanticised recollection of German High culture of Weimar Classicism, his assessment identifies the 1960s as an important period of change in German literary culture which is also the starting point to Sölle's writing career. Sölle's keen familiarity with the German literary canon and her scholarly examination of Romantic and Post-Romantic literatures informs her literary sensibility, her theological stances and her literary innovations. In the course of her writings we can observe an increasing use of neologisms that render a word of masculine grammatical gender in the feminine, as well as creative borrowings in translation from English and French idiomatic expressions, and images. Alongside a reworking of myths from ancient Greece, but also the Latin American context to which Sölle felt very drawn, her poetry skilfully plays, adapts and adopts a language that reveals itself as ultimately more complex than might appear to a reader in the habit of isolating a poetic I as the central subject of a lyric poem.

Where the 1950s literary imagination appears still in shock, expressed in hermetic poetry seemingly sealed “against” political reality and focussed on lyric edification, the 1960s give way to a more optimistic, reality-driven writing that wants to take a stance on life²³⁴. In this light, the editor of the periodical *Kursbuch*, Hans Magnus Enzensberger²³⁵ ‘proposed a new kind of socially functional writing

verändernden politisch-sozialen und kulturellen Kontextes neu zu definieren hatten” – Hermann Korte, *Geschichte der Deutschen Lyrik seit 1945* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1989), 83.

²³⁴ Korte, *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik*, 82; for a similar assessment see: Dieter Lamping, “Bundesrepublik Deutschland / Von 1945 bis zur Wiedervereinigung,” in *Geschichte der Politischen Lyrik in Deutschland*, ed. Walter Hinderer (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), 327.

²³⁵ Enzensberger (1929-) is a much celebrated German literary critic, writer and editor who studied under Theodor Adorno; his work spans all literary genres. What is interesting in relation to the discussion on Sölle is his emphasis on a clear distinction between the poetic and the political, which identifies the lyric's relationship to the political in the modus of resistance or denial. Lamping notes

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designed to make the public politically literate'²³⁶, as a means to curb the looming threat of the polarising rhetoric of the Cold War that seemed to spell out the Death of Literature. *Agitprop* was to sustain the socio-critical function of literature²³⁷.

The first (and also the second) volume of Sölle's poetry ostensibly grew out of the *Initiative Political Night Prayers* – and in that respect has more a kind of "liturgical activism" at its core (at least in the sense of looking for a renewed engagement with liturgical form that many participants may have not been able to experience within the traditional settings of church services). Where Enzensberger hoped to foster a politically literate public, Sölle's work pursues a "religiously" literate one²³⁸. It is her second volume, *Revolutionäre geduld* (1974), which reveals more prevalent links with *agitprop*²³⁹, pointing her in the direction of her literary

the divergence between the theoretical position harnessed by Enzensberger's poetological reflections, and the reception of Enzensberger's poetics as quintessential political poetry – Lamping, "Bundesrepublik," 327f.

²³⁶ Charlotte Melin, *German Poetry in Transition 1945-1990*, ed. and trans. Charlotte Melin (Hannover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 18.

²³⁷ The agenda, in its popular literary reception, is commented upon thus: 'Touting relevance, but all too often lacking artistic merit, *agitprop* proliferated and eclipsed more subtle, introspective verse' – Ibid., 18. Yet, the call for *agitprop* sounded by Enzensberger has more of the guerrilla tactic of literary survival (and an aim towards maintaining a literate public) than of disenchanting withdrawal from the political implications of the current publishing context – cf. Charlotte Melin, *Poetic Maneuvers: Hans Magnus Enzensberger and the Lyric Genre* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003).

²³⁸ This is certainly how I read the conversation between Sölle and Josef P. Mautner, in their agreement over the place of religious language: Sölle names the ignorance of religious language and tradition as the impoverishment of literature – in Sölle, Falken und Mautner, *Himmelsleitern*, 14. In interview she notes that knowing a religion is like speaking a dialect (Sölle, *Welches Christentum hat Zukunft?*, 56). Elsewhere again she equates religion with language, with reference to its communicatory intent or capacity (possibility) – Sölle, "In Search of a New Religious Language," in *On Earth as in Heaven*, 88f.

²³⁹ In contrast and in response to the agitation propaganda of the Eastern bloc, this literary register is commonly noted for its brief, epigrammatic style and its authors' politically self-aware position.

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association with Erich Fried²⁴⁰ and their shared concern over the Vietnam War. Against the negative polemic that underwrites the term, stemming from its leftist association in a largely conservative cultural-political climate, ‘it is decisive for Erich Fried’s “*agitprop*-poem”, “that comprehensible text be brought into a context where it can stimulate thought, formulation and action” ’²⁴¹. What is true for Fried likewise holds for Sölle, insofar as poetic reception of her work goes hand in hand with her political activism; however, in Luibl’s assessment the ideological and political mobilisation attached to the notion of propaganda undermines any critical aesthetic envisioned by her literary politics²⁴².

The Principle of Hope by Ernst Bloch²⁴³ published in the course of the 1950s, is indicative of the political climate of the 1960s that would see collective action impact on political decisions. The hopeful outlook on German restoration, politically, culturally and economically, plays a major part not only for gender roles in German society at large²⁴⁴, but also for publishing opportunities²⁴⁵ within the

²⁴⁰ Erich Fried (1921-1988), poet from Austria, political commentator during his period of exile is maybe best known for his love poetry. However, his public persona resonates strongly with the German political climate of the 1968er movement, and his public personal affiliation with the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition (*ApO*). Sölle dedicates a poem to the friendship with Fried, cf. VL149.

²⁴¹ “Für Erich Frieds ‘Agitpropgedicht’ dagegen ist entscheidend, ‘daß ein verständlicher Text in einen Zusammenhang gebracht wird in dem er zum Denken, Formulieren und Handeln anregen kann” – Korte, *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik*, 101.

²⁴² Luibl, *Des Fremden Sprachgestalt*, 235.

²⁴³ Sölle addresses a touching poem about her friend in FL37. His text was a seminal read of its time.

²⁴⁴ As a study by Robert Moeller puts forward, sadly, the window for change or movement in the re/construction of gender roles, exemplified in the discussion around the family in Post-War Germany, was rather brief. Tracing the jurisdiction over women's rights in legal discourse, as well as over public debates, the media, and proto-Feminist organisations, it transpires that the crucial concerns addressed by work and divorce law (pertaining to property -- and custody of children), did not challenge the status of women's work on the basis of sex – Robert G. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (Berkeley: University

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literary landscape emerging from the ruins. That the window for change was brief may be exemplified by the pressure in the institutions, church and academy to stabilise and normalise their powers. The trend of the institutions towards a conservative re-formation that Sölle already faced early in her career²⁴⁶ nevertheless had to recognise the political stake held by collective action and for which figure-heads such as Sölle (she came to be leading in the German Peace Movement) in many ways became an exemplary target. Having children at the same time as pursuing a university career, and being made the focus of public scorn with her second marriage to the Benedictine Monk Fulbert Steffensky, Sölle gained a certain notoriety also outside of her political activist involvements. As a public persona²⁴⁷, however, her unflinching media presence and leftist associations also performed an important political function in the divided Germany against the fears of Cold War polemics and politics. Only late in her writings does Sölle admit the opposition she received as one caused by her status as a woman; at the time she ascribes it to her radical, openly Socialist politics.

Franziska Meyer, in her analysis on trends in women's writing of the 1950s and '60s in Germany, reflects that in spite of the indubitable significance of *Gruppe 47*, an early initiative by writers to re-establish the literary scene after the war,

of California Press, 1993), 88-92. In a similar case that will come to bear on Section 3.3 in particular, we find a telling remark in *The Encyclopaedia of Sex and Gender: Men and Women in the World's Cultures*, Vol.1, ed. Carol R. Embers and Melvin Ember, (New York: Springer, 2003), regarding Germany's traditional division of labour as 'surprising, since the laws have been much more progressive for decades' (Art. "The Germans" 400-407, by Jakob M. Pastötter, 401).

²⁴⁵ Franziska Meyer, "Women's Writing in Occupied Germany, 1945-1949," in *Postwar Women's Writing in German*, ed. by Chris Weedon (Oxford: Berghahn, 1997), 30f.

²⁴⁶ For instance, Sölle is the only candidate to have failed her first professorial defence, as she was ostensibly subject to unfair exam conditions intended on making an example of her radical politics.

²⁴⁷ Through appearances at the *Kirchentage* (yearly assembly of churches involving both lay and ordained participation), and subsequent radio-discussions.

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female authors who were brought out via this platform are rare; notable exceptions were women authors Ilse Aichinger and Ingeborg Bachmann²⁴⁸. The accounts of female participants and the sexist criticism tolerated at meetings – where women present were predominantly received as wives and partners, but rarely authors in their own right – indicate a shift away from the solidarity amongst writers in the early years after the War, and towards an emergent literary “old boys club”²⁴⁹. ‘Criteria of so-called “femininity” served both the erotic enhancement of the author and the literary degradation of the text’²⁵⁰. The literariness of literature evaluated here is clearly a male imaginary space²⁵¹. The particular role of German literature in deconstructing, and reconstructing, the German (national) imagination – what emerges as a gendered imaginary at that – in the aftermath and witness to the trauma of the Holocaust, can hardly be overestimated²⁵²!

Hand in hand with the problematic status of women across the institutions, the normalisation of male dominated power-structures in Germany during the Kurt Georg Kiesinger’s chancellorship of the so-called *Grand Coalition* (1966-69) provoked considerable unrest, but also political competition between the German

²⁴⁸ Franziska Meyer, “Women’s Writing in the 1950s and 1960s,” in *Postwar Women’s Writing in German. Feminist Critical Approaches*, ed. Chris Weedon (Oxford: Berghahn, 1997), 46f.

Ilse Aichinger (1921-) is an Austrian writer commonly featuring in anthologies and in school curricula in light of her literary reception of the Nazi-era; Ingeborg Bachmann (1926-1973) is also an Austrian writer with numerous accolades – today her name is attached to one of the highest ranking prizes for literature in the German speaking world.

²⁴⁹ Meyer, “Women’s Writing in the 1950s and 1960s,” 48.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁵¹ Gilbert and Gubar come to a similar conclusion, approaching a different period of literature – Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1984), 4.

²⁵² And in fact, the numerous pieces of research on Sölle’s theological work that detail and emphasise the centrality of Auschwitz for any reading of Sölle have shifted the tenor of reception in recent years; cf. Prinz (2007), Aschrich (2006).

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states and their allied power blocs that fuelled much of *agitprop* and other socially recognised movements. With reference to *agitprop* it is necessary to comment on the persistent if often unflattering references to German-US relations in Post-War German poetry that have been examined in an excellent study by Gregory Drivers. He asserts that with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Eastern bloc there was a notable change in reception of American culture. While this also led to a rereading of American poets such as Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath²⁵³ who regained currency in the changing relationship between the two nations, Sölle would appear to follow the negative trend indicated by Drivers when she scandalises US politicians and Cold War rhetoric²⁵⁴. Reacting to US foreign policy in the context of German national politics, her literary reception of the “other America” (as she comes to label it) develops during her teaching engagements at Union Seminary. Protest movements and feminist authors leave an indelible mark on her work.

Sölle’s mature work, *Loben ohne lügen* [LL] (2000) is a far cry from the literary exercises found in *Meditationen und gebrauchstexte* [MG] (1969) and while both share a certain brevity of writing, her mature verse²⁵⁵ cannot be mistaken for *agitprop*. Vietnam, a crucial focus in her second volume of poetry, *Revolutionäre geduld* [RG] (1974), gives way to a more rounded attempt at accommodating the fears and hopes attaching to theological vocabulary in their personal and political commitment in *Fliegen lernen* [FL] (1979). Even though

²⁵³ Gregory Drivers, *The Image and Influence of America in German Poetry since 1945* (Suffolk: Camden House, 2002), 208-11.

²⁵⁴ Alongside the early texts in MG and RG, see especially FL66, the section on resistance in BR, VL23, 112, 119, 122, 126 and ZU140.

²⁵⁵ LL takes stock of various issues prevailing in Sölle’s literary oeuvre, in a more reflective and assured kind of writing that remains more focussed on its literary object without therefore losing touch with the perspective of its literary persona. In this sense, it is most readily accepted as lyric. As a *memento mori*, the poetic I works through expressions of and encounters with death.

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activist politics return to the table in both *Spiel doch von brot und rosen* [BR] (1981) and *Zivil und ungehorsam* (1990) – the latter specifically drawing on her experience in America regarding acts of civil disobedience – it is the former that features the most outspoken examples of her engagement with sexual politics²⁵⁶. *Verrückt nach licht* [VL] (1984) offers a more sustained engagement with societal roles of women²⁵⁷. Here the question of representation returns with force as a context for reflection on art, and the political-literary representations of women²⁵⁸. In this, her “middle-period” remains symptomatic of its time and the rise of *Frauenliteratur* (women’s literature)²⁵⁹ as a recognised genre in German literary circles of the 1970s:

²⁵⁶ In Sections 2 and 3 of that volume, titled “Das glück erklären” (explaining felicity), and “Eine neue sprache finden” (Finding a new language).

²⁵⁷ Close analysis has remained limited to VL47. Other readings, though informing my overall assessment, could not feature in the thesis due to the increasing length of her verse, and the space it would have taken to do these texts any justice. However, the attentive reader will no doubt notice the recurring use of textual allusions to lines of poetry from VL that permeate my prose.

²⁵⁸ Sölle has not, to my knowledge, been associated formally with *Frauenliteratur*, and traces in her texts certainly highlight a different emphasis from that of safe-guarding an exclusive space for women. Instead, while recognising differences, she asserts that both men and women need liberation. For example in “Women’s emancipation” [RG 16]: [REDACTED] [REDACTED].’ (ll.1-4); and “[REDACTED]” [VL 61] narrates the news of expecting a baby, which the poetic persona failed to recognise [REDACTED] [REDACTED].’ (ll.18, 21).

²⁵⁹ Art. “Frauenliteratur/ Frauendichtung” by Friederike Eigler in *The Feminist Encyclopedia of German Literature*, ed. by Friederike Eigler and Susanne Kord (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 186f.

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If work and political commitment are the dominant themes of the early years [from 1968], and the “private” spheres of love, sexuality and personal relationships those of the mid-1970s, this was understood by women writers not as a process of depoliticisation but a widening of the political perspective. Language itself becomes more politicised²⁶⁰.

That the dominant themes of Sölle’s poetry, from the late ‘70s onward especially, foreground the expression of women’s experiences follows the literary culture and feminist awareness of the time – but also Sölle’s theological “agenda” of her earliest works surrounding the short reflection on deprivatisation. That the openly sexual and erotic allusions in Sölle’s poetry put our political associations to the test, is testament to the implicit dynamics of gender-construction in the work of representation generally, and aesthetic reception in particular.

Sölle is rarely, if ever, compared to other women poets, and amongst her literary kinships there is a tendency to foreground Erich Fried, Bertolt Brecht, Paul Celan and Heinrich Böll, a reception that already indicates Sölle as a socio-critical author, at times limiting the perspective for her German readers to a strict datum in literary history, consonant with *agitprop*, even where her writing continued to develop long after this movement had faded. Wolfgang Fietkau, Sölle’s publisher for the poetry, worked closely with his authors to bring out and stay tuned to the poetic vision of the poet in the context of publication: he is keen to note that genre descriptors match the poets’ self-definition of their texts²⁶¹. Thus, we can observe a telling shift in Sölle’s work, from “*meditationen und gebrauchstexte*” (meditations and texts of usage) to “*gedichte*” (poetry) between her earliest and later collections of poetry²⁶², both for the historical trend favouring the publication of poetry in the

²⁶⁰ Cettina Rapisarda, “Women’s Writing, 1968-1980,” in *Postwar Women’s Writing in German: Feminist Critical Approaches*, ed. Chris Weedon (Oxford: Berghahn, 1997), 97.

²⁶¹ Cf. “Fietkau-Profil,” <<http://www.fietkau.de/profil.html>>, accessed 26/11/2013.

²⁶² Another change occurs in the layout of Sölle’s work. Fietkau’s aesthetics for the *Schritte*-series relied on the work of Christian Chruxin who developed the near-squared format (16x14cm/6,3x5,5in) and the monochrome switch sheet, duplicating the title colour changing with each volume. Sölle’s

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1970s as well as for the ongoing discussion amongst theologians about the genre best suited to describe Sölle's verse.

2.1.2. Dorothee Sölle's Poetry in Reception

Johann Hinrich Claussen acknowledges the curious dynamic at work that prevails in scholarship on Sölle's writings: 'About Dorothee Sölle's work it is only possible to speak and write in a personal manner'²⁶³. He echoes Karl-Josef Kuschel's verdict that when engaging with Sölle's work one is never talking "about" but always in discussion "with" her²⁶⁴ (an assessment in line with my own self-positioning to follow below). Thus, not only was her rhetoric and argumentative personality during protests and other public events polarising²⁶⁵, but her work relies on a strategic engagement with our subjectivities without which any assessment of her and our literary positionality fails. The relation this speaks of, however, cannot be thought free from an erotic desire, insofar as gendered affiliations predispose our reading strategies to certain political (theological, sexual,...) outlooks; our very alignment within the framework of gender is a political statement insofar as it locates ourselves within a societal and social matrix

poetry, then, literally stands out in Fietkau's publishing for two reasons: her work remains issued by Fietkau long after her debut as a poet (all her poetry is published here), and from her third volume, *Fliegen lernen* (1979), onwards, Sölle's texts appear in changed format, accommodating her lengthening verse (21x14cm/ 8,3x5,5in) – cf. "Fietkau-Gesicht,"

<<http://www.fietkau.de/derverlag/das-gesicht.html>>, accessed 26/11/2013.

²⁶³ Johann Hinrich Claussen: "Über Dorothee Sölle kann man wohl nur persönlich sprechen und schreiben"; Peter Cornehl und J. H. Claussen, " "Loben ohne zu lügen:" Poesie und Gebet, zwischen Lyrik und Erbauungsliteratur – Ein Kontroverser Dialog über Dorothee Sölles Gedichte," in *Poesie, Prophetie, Power. Dorothee Sölle -- die bleibende Provokation*, Hrsg. Hans-Martin Gutmann, Alexander Höner und Swantje Luthe (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2013), 78.

²⁶⁴ Karl-Josef Kuschel, "Von Formen und Stilen einer Theologie: Dorothee Sölle," in *Welches Christentum hat Zukunft? D. Sölle und J. B. Metz im Gespräch mit K.-J. Kuschel* (Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1990), 7.

²⁶⁵Claussen, "Loben ohne zu lügen," 79.

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of freedoms and obligations that regulate our desires, but also plays into our perception and reception of ourselves and others.

To Sölle and her critics, the concrete truth²⁶⁶ founding the horizon of contemporary readers and writers is the witness to the events culminating (and exceeding) the Holocaust, as well as other occasions of oppression that are shaped in the context of its interpretation (if one dares to call for interpretation). For this reason, major publications by Sölle, such as *Stellvertretung* (1965) or *Leiden* (1971) [*Suffering*] have primarily been criticised with reference to the Holocaust: the one for trivialising the soteriological significance of the Death of God as interpretive horizon²⁶⁷, the other for aestheticising pain²⁶⁸. However, Sölle does not trivialise the Death of God or aestheticise pain and suffering – not that of Auschwitz, nor any other: ‘This almost impossible speaking in face of an annihilating reality is known in our tradition as “prayer”. It is a way to say no to that which is the case’²⁶⁹. Sölle identifies the silence of the impossibility of voicing prayer in face of annihilation with a reality of prayer. Luibl’s critique is characteristic of a particular theological reception of Sölle’s theological works in the context of her poetry; it is also significant to an assessment of Sölle’s literary roots. If we judge Sölle’s work

²⁶⁶ “The truth is concrete” has a complex reception within the intellectual heritage coming down to Sölle. She takes the term from Hegel, in its reception via Marxism and in affiliation with Brecht. Her publication by the same name, it should be noted here, stems from a series of radio-talks on the changing outlook on Christian tradition conducted in the mid-60s. Her tenacious media-presence in press and on air did not only draw negative attention to her from the church, but also formed a popular support base which the more conservative sectors of the various institutions could not dismiss.

²⁶⁷ Otto Reidinger proposes that Sölle’s staunchly Hegelian ideology might as well not have posed as theological argument in this regard; Reidinger, *Gottes Tod und Hegels Auferstehung*, 134.

²⁶⁸ Luibl, *Des Fremden Sprachgestalt*, 245.

²⁶⁹ “Dieses fast unmögliche Sprechen im Angesicht von vernichtender Realität hat in unserer Tradition den Namen „Betten“. Es ist eine Art, nein zu sagen zu dem, was der Fall ist” – Sölle, ‘Auschwitz und kein Ende’ (1981) in “Aufrüstung tötet auch ohne Krieg” (1982), Bd.1, 128f.

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according to her associations with *agitprop*, it raises concerns over a sentimentalisation of the political issues addressed. Alternatively, it may indicate less about the context from which Sölle wrote and in which context her poetry was first received, than of the aesthetic sensibility of her critics, and their parameters for identifying the role and the work of lyric poetry as a literary framework for essentialising the poetic self as objective reality dissociated from, and distant to, the pain of the poem.

Paralleling Sölle's reception as Political Theologian, her poetry, too, is noted by Hans-Jürgen Benedict amongst Sölle's political commitments:

[Sölle's] poems are not necessarily consolidations of her books... but more a versification of her experiences as theologically and politically engaged contemporary, such as the theologian Dorothee Sölle was to a high degree. These are political poems, first and foremost, texts of usage [*Gebrauchstexte*] and occasional poems [*Gelegenheitsgedichte*]²⁷⁰

Benedict lauds Sölle for her poetic engagement, and typifies her work in terms familiar from the title of her first volume of poetry, but also adds a more generous title to her work on everyday motifs: *Gebrauchstexte* and *Gelegenheitsgedichte*²⁷¹. The privileged place of the ordinary in Sölle's *Gebrauch* (use) of poetry, seems to contradict with Northrop Frye's assessment of *Gelegenheit* (occasion)²⁷². Frye

²⁷⁰ "...ihre Gedichte sind nicht unbedingt Verdichtungen ihrer Bücher... sondern eher Verdichtungen ihrer Erfahrungen als theologisch und politisch engagierte Zeitgenossin, die die Theologin Dorothee Sölle in hohem Grad war. Es sind politische Gedichte vor allem, Gebrauchstexte und Gelegenheitsgedichte," Hans-Jürgen Benedict, "Das Eis der Seele spalten: Dorothee Sölle als Gottespoetin – eine kritische Analyse," in *Eher eine Kunst als eine Wissenschaft: Resonanzen der Theologie Dorothee Sölles*, Hrsg. Helga Kuhlmann (Stuttgart: Kreuz, 2007), 272.

²⁷¹ *Verrückt nach licht* (1984) and *Loben ohne lügen* (2000) both feature the characterisation "human engagiert[en], zeitkritische[n] Verse[n]" (humanely involved, time-critical verse), "Erzähl- und Lehrgedichte" (narrative and didactic poems).

²⁷² To translate *Gelegenheit* with "occasion" is tied into an idiomatic context not usually obvious from the word in itself. Typically *Gelegenheit* is rendered with "opportunity". In the context of the

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grants occasion a special place in the history of the lyric: ‘If there is no public occasion, what corresponds to it may be a private occasion like drinking or love-making, to cite two standard themes. But even in this “occasional” verse there is still an identity of subject and object’²⁷³. Sölle manipulates political-ideological rhetoric in juxtaposition of biblical text alongside expressions of the Christian traditions, which serves in the final analysis to challenge not merely the historical and ideological roots of the biblical texts, but also those of the present context for reading. She challenges the institutional allegiances of her readers, as much as of her texts²⁷⁴. Consequently, the identity of subject and object is never given by the text, but has to be (re)-made in inter-action *with* the text. What goes for her theological considerations on prayer, then, also applies to her poetry: the lyric is charged with coming to the sociality of its making, is tied into the process of deprivatisation.

In acknowledgment of her theological project, Benedict discusses this under the heading *theoagitprop*²⁷⁵. As the selections for this thesis will show, the overall tenor and strength of Sölle’s poetry at large exceeds the confines of the classification “political poetry” popularised by *agitprop*. What differentiates Sölle from other *agitprop* is not a shift in subject matter so much as a shift in perspective. Her texts evoke poetic personae in detailed description and empathise with but also challenge the situations addressed. In this she likewise refuses to propagate a literary interiority²⁷⁶: her poetic voice is never solitary. Instead the very compound *Gelegenheitsgedicht* connotations of both – the randomness of a day-to-day occurrence or opportunity as well as the significance of an occasion – find resonance.

²⁷³ Northrop Frye, “Approaching the Lyric,” in *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, eds. Chaviva Hošek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 32.

²⁷⁴ Compare with her theological reception of Rudolf Bultmann in her *Political Theology*. Cf. Ch.1.1.

²⁷⁵ Benedict, “Das Eis der Seele spalten,” 277.

²⁷⁶ “Neue Subjektivität” (New Subjectivity or New Interiority) – a trend in the lyric prevalent between 1969 and 1980. The term was coined by Marcel Reich-Ranicki (1920-2013, a prolific literary critic)

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structuring of the poetic I relies on the participation of the reader who has to complete – in one way or another – the poetic process set in motion. The emphasis on experience and personal witness that Sölle finds lacking from classical, and to her mind one-sided, theo-logy is sponsored by the literary tradition of the lyric poem, whereas a modern, privatised reading culture – that such a tradition invokes – is challenged by her ethical commitment expressed in a theology of relation. Hence, Sölle's overall project translates the one into the other, with theo-poetry moving towards an engaged expression of relationship. In this sense, 'lyrical poetry may be a communal enterprise, like the Old Testament Psalms [which guide Sölle's hermeneutic] or the odes of Pindar'²⁷⁷. The status of the Psalms in the context of a communal practice in the Hebrew tradition, but also their use as "prayer-book of the Church," would bring Sölle's project in line with her recognition of Jewish culture as eminently important to a viable Christian faith praxis which has to extend to our sensibility in reception as liturgical.

Classificatory attempts such as *Gebrauchstext* and *agitprop* fail to characterise and ground Sölle's lyric sufficiently in the specificity of her own text. Genre is itself too tied into a functional relationship to the institution of literature, as its ordering mechanism. To Sölle, however, prayer-poetry is 'an attempt not to use language as a tool, but as a part of life itself'²⁷⁸. After all, her attestation that *everyone* can write poetry is not merely a pious wish, but a conviction that makes and remakes the poetic not simply in the writing, but also in the act of reading poetry, if it is to be "understood". Sölle's poems, as will become evident in the

who identifies the literary introspection as a response of a self-assertive poetic I as a distancing from the political engagement called for by *agitprop*. Cf. Lothar Jordan, Art. "Neue Subjektivität" in *Reallexikon der Deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, Band 2, 3.Aufl. Hrsg. Harald Fricke und Georg Baumgart (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 702f.

²⁷⁷ Northrop Frye, "Approaching the Lyric," 32.

²⁷⁸ "...ein Versuch, die Sprache nicht als ein Instrument zu benutzen, sondern als ein Stück des Lebens selber" –Sölle, "Gespräch mit Wolfgang Fietkau," 96.

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course of analysis in Chapter Three, do not simply pose thematic units: they are geo-political and concrete, if not therefore “discrete” occasions of poetic struggles. Insofar as “work” appears as a dislocated topical concern within Sölle’s literary thematic of her early writings, due to the participatory movement invited by both political and liturgical reflections, work finds its realisation in the critical reader’s political situatedness, an awareness of being embedded, implicated and addressed by the poetic text. In the course of Sölle’s writing of poetry, her poetic reference-points shift, but not so her aesthetic ones. Sölle’s own blend of ‘pop and politics’²⁷⁹ (as Drivers characterises the poetry of the 1960s), or *agitprop*, only captures a small fraction of the literary character presented in her work, and criticism of her verse as somewhat mundane and trivial can be understood as itself an implicit attempt to trivialise the gender-critical echoes that pervade her text.

It has been remarkable to me that none of the critics of Sölle’s poetry have passed comment on the role of gender to her work. Given Sölle’s own reluctance about such labels this may not be altogether surprising, especially within a historical emphasis on her earliest poetry, but certainly in the course of her writing career this appears as a strange omission. Since my reception of Sölle’s literary work as the work of a woman-author sits in the context of a critical discussion of women’s subjectivity, this has implications on myself as author of this study, and on the text I commit to the page. ‘A poetic tradition needs to be seen not only as a defining context, but as an area of perpetual struggle, both political and intellectual’²⁸⁰, as Jan Montefiore says in light of female identity in the literary landscape²⁸¹. And with the bulk of texts – four out of ten close readings to this

²⁷⁹ Drivers, *America in German Poetry since 1945*, 212.

²⁸⁰ Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry*, 19f.

²⁸¹ My struggles on this matter are manifold: identifying a “unified” German literary tradition for an English-speaking audience, and situating Sölle’s political and intellectual struggles in the context of that tradition identifies myself, as a German scholar who has studied in the UK, with my own share of

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study – taken from *Fliegen lernen* (1974), reading Sölle in light of women's literature, seems appropriate on a number of levels. We recall that by the late 1970s women's literature established itself in Germany as a genre in and of itself, loosely identified as literature by women (as authors) and for women (as target audience), which explores ways of rendering women's experiences and self-awareness in writing. Privileging the woman subject, the emergence of an independent (emancipated) literary tradition challenged women to find, and ask their own questions of, the text and to create their own images of women in literature (the negative rhetoric surrounding the term speaks to its own historical challenges). As a genre marker that is less defined by its stylistic measures than a trans-historical project, it is well suited to shape the changing contour and emphasis that characterise Sölle's writings over four decades.

Historically, women's literature gave rise to debates centred on feminine and feminist aesthetics²⁸², to which I positioned myself methodologically in terms derived from Luce Irigaray at the outset of this study (cf. Section 0.3). The distinction between feminine aesthetics and feminist aesthetics is interesting to me, particularly where the *Feminist Encyclopaedia of German Literature* traces aesthetic perception back to either biological sex (feminine aesthetics) or socially

differences. From questions of aesthetic sensibility and taste concerning literary periodization to socio-political assessments of the German context, my readings are coloured by my experiences with educational institutions in Germany and Scotland, and my generational perspective on socio-economic concerns then and today.

²⁸² The contentious relationship between claims on a "feminine aesthetics" (Silvia Bovenschen, 1976), and women's literature in the German context find further comment by Margaret Littler, "Women's Writing of the 1980s and 1990s," in *Postwar Women's Writing in German*, ed. Chris Weedon (Oxford: Berghahn books, 1997), 101-129.

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learned gender-roles (feminist aesthetics)²⁸³. I read *the text* as a “body” of literature which is inherently “productive,” and despite its neuter pronoun, this text is an inherently sexuante (i.e. placed in a textual economy of reproductive exchanges that invokes a performative relation to another) discourse. Hence, I maintain that discussion *about the text* is socially constructed. Thus, while the former has to contend with the representative work of language addressing biological sex (text), the latter is tied to the performative capacity of that work in social context (discourse). In light of gender, the relationship between Sölle’s authorship, and my reception, can be described according to the relationship between women’s production and representation in literature and aesthetic criticism. Insofar as it is the prayer-poetry that I seek to represent in my work, gender only allows for the collective (if not unified) identity of women’s subjectivity to emerge from the text, but does not yet address the body of the text as a concrete existence or a consciousness aware of its *Sitz-im-Leben* (Freud’s body-consciousness).

While I would not claim, especially not in light of the framework given for a thesis, that this text inaugurates an *écriture féminine* (Cixous), the thesis certainly is troubled by the perpetual need to theorize that which it receives, because Sölle’s writing, to me, is women’s writing:

It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogentric system²⁸⁴.

Cixous’ passionate exposition for the unsystematic and the poetic exemplary of feminine writing reinforce and subvert in equal measure the binary opposition in

²⁸³ Friederike B. Emonds, Art. “Feminine/Feminist Aesthetics”, in *The Feminist Encyclopaedia of German Literature*, ed. by Friederike Ursula Eigler and Susanne Kord (London: Greenwood Publ. 1997), 7ff.

²⁸⁴ Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”, *Signs*, Volume 1, Iss.4 (Summer 1976), 883.

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heteronormatively gendered existences. If logic is attributed to the male, and with it any sense of the systematic functioning of language, then women's place in writing celebrates its opposite. However, careful to denounce any such blatant polarity, Cixous already in the act of defining her proposition, refuses its systematic and theoretical foundations, because writing – all writing – is a process, a praxis. Sölle's writings document an ongoing process, but do not set out to establish a literarily distinct practice for women. Hence, this thesis shifts focus from the writing²⁸⁵ to the reception of such a process²⁸⁶ in the context of a gendered discourse that relates to both. Without returning to a commitment for biographical contextualisations, the focus on women's subjectivity, inscribed in my thesis, renders Sölle's text part of a larger generic (Gerhart) situation: read as women's literature (*Frauenliteratur*), prayer-poetry offers a text-based practice that takes stock of its gendered situation, a process that needs to continue in reception. To do so we need to elaborate further on the situation of literary subjectivity such a reading invokes.

2.2. Literary Subjectivities: Language and Form

The body of literature constituted by Dorothee Sölle's poetry needs locating amidst its textual and inter-textual relations if my own work on this literary body in the course of the thesis is to find clear, critical contextualisation and interpretation. Sölle's work features a tremendous breadth of literary, liturgical

²⁸⁵ Which is at the forefront of the works of Prinz (2003) and Aschrich (2007).

²⁸⁶ 'I do not want to burden my books unnecessarily with footnotes, I do not want to document my knowledge, but my thought process. That's a very different concern' – "Ich will nicht ein Buch durch unnötig viele Fußnoten belasten, ich will nicht mein Wissen dokumentieren, sondern meinen Denkprozeß. Das ist ein ganz anderes Interesse" – Dorothee Sölle, "Man kann nicht wirklich glauben, wenn man nicht zweifelt" 29.12.1986, DRS-Radio, in *Dorothee Sölle im Gespräch*, Hrsg. Theo Christiansen und Johannes Thiele (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1988), 180.

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and other artistic references²⁸⁷, carried in large part by an underlying negotiation about the place and capacity of language²⁸⁸ that needs closer examination in light of the generic (Gerhart) location of Sölle's work, discussed in the previous section. This study, however, cannot offer an exhaustive account of her work, and neither can it assume to present an objective perspective: Sölle's literary work is not treated as if a passive object. Tracing textual and inter-textual relations in Sölle's poetry already operates in an aesthetic framework – a discourse of interpretive judgments responds and reshapes the kind of body of literature under examination. In her study of Kristeva, Elisabeth Grosz makes a pithy remark on the interrelationship in discourse between sex, gender and the body when she states

that the body is literally written on, inscribed by desire and signification, at the anatomical, physiological and neurological levels. The body is in no sense naturally or innately psychical, sexual or sexed. It is indeterminable outside its social constitution as a body of a particular type.²⁸⁹

The body of Sölle's texts has altered, as a particular type, insofar as I have been the one reading it – I have become part of its social reflections in solidarity with (and in emancipation from?) the text, and I have become part of a normativising framework for the text in the context of writing a thesis. And yet, my selections for this study have been influenced in large parts by the attachments fostered in

²⁸⁷ Aside from the Bible (which does not feature prominently in the selections made for the present study), explicit reference is made to works by Franz Kafka [FL42], Bertolt Brecht [FL69], Simone Weil [BR21, 99], Audre Lorde [LL47], various hymns [ZU99, 125], [LL26], lyrics of songs and traditionalists [FL48], [BR81, 92], [ZU68], works of the plastic arts [FL78], [VL47, 153] and painting [VL48, 160], and critical writers of theology and other disciplines [RG24], [FL68], [BR82], [VL166], [ZU147]. This list is not exhaustive.

²⁸⁸ Writing poetry as "*Geistige Fingerübungen*" [literally: spiritual finger exercises; exercises in mental flexibility] – Fulbert Steffensky, *Personal correspondence*, Phone call, 08/03/2012.

²⁸⁹ Elisabeth Grosz, "Psychoanalysis and the Imaginary Body," in *Feminist Subjects, Multimedia, Cultural Methodologies*, eds. Penny Florence and Dee Reynolds (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 194.

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repeated readings of Sölle's work, despite the topical considerations for examination given by women's subjectivity, the role and potential of prayer-poetry, and images of water (to be elaborated upon further in Section 3.1). Elucidating Sölle's and my relationship to aesthetic theory will make explicit two things: the position (literary)-liturgical reception occupies with regards to any claim on *general* applicability; and the relationship between critical discourse and Sölle's poetic text, particularly in respect to women's subjectivity.

In order to show these features, let me first return to the discussion begun in the context of literary subjectivity. The crucial problem of reception is that in its desire to approach, disclose and interpret the text it should never scrutinize the text to fit its own (ideological) model, and impose negative value-judgments where there is deviance from that model; neither should it be a disembodied response to the text as object of criticism, seeking to ascertain a timeless meaning of the text in the self-stylisation of the critic as neutral presence to that text. Of course, good literary scholarship will not make any such claims. Sïan Hawthorne, alerts us instead of the disciplinarity by which some such approaches become self-justified:

Scholarship, in establishing and indulging a nexus of authority, serves a reproductive function; it establishes a genealogy of scholarship that relies on motifs of tradition (disciplinarity), inheritance and, most significantly, a motif of paternality²⁹⁰.

Approaching Dorothee Sölle's prayer-poetry neither with an emphasis on the author, as the appealed-to authority, nor on a disciplined investigation of the genealogy of her text, my focus on literary subjectivity discloses the textual subjectivity in interchange with its reader-author (a reader who authorises the text to inform herself of subjectivities beyond herself) in the process of deprivatisation.

²⁹⁰ Sïan Hawthorne, "Rethinking Subjectivity in the Gender-Oriented Study of Religions: Kristeva and the 'Subject-In-Process'," in *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Ursula King and Tina Beattie (London: Continuum, 2005), 42.

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This focus pointed my reception in the direction of liturgy from which Sölle's criticism had emerged. However, in my analysis it is not the authority of the Bible or the reworkings of biblical material that lend authority to Sölle's verse. Prayer-poetry comes with the same demand as other texts: it wants to be read. That it does not therefore become one and the same with other lyric productions has to do, primarily, with the way we as readers construct the inherent relationship between this text and others, and the claims we attest to the representational play of its "work". Prayer-poetry indicates not a linear genealogy, but a conversation. In this respect I, in writing this thesis, do pose a certain objectivity to the text, but one that is limited by – but not exhausted in – my own subjectivity and socialisation into literature²⁹¹.

2.2.1. Intersubjectivity: a Question of Solidarity

The tension built into the dynamic between literary works of art and criticism in the role of representation is itself a feminist concern insofar as the critic can give voice to, or can subordinate, the text under discussion (and by means of that discussion), but will forever be interjecting: the critic remains an added presence in the making of the work of art. The focus on subjectivity allows for a certain levelling of discourses: criticism and literary (intertextual) responses to the text each involve a process of reception by a subjectivity which reflects in consciousness that which is given by the text. The text here performs the body of critical consciousness. However, the profile raised by criticism of the text as Literature constitutes a different claim in its institutional privilege and in its demand on the text to suit (patriarchal?) aesthetic judgment – the law of the

²⁹¹ Aiming to address my interpretations at an audience with a literary familiarity with "English" literature here poses a certain problem, since allusions to German literatures and cultural specificities are more ingrained in my perception of Sölle's texts, whether I intended these or not. Contextual allusions to the Americas are more distinct, while "British" literary references seem to remain fairly canonical.

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Father, indeed. It is the task of the critic to select (and exclude) aspects of the work at hand and to identify the political implications these produce for the reception of its literary kinships. Characterising the representational task of criticism as ‘reproductive function’, Hawthorne points to the inherently sexed construction of criticism²⁹². Criticism reproduces what originates in the work of art. To state this clearly, I mean by this not the art-work as origin of aesthetic criticism – the text for all its material presence remains performative space, and as such remains too much in flux to be a “point” of origin. I understand the “work” of art as the intersubjective consciousness made, unmade and remade in the engagement by reader / critic *with* the text. The work of art is then a play of language’s capacity to transcend and ‘perpetually bring [...] into relation’ (FL 42, l.5)²⁹³ that which is the work of the author, of the text and of readers and critics in reception.

Reading the work of *poiesis* as co-creative – as an act of playful engagement and relation – has parallel implications for conceptualising linguisticity, textuality and subjectivity. It transforms our sense of boundaries between *langue* and *parole*, between text and context, and between self and other: but more importantly here, *poiesis* transforms the boundaries drawn between body and consciousness. Thus, *reading* practices deprivatisation, a discursive transformation of embodied desire, between language, text and subject, that admits its own investment in the work invited by *poiesis*. The transitions made across linguisticity, textuality, and subjectivity are significant for the criticism I hope to present of Sölle’s poetry as a liturgical reception (a discussion we return again to in Chapter Four). Not only the *I* of the reader poses a relative objectivity to the text (the authoritative position having been relativised in Hawthorne’s criticism), but the literary text also poses a relative objectivity to its reader, tempered as this might be by the level of the reader’s competency or

²⁹² Ibid., 42.

²⁹³ Sölle – and I – implicitly draw on Ludwig Wittgenstein’s notion of the *Sprachspiel*.

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“repertoire”²⁹⁴. Each of these subjectivities are relative and relational, orientated towards one another (insofar as the text only performs in the context of perception by its reader); as a relationship between bodies, the literary competency is filtered by desire at the level of discourse that itself performs the literary body of that reading’s consciousness. In this I follow Irigaray:

The most important mediation for this relational life is language. Language is what allows us to defer instinct, to transform it into desire, to suspend the immediacy of impulse in order to seek means of communication or communion in shared attraction²⁹⁵.

Figuratively, desire draws near, and desire recognises difference – and distance – and in the longing seeks to overcome such difference/distance without actually wanting to eradicate it (or else there would be nothing to be desired for); desire sublates that which *poiesis* creates (for-itself) in the context of subjectivities in relation. Desire longs to partake of the work of *poiesis*, which becomes altered – cancelled out – in the presence of desire, but also preserved – in the knowledge of its participation²⁹⁶. In this the work of art provides the space for intersubjective consciousness²⁹⁷.

The nexus between desire and subjectivity is traced in Judith Butler’s work on gender, where she says:

²⁹⁴ Iser, *The Implied Reader*, 8.

²⁹⁵ Luce Irigaray, “Towards a Sharing of Speech,” in *Luce Irigaray: Key Writings*, trans. Gail Shwab (London: Continuum, 2004), 78. Irigaray’s very helpful distinction between desire and instinct will come to the fore later-on (Section 3.2).

²⁹⁶ Desire is not appropriation (ownership, self-aggrandisement), substitution (fetish, excessive objectification of the desire), or adaptation (disavowal of self in the wish to be assimilated by the other, self-debasement).

²⁹⁷ This is evidently a Hegelian movement of sublation (*Aufhebung*) at work in this notion of desire. For more on desire as read through the lens of Hegel, cf. Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

One can certainly concede that desire is radically conditioned without claiming that it is radically determined, and one can acknowledge that there are structures that make desire possible without claiming that those structures are timeless and recalcitrant, impervious to a reiterative replay and displacement. To contest symbolic authority is not necessarily a return to the “ego” or classical liberal notions of freedom, rather to do so is to insist that the norm in its necessary temporality is opened to a displacement and subversion from within²⁹⁸.

The objectivity with which we learn to relate to/ desire our bodies²⁹⁹ is not a timeless abstraction; it is part of a symbolic code which is controlled by the pervasive repetitions of social conventionality. The conditionality of the material body, which is consonant with the referential and deferential poetics of text, can only retain its agency if its exteriority – and that means, its face-value or surface-level – can be maintained as itself significant and positive (to mediating) “reality” that can become the dwelling place of multiple subjectivities. The objective then, not the object of poetic exchange, is the promise of a creative and creational encounter in solidarity with the text, not the establishment of immutable lyric verse.

Desire identifies the body. Insofar as the desire of my thesis is a desire for gender, a desire that identifies the process of identification set up by a discourse on gender, the thesis is itself not gender-neutral, or free. Given that I cannot respond to the poetic texts under investigation within the “same discourse” (or even similarly poetic discourse), the thesis-text implies a dyadic relationship in its representation of gender, as it does in discussions of literary subjectivity, and its own methods of identification (problems that poetics addresses with questions about truthful representations). The power and structure of gender in the discourse of liberation, but also the place of gender as the pre-requisite for the speaking

²⁹⁸ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), 47.

²⁹⁹ Desire understood here as a modus of relation, not lack; but also the mediating context of relating to the desires (drives) of the body, the unconscious at task in Kristeva’s critical account of maternity.

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subject, suspended between its normative functioning within societal institution and personal embodiment of creative encounters, require me to attest to difference also in the interchange envisioned and theorised as the intersubjective play with the text in reception.

If gender were to develop individually, collectively, and historically, it could mark *the place where spirit entered human nature*, the point in time when the infinite passed into the finite, given that each individual of a gender is finite and potentially infinite in his or her relation to gender³⁰⁰.

In the context of Mary Gerhart's understanding of the generic, the connections between Irigaray's explanation of the dialectics implied in the social construction of the term "gender" coincide with Jacques Derrida's explorations into the 'laws of genre'³⁰¹. In both cases the institutional (normative) character plays itself out against a "fictional infinity", a subversive potentiality of the poetic text. The inherent difference between that which represents what comes to be real and the Real (not as ideal, but as a multiplicity of ontologising movements), in linguistics as in psychoanalysis (or theology!), seems to require a third term, an "outside", a "beyond", a desire for a collectivity against which the exchange can be structured. We learn to differentiate ourselves with the gendering of our subjectivities precisely because it is not entirely our own doing, but we emerge in the recognition of society, idiom or the divine Other etc – even where we have agency over the terms we choose to characterise and identify ourselves by.

Hawthorne's analysis (cited above) of the reproductive function of criticism as a sexed construction bears fruitfully on the position I hold regarding sexuate identity in my argument: the existential awareness that corresponds (that communicates) with the body in relation to others. Criticism and poetry share in, but facilitate differently, the inherently self-referential character of language that

³⁰⁰ italics in original; Irigaray, "The Universal as Mediation" Zurich, March 25, 1986 in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 139.

³⁰¹ Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," trans. Avital Ronell in *Glyph* 7 (Spring 1980): 202-229.

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points beyond itself in its representational economy. As texts, their material existences evoke an intertextual fabric in themselves as much as in relation to a wider discourse, self-consciously appealed to by criticism as a source of authority³⁰². It is in the act of reading that the text becomes the material site of an otherwise imagined (more consciously, psycho-socially constructed) body, through an act of transference that brings the subject to the consciousness of its own subjectivity. Criticism, if it is to locate itself in an intersubjective encounter with its “source”, would need to locate itself in this shared attraction self-consciously.

Prayer-poetry speaks of experience, and as Sölle formulates it, seeks to speak of experiences and concerns truthfully, as a concrete (and material) reality. This links Sölle’s lived faith practice to the physical body in consciousness, and her literary work to conceptions of poetic texture, both irreducibly linked to the body (in its material and psycho-social specificity), which cannot by that token be appropriated by another, man or woman (or text!)³⁰³. The desire inscribed in the discourse of criticism is not self-identical to the *experience* with the text of prayer-poetry as the site of the body whose *specificities* remain marked by generic (Gerhart) difference. My thesis then is not only marked out by difference from the poetic text it investigates; its focus on women’s subjectivity equally refracts generic implications over the status of experiences shared or co-created in writing. Jan Montefiore warns us about ‘the tendency to privilege the notion of female experience, and to think of women’s poetry as a magically powerful collective consciousness, [that] can make for a too easy and uncritical assumption of identity

³⁰² Only where the text is read, where it presents itself as a physically discrete object that interferes with our subjective consciousness, does the text take on a body, in the socially constructed sense indicated in discussions of genre or gender, that we commonly identify as literature.

³⁰³ The exclusion of the male in this is tied to the vantage point of its discourse, as it prioritises a particular gender-position, while affirming it as a generality. The exclusion, I would argue, is temporal, i.e. when we resituate the onus of the discursive strategy, while not eliminating gender-difference, we can observe the intersubjective relations *between* gendered experiences.

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between all women'³⁰⁴. It is not the mark of heterogeneity amongst women (in their differing experiences of a patriarchal discourse of femininity) that stands in the way of a collective and deprivatised discourse on the body feminine; it is the “direction of emotional attention”³⁰⁵, which identifies the body as a functional site of such femininity. I would argue then that it is not an autonomous vision of the body in its hold over experience which provides ‘a door’ [BR82, l.23] to collective consciousness (certainly not one determined as femininity), but the re-cognition of that body’s subjectivity over its sexuate identity – the body’s claim to be related to other bodies in complex ways that find expression in discourse³⁰⁶ and the ethical demand to find solidarity with the text.

2.2.2. The Lyric I: Women’s Subjectivity and Romantic Desires

A typical point of entry in reading lyric poetry is the reader’s identification with the lyric I. However, as the previous discussion made clear, such identification runs the risk of colonising the text, curbing its creative potential. The previous section has elaborated this with regards to the position of women’s subjectivity in reception. As I have shown then, the role played by desire in identifying the body of the text equally determines the commitment of its reader to realise that text’s imaginative potential in discourse. To elucidate the situation to be presented in

³⁰⁴ Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry*, 12.

³⁰⁵ Louise Bernikow: ‘...what matters most is not who did what to whom in bed, but the direction of emotional attention. Mostly, then, these women [Lesbian poets] turned to women – and understanding that might be the beginning and end of a non-patriarchal biography’ – *The World Splits Open: Four Centuries of Women Poets in England and America, 1552-1950* (New York: Vintage, 1974) 15.

³⁰⁶ Obviously bodies also can be connected with other bodies in a material sense – in the act of love-making, pregnancy and breast-feeding, as well as organ transplants. While I am not suggesting that these instances would not hold potential for an emotional and psycho-social cognition, its significant social restrictions in discourse alienate the collective dimension of these experiences from gaining currency.

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analysis in Chapter Three on women's subjectivity in prayer sufficiently, I here draw out relevant conceptual connections between Sölle's poetry and the history of the lyric to which her critical writings respond. It is here her own contribution to literary criticism in general, and the use of the poetic I in light of such aesthetics in particular, comes to our attention.

Sölle's approach to literature is skilful and passionate and her familiarity with both disciplines, literature and theology, have found repeated reflection throughout her academic work. As early as her undergraduate dissertation³⁰⁷, a study on Bonaventure's *Nachtwachen* (1804)³⁰⁸, and later again in her professorial thesis [*Habilitationsschrift*]³⁰⁹ on post-Enlightenment literatures, reflections on the literary import to theological thinking emerge in sustained, critical dialogue³¹⁰. The first study is more stringently rooted in literary criticism – elaborating the subversive models within the text along the lines of an existentialist interpretive strategy situating the unfolding narrative from the viewpoint of a post-Idealist poetics. Sölle identifies key relations in the narrative structure³¹¹ which she then

³⁰⁷ Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, *Untersuchungen zur Struktur der Nachtwachen von Bonaventura*, Dissertation 1954 Universität Göttingen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959).

³⁰⁸ Although the authorship of Bonaventure's work remained contested until recent times, Sölle agreed on the author being Ernst August Friedrich Klingemann (1777-1831), a German writer of the Romantic period.

³⁰⁹ Dorothee Sölle, *Realisation: Studien zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Dichtung nach der Aufklärung*, Habilitationsschrift 1971 Universität Köln (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1973).

³¹⁰ In fact, her initial theological debut with *Stellvertretung* gained public recognition because it was perceived to be the work of a German scholar, not a theologian! Ralph Ludwig, "Wir müssen radikaler und frömmer werden:" Ein Hörbild zu Dorothe Sölle," in *Poesie – Prophetie – Power: Dorothee Sölle – die bleibende Provokation*, Hrsg. Hans-Martin Gutmann, Alexander Höner und Swantje Luthe (Berlin: EB Verlag, 2013), 29.

³¹¹ The centre of gravity for Sölle's study of Bonaventure's text rests on the encounter with the Enlightenment. In the final analysis, Sölle provides a structural analysis of the text – focussing on *Gestalt*, the *topos* of the night, and the Romantic's response to Nothingness (in particular death and

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contrasts with the world as presented within the text. The modalities of encounter with reality (in report, descriptive narrative, and judicative appraisal) determine the interpretive scope of that reality's transformational future. The modalities of wishing and phantasing, examining and denoting, and questioning point away from the givenness of the encounter to a horizon of possibility or potentiality inherent in the exploration of that reality. In the context of poetry, Joan Aleshire points to this, stating: "The "I" of the poem is the fulcrum on which the action of the poem turns, the agent by which the reader can enter the experience"³¹². Aleshire's observation is somewhat clouded by the convolution of the roles played by action, agency and experience in the lyric; a closer differentiation will be attempted in the course of this section. Suffice it here to say that her understanding of immediacy as the prime characteristic of the lyric voice runs counter to Sölle's awareness for the need of (and desire for) mediation³¹³.

Identifying a covert (or in Sölle's case very overt) relationship to Romanticism in many articulations on poetry, Jan Montefiore alerts her readers to the fact that many such articulations implicitly define 'the poet as "a man speaking to men" [Wordsworth], which silently excludes women from poetic speech'³¹⁴. However, Sölle situates the lyric I within her poetry self-confidently in the feminine. It is in the reception of her poetic strategy that we find the challenge of being heard and read as a poetry in a feminine voice. Her assertion that praying is

laughter) before identifying the conceptions of time: stagnant time, ennui, and the spirit. This not only highlights her commitment to existentialist thought in the vein of Martin Heidegger and also Jean-Paul Sartre, but it also leads her to comment on the eschatological hope of the narrative voice and on the type of nihilism pervading the plot.

³¹² Joan Aleshire, "Staying News: A Defense of the Lyric," in *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography*, ed. Kate Sontag and David Graham (Saint Paul, Minn.: Graywolf Press, 2001), 15.

³¹³ And as will become clear by Chapter Four, mediation through language, the very linguisticity of language, is that which enables a positive valuation of gendered identity.

³¹⁴ Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry*, 9.

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to be writing poetry goes too far for Benedict's assessment. He repudiates her vision of theopoetic language: 'Here the lyric is understood more as one of a cry, of the authentic, then of poetry. In some sense art is being down-graded, which at any rate requires "skill" and is being wrung from life in hard labour'³¹⁵. It is clear from his assessment that his understanding of poetry is radically different from Sölle's. Whereas Benedict views art as an object extracted from life and to be manipulated *extra me* in the service of reflection (a mirror of reality; mimesis), he fails to understand the fundamental, existential shift in Sölle's understanding of the lyric where the artist is charged with 'an attempt, not to use language like an instrument, but as a part of life itself'³¹⁶. The artful is a necessary living condition for the artist. Sölle's poetry becomes poetry in the labour involved in reading her work, which is understood as part of the process of living verse and that will – and here I agree with Benedict – require authentic speech if it is to be shared. The artisanship or skill that Benedict is looking for in her poetry is displaced by the performance required to bring Sölle's poems to life.

In Sölle's work, typical of modern lyric verse, we can expect in form and expression openness to rhythms, metres and rhymes, which are played out against themselves. It seems, then, that Sölle externalises or deprivatises a concern for the performativity of the body of poetry which stands in for (*vertritts*) authenticity (to speak in existentialist terms) of the lyric voice to be enacted in reading. Discussions of authenticity or truthful concern also point her poetics towards ontology.

Ontology in Sölle's work, however, is necessarily entwined with ethics. In this, Sölle

³¹⁵ "Hier wird Poesie eher als eine des Schreis, des Authentischen, als des Gedichts verstanden. In gewisser Weise wird so Kunst abgewertet, die allemal "Können" voraussetzt und in harter Arbeit dem Leben abgerungen wird" – Hans Jürgen Benedict, "Das Eis der Seele Spalten: Dorothee Sölle als Gottespoetin – eine Kritische Analyse," in *Eher eine Kunst als eine Wissenschaft: Resonanzen der Theologie Dorothee Sölles*, Hrsg. Helga Kuhlmann (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 2007), 278f.

³¹⁶ "ein Versuch, die Sprache nicht als ein Instrument zu benutzen, sondern als ein Stück des Lebens selber" – Sölle, "Gespräch mit Wolfgang Fietkau," 96.

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departs from the typical modern reception of Romanticism: the responses by Goethe, Hegel and Georg Lukács (1885-1971) expose a certain mistrust in the Romantic project as one of mystical or utopian denial of the world³¹⁷. Given Sölle's take on mysticism as a critical, and ethical, practice that does not deny the world, it comes as no surprise that Sölle's reception, though informed by a reading of these critics, falls out differently. In fact, despite a keen historical-critical approach, founded on her left-wing politics, Sölle's (primarily theological) reception of German Idealist thought is coloured by a passion for Romantic literatures fostered early in her life³¹⁸. Her early academic engagement with Romantic literature and its own philosophical struggle with German Idealism (Schelling, Fichte, Hegel) play into her developing theo-poetic stances³¹⁹, in conceptual and material terms: her readings interweave existential and Marxian perspectives, while retaining much of Hegelian language, even though by her own admission she positions her understanding of hermeneutics with Martin Heidegger, and Rudolf Bultmann's interpretation of Dilthey (evinced also in her choice of contemporary writers of poetics, such as Emil Staiger and Wolfgang Kayser)³²⁰. In agreement with much of Marxist aesthetics, Sölle nevertheless clings to a relationship between art and truth.

³¹⁷ Sölle began her academic studies in classics, before changing to German literature with theology.

³¹⁸ After the disillusionment with the nationalist Romantic project emphasised by the Nazis, Sölle begins reading the texts of the Romantics with great critical discernment. Although the naive enthusiasm of her youth is not lost on her appraisals, she develops a nuanced understanding of the Romantic tradition in its lasting legacy for a German national consciousness.

³¹⁹ With regards to Jean Paul, she takes the position that his poetics are grounded in a materialist epistemology that circumvents the "idealist detour" of Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel (Sölle, *Realisation*, 196). It would be interesting to see, for example, the line of reception going through Jean Paul's literary reworkings of Hegel, and Sölle's reading of Jean Paul.

³²⁰ Sölle-Nipperdey, *Untersuchungen zur Struktur der Nachtwachen von Bonaventura*, fn.9, p. 9. – Staiger and others appear again in *Realisation*.

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The consequences of these aesthetic-literary and theological-existential cross-overs that remain highly unsystematic impulses in Sölle's work also resonate in a comment on the language of prayer by Sölle. In the context of a critique of the alienation of language advancing in the language of advertisement, she states: 'I conceive of the language of prayer as a union of thought, emotion, and will. To pray means to wish, to be open to the transcendent expressively, thoughtfully and in an unlimited way'³²¹. The tension – within the discourse of criticism – elaborated earlier between the potentiality and the concrete engagement envisioned with the poetic text gives rise in Sölle to a panentheistic vision of the sacred in the desire for transcendence that poetic language expresses. Dwelling in language (Hölderlin) harbours an experience of wholeness that voices the truth of the situation, that is, its embodiment and vocation. It also points to Sölle's aesthetic sensibility concerning emotion, affection, and mood, all of which are expressions of the self in relation to the world. In the world of the text this marks the lyric not as a category of literary genre, but as a performative quality of language. The expansive vision facilitated by language corresponds closely to Sölle's stylistic choices in her poetry, orientated on the spoken word.

Returning to Montefiore's astute observations, she isolates two "vestiges" of Romanticism that impinge upon a feminist aesthetic: 'its belief that poetry gives privileged access to the (woman) poet's experience, and that poetry is a form of transcendence'³²². Sölle poses only two formal demands on her poetic texts: that they feature 1) no punctuation and 2) no capitalisation of words except at the beginning of a stanza. She does not exempt the poetic "I" from these demands, and

³²¹ Dorothee Sölle, "Thou Shalt Have No Other Jeans Before Me' (Levis Advertisement, Early Seventies): The Need for Liberation in a Consumer Society" in *The Challenge of Liberation Theology: A First World Response*, ed. Brian Mahan and L. Dale Richesin (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis books, 1981), 10.

³²² Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry*, 11.

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while German would not capitalise an “*ich*” in the middle of a line, it is a fortuitous aspect of the work of translation that draws attention to her ruse in this manner for an English-speaking audience, prior to any discussion of women’s subjectivity³²³. As a poetry that deliberately textualises women’s experience (real or imagined), and as a poet with concrete theological viewpoints on the place of transcendence, Sölle’s reflections and critical divergences from important aspects of a Romantic and Post-Romantic framework (literary and theologically) offer a unique perspective on women (in) poetry.

Sölle's professorial thesis sheds light on the role of one Romantic theme, dreaming (interpreted as a more truthful exercise in wishing). Evaluating Jean Paul, Sölle considers ‘the ability to dream outright [as] a criterion of the living’³²⁴. Wishing and phantasing, and its corollaries (we need not be specialists on Freud for these) are derivatives of desire towards various aspects of the plot, text, world or interpretation addressed in literary context. As a critical presence within her poetic text, the lower case “i” does not seek to be appropriated by the reader, even though this “i” filters much of the perspectives available to us: ‘Genre represents the site of the non-substitutable positioning of the I and the you and of their modalities of expression. Should the difference between the I and the you disappear, so do demand, thanks, appeals, questions’³²⁵. Precisely because the difference does not disappear – also the difference to dominant grammatical

³²³ In German such a practice makes the boundaries between adverb, adjective and noun become fluid. Words with double-meanings are also common to Sölle’s repertoire and will not always translate.

³²⁴ “Träumenkönnen geradezu [als] ein Kriterium des Lebendigen” – Sölle, *Realisation*, 173. Later-on Sölle states that self-criticism of dreaming does not lead to relativism of an eternal return, but to an aware, knowing hope – cf. p. 177.

³²⁵ Luce Irigaray, “The Three Genres,” in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford, trans. David Macey (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 141. In *Sexes and Genealogies* (1993), the same text appears with its alternative translation of *genre* (f.), gender (engl.).

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convention – the reader struggles with the poetic “i”. But this “i” is not the absolutisation of voice in lyric verse; it is yet in search of that other one who can bear its reflection. Sölle seems most partial to the work of Jean Paul as a reaction against an idealist position³²⁶. In response to Jean Paul’s “Hesperus”, she writes:

That the living are those who dream has a double meaning: they dream the nightmares of childhood, but they also dream the uplifting dreams of the new human, the eschatological understanding of the midnight hour contains both³²⁷.

What Sölle identifies in the locality of the night is the horizon of possibility constative of that desire’s ultimate realisation (played out in the performative occasion of the dream as the “as-if” of such desire’s fulfilment); the dream is creative practice. Rather than negating or obliterating this desire, the night displaces the relationship of one’s subjectivity, one’s desirous consciousness, into a temporally different modus. Sölle’s own comment³²⁸ that ‘I have preferred to speak about certain central aspects of life in poetry, seeing that life brings along enough

³²⁶ While part of her professorial thesis has been republished in *Das Eis der Seele spalten* (1996), and reproduced in the Collected Works Bd.7, I agree with Peter Cornehl in his lament over the failure to reprint her fourth chapter “Transzendenz und Weltveränderung bei Jean Paul” (Sölle, *Realisation*, 168-280), which has been excluded from the republication of her professorial thesis. The relationship between Sölle’s writings and her understanding of Jean Paul seems to link up significantly (cf. Cornehl, “Dorothee Sölle, das ‘Politische Nachtgebet’ und die Folgen,” 296).

³²⁷ “Daß die Lebendigen die sind, die träumen, hat hier durchaus doppelten Sinn: sie träumen die Angstträume der Kindheit, aber auch die erhebenden Träume vom neuen Menschen, das eschatologische Verständnis der Mitternachtsstunde enthält beides” – Sölle, *Realisation*, 174. Please note, the punctuation of the quote is true to its original publication.

³²⁸ It is significant that Sölle identifies her own relationship to poetry – even within the process of writing her memoirs – differently from straightforward reflection on “purely” personal experience: her poems are publicised texts, for all their content feature highly personal information, which we are not invited as readers to appropriate and own in objective reality. We are asked to query them and bring our own subjectivities into play with them.

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prose as it is'³²⁹, might serve for some clarification: poetry keeps the dream alive (and the poetic "i" focalises as an interior reflection the poem's representational – gendered, political, desirous – affiliations). The constative (prosaic language) functions differently at day and at night. At day it is both the cause and consequence of revoking desire by trivialising the wish as fictitious, thereby bereaving the wish of performative power. By night the constative is pre-conscious of the Real, thus not distinguishing language according to function but believing its fictions, i.e. its arbitrary referential play. Hence, the night colours³³⁰ the (temporal) perspective of one's own subjectivity in view of the normative behaviour of the day.

Staiger's discussion, too, identifies a temporal significance to lyric poetry in the identification with remembrance as its primary function. As stylistic choice, the lyric serves to convey a mood rather than to express a concrete particularity³³¹. In positioning his discussion against the distinction between epic and dramatic, he raises the importance of inspiration. Inspiration, like the dream or vision of the night, however, is a concept of futurity that establishes a productive tension between itself and the linguistic *fatum* that states the "facts" as categorically present or absent. Inspiration, like the dream, resides in the *latent* presence. Recalling Sölle's interest in gaining presence, and her assertions that the dead are with us in this presence, memory and remembrance serve to build a poetic arch between performative (linguistic) expression and social consciousness, and therein

³²⁹ Sölle, *Against the Wind*, xi; "[z]u einigen zentralen Themen des Lebens habe ich mich lieber im Gedicht geäußert, Prosa bringt das Leben schon genug mit sich" – Sölle, "Gegenwind," Bd.12, 9.

³³⁰ In the sense that the 'flesh colours' a sexual perspective in Irigaray's elaborations – Luce Irigaray, "Flesh Colours," in *Sexes and Genealogies*, 151-165.

³³¹ This approach is helpful in relation to our discussion on genre, as the lyric, in Staiger's words, cannot find determination as 'genre according to metric characteristics' (Emil Staiger, *Basic Concepts of Poetics* (Grundbegriffe der Poetik), trans. Janette C. Hudson and Luanne T. Frank [USA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991], 50). Form, although ultimately important to any interpretation of poetry, is not itself strategic marker for the type of poetry we encounter in the lyric.

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lies the encounter with transcendence. In being able to perceive ourselves in our subjectivity we grasp the transcendence of ourselves – in the consciousness of being in relation to others whose presence makes and remakes the boundaries we perceive, we create or understand of ourselves. In the context of aesthetics, we find Hegel's articulation of the poetic imagination to correspond most closely to the idea of self-consciousness at play in Sölle's notion of prayer deprivatised:

The poetic imagination [*Phantasie*], as the activity of a poet, does not, as plastic art does, set before our eyes the thing itself in its external reality (even if that reality be produced by art) but gives us on the contrary an inner vision and feeling of it³³².

However, Sölle positions her thought differently in the emphasis on de-privatisation [*ent-privatisieren*], consciousness is revealed (*ent-hüllt*), and delimited (*ent-grenzt*) from the modern, privatised and mystified sense of self and instead emerging as a politically conscious subject, and a self-critically reflected subjectivity. Hegel here points to a crucial commonplace³³³ in the reception of lyric poetry: identified as individualising art-work which cannot be strictly speaking dealt with apart from the subjectivity of the author, lyric poetry is seen to be the expression or verbalisation of poetic consciousness³³⁴. In its articulation poetic consciousness formulates (and to a greater or lesser degree) formalises the manner

³³² G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Volume II trans. by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1111; “Die *poetische* Phantasie als dichterische Tätigkeit stellt uns nicht wie die Plastik die *Sache* selbst in ihrer – wenn auch durch die Kunst hervorgebrachten – äußeren Realität vor Augen, sondern gibt nur eine *innerliche* Anschauung und Empfindung derselben” – G. W. F. Hegel, *Ästhetik*. Band II, [1842], (Frankfurt a.M.: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Publication date unknown), 469.

³³³ Cf. Aristotle's *Poetics* and also Jean Paul's *Vorschule der Ästhetik*: “das Geschichtliche [wird] im Epos erzählt, im Drama vorausgesehen und gewirkt, in der Lyrik empfunden oder erlebt” (*Vorschule*, ed. Wolfhart Henckmann [Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990], 273) – “The historical is being narrated in the epic, predicted and effected in the drama, and felt or experienced in the lyric” (my trans.).

³³⁴ Cf. Hegel, *Ästhetik*, Bd.2, 487-9.

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of imagining (i.e. adverbial to understanding)³³⁵. This leads discussions of the lyric into a delicate struggle between text-immanent interpretations of the subject, and a dubious doubling of the author's subjectivity with that of the poetic persona (be that in whatever agency or non-agency that finds description)³³⁶.

Jean Paul, describing the difference between prosaic and poetic language, marks this out in terms of mimetic imaging of the real. In his *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, he says about poetry that:

Even the highest, escaping our all sense of reality eternally, even that most beautiful [sense of reality] of the heart, she [poetry] gives and paints the future [theatrical] play on the curtains of eternity; she is no flat mirror of the present, but a magical mirror of that time which is not³³⁷.

It is worth dwelling on the image of the mirror here, seeing as we come across it again in the analysis to follow in Section 3.1. Poetry here comes not as a 'flat mirror', as something of the 'present'. Jean Paul's prose may be convoluted to an English ear, but the image he paints of a magical mirror that pre-views, or creates in the imagination, the play of life has great significance in Sölle's work. This is not a presencing in the sense of artful imitation, or mimetic repetition: for Sölle, maybe even more so than Jean Paul, the 'time which is not' is not only the future potential, but is also past opportunities – and memories – lost. Poetry is never "here", but "there", playing itself out in a futurity of its own aesthetic composition, building itself as autonomous reality on the backdrop of 'eternity', irreducible truth

³³⁵ Cf. Hegel, *Ästhetik*, Bd.2, 362ff.

³³⁶ I.e. either the author is amplified in the reading of the text, and her or his characteristics are seen in every image described in the work, or the author is eclipsed, leaving the scene for an absolutising of the treated subject matter in lieu of any connection to the "real world".

³³⁷ My translation of "Gerade das Höchste, was aller unserer Wirklichkeit, auch der schönsten des Herzens ewig abgeht, das gibt sie und malt auf den Vorhang der Ewigkeit das zukünftige Schauspiel; sie ist kein platter Spiegel der Gegenwart, sondern der Zauberspiegel der Zeit, welche nicht ist" – Jean Paul, „Kantate Vorlesung“, in *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, 447.

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whose curtains are curiously never drawn³³⁸. For Sölle, eternity, however, is not a temporal concept; it is an existential one³³⁹. In this light, the mirror of poetry in Sölle's work passes a moment of transcendence towards the Real.

Emil Staiger, moving away from the theatrical towards more internalised expressions, poses 'lyric poetry... to show the reflection of things and events in the individual consciousness'³⁴⁰. Curiously, the individual, presented in Sölle's poetry in the poetic I, remains at once typically modern, and yet is branded for being self-absorbed³⁴¹ by virtue of having retained any I-perspective at all. (The politics underlying the problematic reception of women authors, which dismiss aesthetic features that would not be dismissed in a male author, are characteristic of the literary establishment as an institution of power, which certain discursive and poetic strategies undermine). Yet, we never get a grasp of this poetic persona's consciousness as an isolated individual. Sölle's notion of *Stellvertretung* is not merely reproductive, but creative. And in that creative poetic lurks a principal playfulness that requires playmates. Truly, 'participation in lyric poetry deserves the more intimate designation of love'³⁴², and that love is expectant of a future to be.

³³⁸ Sölle points out that Jean Paul does defend the autonomy of aesthetics, despite a continuous connection to theology as that which unsettles the autarkic symbolic order raised by this aesthetic (Sölle, *Realisation*, 188).

³³⁹ Cf. "Memories of Audre Lorde" [LL 47].

³⁴⁰ Staiger, *Basic Concepts of Poetics*, 79.

³⁴¹ This appears as a popular modern premonition against poetry with a poetic I – cf. Aleshire, "Staying News," 14; and Judith Harris, "Breaking the Code of Silence: Ideology and Women's Confessional Poetry," in *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography*, ed. Kate Sontag and David Graham (Saint Paul, Minn.: Graywolf Press, 2001), 254.

³⁴² Staiger, *Basic Concepts of Poetics*, 74.

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From this perspective Sölle's connection between poetry and prayer – introduces a crucial tension for the temporality of (literary) realism(s) that her conversation partner Josef Mautner raises:

In my view, realism maps out the boundaries of fictional spaces of reality. It signals that language is a medium for communication of subjects, behind which the subjects with their experiences and their history [sic] must not disappear. Realism limits the omnipotence of construction, also of poetic construction³⁴³!

What Mautner indicates here is the programmatic necessity of *Trümmerliteratur* (debris literature, i.e. the characteristic of most Postwar literature) to acknowledge its literary and non-literary memories with which language is invariably tainted³⁴⁴. Mautner does not, as might be suspected, presume Reality and realism to be synonymous with (scientific) fact. To maintain a sense of truth in poetry, as Sölle indicates it above, the lyric has to find and acknowledge its relationship to aesthetics from an ethically aware (conscious) position. As Paul Ricoeur says, 'Language is for itself the order of the same. The world is its Other. The attestation of this otherness arises from language's reflexivity with regard to itself, whereby it knows itself as being, *in* being in order to bear *on* being'³⁴⁵. In the play between same and other, the self-reflexivity enabled by the other for the medial position of language is also the source of its own alterity. As art-work in language, the aesthetic work of art resides in this deferential capacity, able to break out of bounds from established (analytical) discourse. As this capacity is crucial to the issue of prayer in Sölle's work, the link between a temporal displacement and a

³⁴³ „Der Realismus gibt meines Erachtens die Grenze fiktiver Wirklichkeitsräume an. Er signalisiert, daß Sprache ein Medium für die Kommunikation von Subjekten ist, hinter der die Subjekte mit ihren Erfahrungen und ihrer Geschichte nicht verschwinden dürfen. Der Realismus begrenzt die Allmacht der Konstruktion, auch der dichterischen!“ – Josef Mautner, in: *Himmelsleitern*, 28.

³⁴⁴ Still a prevalent topic in German literatures, see for example Bernhard Schlink's collection of critical essays *Guilt about the Past* (Berkley, CA: Publishers Group West, 2009).

³⁴⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* [orig. 1983], Vol. 1, trans. Kathleen Mclaughlin and David Pellauer (London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 78.

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lyric depiction of truth needs further clarification in reference to an existential interpretation of poetic subjectivity at stake in the ontological substantiations of women voices in prayer.

With Hegel, the lyric is the art form most closely related to the Spirit. Emil Staiger proposes its “mood” to be a poetic framing of language that defies even the nature of language:

Language itself takes apart, only to unite again, in the structure of the sentence, precisely what it has taken apart. In contrast, we characterize the lyric mood as interpenetration that needs no interrelationships because everything has already been unified in the mood³⁴⁶.

Unity, purity, transcendence, all characterisations of the lyric, suggest the absolute. ‘For the lyric poet, there is no substance, there are only chance occurrences; nothing tangible, no contours’³⁴⁷ – and with these sort of poetics in mind, Sölle's poetry really does not adhere to a sense of the lyric, even where it transpires to bespeak an occasional encounter (in the sense elaborated by Frye³⁴⁸). Sölle, as already noted in the Introduction to this thesis, was conscious that there could not be a ‘poetic immediacy to Auschwitz’³⁴⁹, certainly not one that could feign itself ethically defensible. The ‘objectivity’ of the body in the discourse on gender (Irigaray³⁵⁰) is here mediator of any such experience, and is given its primary task as consciousness-raising. In the role of the voice we are given a metaphor for the transcendence of the body that remains at once ever projected outside of its body, but coloured by the corporeality of its sounding body, perceived as an echo of itself. In interview with Wolfgang Fietkau, Sölle emphasises that ‘I write strongly from

³⁴⁶ Staiger, *Basic Concepts of Poetics*, 92.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 68.

³⁴⁸ Cf. Section 2.1.2, elaborating on “*Gelegenheit*”, p.119f. – Frye, “Approaching the Lyric,” 32.

³⁴⁹ Sölle, *Almanach 2*, 82.

³⁵⁰ ‘...as I belong to a gender, my body already represents an objectivity to me’ – Luce Irigaray, *To Be Two*, trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc (London: Athlone, 2001), 21.

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the perspective of hearing and being spoken out loud. Most of my texts are better when they are spoken than when they are read silently'³⁵¹. In that, Sölle follows in the footsteps of an oral tradition where 'the lyric is primarily addressed to the ear'³⁵². The relationship between the mouth that utters and the ear that listens needs further investigation. While I do not agree with the intention behind the strategy that obscures certain characteristics of logic in language, I am partial to Staiger's elaboration that 'the musicality of language ... seems to dissolve the intentionality and objectivity of language'³⁵³.

'In the lyric, language does not want to be taken literally; it shies away from its own all-too-concrete reality and wants to free itself from all logical and grammatical coercion'³⁵⁴, Staiger says further on. Although there is a notable move away from the coercions of grammar in the way Sölle presents her poetry, her work certainly does not bypass logic, nor does it look to move away from an awareness of the real, however differently structured it may appear in the context of her work. As technical ruse, a stylistic choice that by and large denies structural differentiation, Sölle obliterates capitalisation and punctuation from her poetry, rendering her texts highly ambiguous to linguistic determination. While German by virtue of being an inflected language still shows traces of grammatical structure, the ambiguity which arises from poetic conventions (enjambment, fragmented word order, metaphors, et al.) is further complicated by shifting contexts that play themselves out in anaphora/cataphora within her text (which also present a crucial

³⁵¹ "Ich schreibe ja sehr stark vom Hören aus und vom Gesprochenwerden. Die meisten meiner Texte sind besser, wenn man sie spricht, als wenn man sie liest" –Sölle, "Gespräch mit Wolfgang Fietkau," 92.

³⁵² Northrop Frye, "Approaching the Lyric", 34.

³⁵³ Staiger, *Basic Concepts of Poetics*, 92f.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

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challenge to translations of her poetry into English, where natural genders are different from the grammatical genders of the German source text).

The rough edges and the daring partiality that springs from her work is unnerving at times but equally effective for sustaining a critical engagement in the reader: while there are biographical traces and at times overt autobiographical reflections in Sölle's poems, these primarily offer markers for the realist conception of the poem, even where we are confronted with shifts in discourse that may appear to be bordering the surreal (such as strangely placed references to colours (not Colour), the dissolution of the poetic persona into various elements or unexpected speech turns). This ambiguity challenges the reader to make linguistic and ethical choices about the content, meaning and form of her poetry³⁵⁵. It brings her readers into conversation with her texts, draws them into an argument with her work, but also negotiates the extent to which her lyric verse is constructed as biographical narrative. Thus, the lyric form is given over to narrative strategies which outlast the individuated focus on the Enlightenment subject. "*Aufklärung*"³⁵⁶ in all its senses is at work in her poetry, and the awareness she seeks to recover is of (poetic) subjectivity as a social phenomenon insofar as it identifies itself in the relationship to the world in which it finds itself.

³⁵⁵ In reading Sölle's poetry out loud we learn the significant function of *timing* (Sölle considers subjective reading-time a participatory experience in the perception and interpretation of a text – Sölle, Falken und Matuner, *Himmelsleitern*, 34f.), of giving voice to her work, which substantiates the grammatical framework which we imagine and which we require for our understanding to underline the text. Only in altering the pauses, the imagined punctuation and references do we recognise the inherent multiplicity of the text. Her poetry is collaborative in nature.

³⁵⁶ Literally: Enlightenment. In German this can refer to the modernist project in philosophy, in art, or in any form of elucidation; most commonly, however, it is used to refer to sexual illumination (in lieu of referring to "birds and bees").

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In theory, the aesthetic work of art in discourse is still discussed in terms of a body, even where the ephemeral characteristics of this body are less tangible, until treated from the vantage point of an aesthetic generalisation (poetics is to text what subjectivity is to body). Whereas a text as text may appear to have the freedom to indulge in narcissistic self-reflections which do not necessarily relate a speaking subject to anything other than itself, but remain pure ideation – an ideal, idealised and idolised image – the performative import of prayer is such that it has to go beyond reflecting the known or assumed unity of subject and form that marks the “inner logic” of the lyric³⁵⁷. If our desires are what reveals our love of and for God, that is, our desire reveals God to the world (cf. Mtth 19:16-28), then in a challenging and interesting way, Sölle’s poetry is too contextual to be revealing God in a poetic abstraction (meaning, the poetry is at once too dependent on Sölle’s own subjectivity and historical situatedness and at the same time tackles conceptual, theological and ethical subject matter that denies these contexts to pass into the oblivion of narcissism). Sölle’s poetry is never constructed as purely interior monologue but engages a number of voices and discourses: it is always already a conversation between the literary form and prayerful action that plays itself out in the reader’s attention to creation/creating the poetic work of art.

Work, or un-alienated labour, is an important focus in the discussion of the thesis at large, not merely for Sölle’s Marxian concerns, but also in tracing the transference between the poetic work (the poem) and the work of prayer (faith). It is important to note that Sölle does not refute the struggle of prayer – or poetry – nor does she forego the pains of this labour (as Luibl would have her do³⁵⁸). The issue both of the critics cited for this study, Luibl and Benedict, have come up against is the difference in *disciplining* the problem – set *between* literature and theology. Rather than giving weight to one over the other, as her critics assume,

³⁵⁷ Hegel, *Ästhetik*, Bd.2, 477.

³⁵⁸ Luibl, *Des Fremden Sprachgestalt*, 245.

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when Sölle says that all prayer is poetry, she does not say that all poetry is prayer³⁵⁹; she makes an existential claim. In this regard, Benedict is correct for noting the plea for the authentic. But what does such a relationship to literature say about the literature, when it is not to be taken as a value judgment on the skill or production value of the verse? Sölle does not say that the prayerful be necessarily lyrical; however, she asserts that a poem must represent in its poetic entirety the very transcendence encountered in poiesis. What makes a poem authentic is the *process* of conceiving of the work (labour), in the writing, and in the reading of the poem.

2.3. Conclusion: Poetic Emancipation and Solidarity

Hegel puts the case for poetic subjectivity thus: ‘The belief in the world which we look upon with understanding in a prosaic gaze turns to a belief in the imagination [phantasy] for which only that world exists which was created by the poetic consciousness’³⁶⁰. For Sölle, literature remains with a lower case “l”, and cannot lay claim to the absolute, imperial Literature (with captial “L”). When poetry is utilised as prayer, or conversely, when we learn to recognise the prayerful in the act of poetic creation, then we need to address what kind of relationship the imagination is deemed to hold with “reality”. This relation has implications for language as functional (analytic) discourse. This study, itself bound to a certain economy of functionality on some level, is required to offer its reader a point of recognition that verifies its interpretive stance. In order to do so, this text sets itself against its source, seeking the empowerment by the text that it defers/refers to.

³⁵⁹ Dr. Ursula Baltz-Otto’s interpretation of the same statement concludes: „Gedichte können Gebete sein, Gebete sind Gedichte, in der Hoffnung gehört zu werden“ (Poems can be prayers, prayers are poems in the hope to be heard); „Alle Menschen sind Dichter“, in *Wort zum Sonntag*, 20.11.2009. SWR2 <www.kirche-im-swr.de>, accessed 02/05/2012.

³⁶⁰ My translation of: “Der Glaube an die Welt, wie wir sie mit prosaischen Augen verständig betrachten, wird zu einem Glauben an die Phantasie, für welche nur die Welt da ist, die sich das poetische Bewußtsein erschaffen hat” – Hegel, *Ästhetik*, Bd.2, 368.

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The act of representation of power that occurs with language is always already a deferral of power to another who is not “in” language, but who posits him, her or themselves as referents to the utterance voiced. In order to abstain from brutalising the source texts, I focus on the notion of desire as that which links prayer and poetry in Sölle’s own understanding of prayerful participation and as that which emerges in per/formative textual encounters with gender, genre and sexuality.

What has become obvious from a reading of Sölle’s work in the course of Chapters One and Two, theological and literary, is her explicit concern for the reader-text relationship to a degree that in the ‘ultimate concern’ (Tillich) for the text under reception the author *as* author recedes into the background, although we can seldom fool ourselves into reading the poetic voice as generically male. The ‘ultimate concern’, what matters, is the matter itself, the content and material significance of the poem. For this reason we are required to be giving weight to a different generic aspect: the social construction of the lyric. While the self is a common *topos* of the lyric as introspective verse, its feminine gendering, and appeal to collectivity, are not. The ostentatiously lyrical venture into a deliberately political, aware, gendered self – a poetic persona confessing its cross-overs into public (literary) life – is offering a critical assessment mingled with creative intent. As I see it, Sölle’s texts commit her readers to a gender-conscious reading that opens out into a sociality of the text (and with the text) in performative action.

‘To discover this [the sublation of prayer and poetry] anew, to bring it into reality or to make it known, is one of the goals I pursue in my poems’³⁶¹. In the

³⁶¹ Sölle, *Against the Wind*, 153; “Beten und Dichten, Gebet und Gedicht sind für mich keine Alternative... ich empfinde ... den Gedanken, dass jeder Mensch beten kann, als eine ungeheure Betonung der humanen Kreativität. Das Christentum setzt voraus, dass alle Menschen Dichter sind, nämlich beten können... Wenn die Menschen mit der größten Wahrhaftigkeit, deren sie fähig sind, das zu sagen versuchen, was sie wirklich angeht, dann beten sie und sind zugleich Dichter. Das

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pursuit of a theopoetic language, envisioned as the sublation of the dialectic between poetry and prayer, Sölle tasks her poetry with an act of consciousness-raising. It is the task of Chapter Three then, to provide a public space that confronts this literary consciousness, that is, its gendered body, such that it may find in the ideality (potentiality) of the text the deprivatised reality (realisation) of discourse.

3. Chapter Three: Women and Water – Analysis

3.1. Women and Water

We have been tracing thus far the role of prayer within Sölle's theological writings, and in reflection of her aesthetic vision. For this study's focus on women's subjectivity, seeing Sölle's poetry in the wider context of German literary history allowed us to identify the connections with the German literary milieu, as much as the divergence of Sölle's work from traditional aesthetic judgments of the lyric. In this her poetry falls in line with a larger literary project that sought to recover from the trauma of a German national consciousness (once heralded by the late Romantics³⁶² and harnessed in Nazi propaganda) and its ethically questionable aesthetic after "Auschwitz". In Chapter One it has come to the fore that deprivatisation, understood in broader conceptual terms, serves to identify the manner of relationship that enables prayerful engagement: it reveals the individual-in-process in the context of a community. This sociality requires careful critical analysis in reception of such prayer practice, where such reception is itself understood as a co-creational engagement. Thus, deprivatisation is a way of dealing with language theologically such that both self- and other perception give way to a communal event in prayer that seeks to empower instead of control a faithful commitment to the sanctity of life. It is a way also to read the lyric with different eyes: not as the subjective concern of a private or immediate expression of experience, but as a self-reflective and intersubjective mediation in language.

Chapter Two, trying to account for the scope in which ambiguity is invited both into the theoretical framework of Sölle's poetic engagement and the readerly

³⁶² Typically J. G. Herder, and Clemens Brentano and Heinrich Heine will be named as such.

Bernadette Malinowski, "German Romantic Poetry in Theory and Practice: The Schlegel Brothers, Schelling, Tieck, Novalis, Eichendorff, Brentano, and Heine," in *The Literature of German Romanticism*, ed. by Dennis Mahoney, Camden House History of German Literature, Vol.8 (Suffolk: Camden House, 2004), 152.

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reception, localises water as that which metaphorically constitutes the discourse of prayer-poetry – as an ambiguous fluidity in circumscribing the body of the text. Feminist theory here intersected not only with questions regarding the lyric, but also with the roles of gender and sexuality that frequently draw on more poetic explorations of the female psyche such as Luce Irigaray’s philosophical project in *Elemental Passions* (1992). The literary development alongside theological reception identifies the relationship between a love-(faith)based ontology and women’s subjectivity. This marks out women’s sexuate identity as a critical issue for prayer and the role of co-creation that its generic intersection with poetry proposes. In order to develop the positionality/-ies of women, this chapter will analyse possible readings of women’s sexuate identities in face of the roles of lovers, mothers, and artists, in reflection of institutional, normative images, as roles that nevertheless hold a claim over a mutually interdependent sociality fostered in the intersubjective consciousness of the literary text.

Thus, whereas the previous chapters already raised the difficulty of approaching prayer as a subject of study, and touched upon the theological concern for subjectivity in prayer, at this stage it is necessary to determine the relationship between the subject of study and its second-order identification, the literary imagery and the personae articulated within the poetry that by and large guide a reader’s perspective (and reception) and inform the analyses of the poetic voice. Sölle’s emphasis on liberation theology, and her increasing deliberation on eco-justice that mark her theological development, go hand in hand with her poetic expression. Ecological concerns find personification in her poetry, in the same move that personal, societal hardships are infused by “elemental” shifts. Developing Sölle’s literary expression, the current chapter will analyse the relation between images (lovers, mothers, artists) and discourse (prayer-poetry) that inform the selection criteria of poems analysed for this study. Water, in its various

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forms³⁶³, emerges here as a prominent thematic in a metaphorical play on love and fear; connotations of water with sexuality allow for broader issues to be addressed. To this end, I will open out my analysis with a reflection on “Levadia” [LL 87], named after a lesser known oracle near Delphi in Greece, which showcases the marked significance of a gendered reading perspective of her work at the sight / site of this poetic source (flagging up yet another transference offered in the image of water with language). Exemplary of the working mechanism of the subsequent analyses focussing on women roles, this exercise identifies the role of the poetry in concrete example.

3.1.1. “Levadia” [LL 87]

Water is a prominent thematic in Sölle’s literary work. What I want to show with “Levadia” is that water, as a “source” and point of “reflection”, allows us to reconceive the lyric mirror of poetry of the Romantics, not in its modern reading as a source for modern self-obsession, but as a critical starting point for co-creative engagement. We have addressed this question in its theoretical make-up in Chapter Two. In Section 2.2 we have already touched upon the curious status of the mirror in Jean Paul’s assessment of the mimetic situation of poetry. We are also alerted to the typical understanding of prayer as a call and response structure: it is typically a call to God in praise and petition, and a response to God in worship; the situation for deprivatised prayer *after* the Death of God serves to contextualise *this* God differently. Because the body of poetry is the guiding watershed in this assessment, both theological and literary, there is a depth to the ‘mirror of poetry’ that surpasses mimetic play. Poetry is not merely mimicking life, is not solely there to represent in that sense; it has for Sölle the hallmarks of active participation –

³⁶³ Ice, snow, rain, dew, various references to rivers and the sea, and tear-drops (here the combination between the “salt of the earth” mingled with the “water of life” is markedly significant), to name more prominent occasions. Tears will serve as a more sustained point of reflection in Section 3.3.3.

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embodiment. In other words, it is a living situation, a body with shared consciousness in the face of its author, its readers and critics. However, insofar as poetry has largely been cast on the side of (self-)reflection in the corpus of modern lyric, the co-germination between the literary tradition informing the poetry and the lived praxis pervasive to the life of prayer, questions the manner of call and response envisioned in a body of texts that deprivatise the individual, without losing sight of the personal³⁶⁴.

Between the individual and the collective, also in my analysis, lurks a third term by which analysis operates, and which characterise the call and response in question in prayer: Insofar as “love” remains a central analytic context (and to this pertains the selection criteria of images of water), Luce Irigaray’s observation in *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* on coming to identity in love – a site of sameness (necessarily?) – are decisive: “There would be nothing there but love of self. Therefore, no love? Christ would not be Dionysos’s [sic] latterday twin, but a monster of egoism, a Narcissus who ends up reabsorbing his highest idea or ideal into himself³⁶⁵. Yet, Sölle’s lyric, if we take “deprivatisation” to its prayerful conclusion, is not merely revelling in its self-disclosure, but is inviting the concretisation of a sociality in the context of a performative body of literature that is consciously gendered. Where God is understood as “a” sociality to be presented, the Death of God likewise *recalls* the dead Narcissus. Theologically, to Sölle and others, God’s self-identity is not typically understood as narcissism – even though the patriarchal tradition occupies that place for much feminist theology. Instead I would pose the recalling in both senses, namely a revoking of the self-obsessed

³⁶⁴ The distinction, as I hope has remained clear in my theological elaborations, between individual and personal is crucial to Sölle’s understanding of the existential situation of faith given by theologies of Lutheran influence.

³⁶⁵ Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, European Perspectives, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 187.

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“narcissistic” death-drive, as well as a remembering (and in that sense rescuing) of Narcissus, even in the seeming futility of “his” love.

In the myth of Narcissus, of course, the mirror is the surface of the water that provokes Narcissus’ death. In the telling of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, we learn that Narcissus is the son of Liriope, a water-nymph, who bore him as a result of a rape by the river God Cephisus. This allows us to read the watery pool he gazes into, and from where he discovers his own reflection, as symbolic of his mother. This becomes significant to my reading here insofar as it allows the myth to speak to all of the poetic roles to be investigated in this study – lovers, mothers, and artists – and asking after Narcissus’ sexuate identity places Echo likewise, as the other unhappy lover of the myth. In the myth, Echo had been punished with repetitive (mimetic) speech by Juno (Hera) for collaborating with Jupiter (Zeus), when she had distracted Juno from her husband’s adultery. Echo cannot speak for herself, but mirrors the speech of others. Thus, when she falls in love with the beautiful Narcissus, she cannot declare her love. And so the myth proceeds: upon her rejection, Echo pines away to be mere sound and no form. Amongst all those rejected by Narcissus, one sends a prayer to the gods, praying that ‘If he should love deny him what he loves!’³⁶⁶. So when he comes upon the source that reveals his own reflection to himself, both the Tiresian oracle about his death and the prayer of the rejected lover find fulfilment: because touching the watery surface causes his reflection to disappear, Narcissus dies gazing at the mirror.

Reading poetry should not cause us to die. With “Levadia” we are offered a poem that thematises the grace that would promise life³⁶⁷, theologically, in the

³⁶⁶ Ovid, *Ovid’s Metamorphoses: in English Blank Verse*, Volume I, trans. Brookes More (Boston: The Cornhill Publ. Company, 1953), 107.

³⁶⁷ Not unlike the promise of the newness of life in baptism that would do away with the old life in an act of cleansing or forgetting, by remembering the passion of Christ, grace.

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mythical image of petitioning an oracular source that remains inherently ambiguous: it is not one; it is already the relation between two, namely memory and forgetting – mnemosyne and lethe. Poetry should help us to live – with memory. LL87 juxtaposes a concern for memory in the face of forgetting (Stanzas 1 and 2) with the acts of the poetic I who is petitioning an oracle, a future rather than a past vision (Stanzas 3 and 4). In the shift from inquiry to contrition the poetic I invites us as readers to undergo a transformation in relation with that literary subjectivity posited towards the oracle and the scribe. In the convergence between literary and theological constructions underpinning this study we glimpse the multifaceted allusions of these points of orientation given by the watery oracle and the scribe (doubling the poet) – in function and temporal orientation – that the myth of Narcissus will help to further elucidate. Both, our sexuate identities in prayer, as well as our understanding of community as mutual relation is judged against the Death of God in this poetic co-creation. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (ll.19f.) whose echo enjoins the grace provided by forgetting.

Lethe and Mnemosyne

“Levadia”, in a unique way, draws attention to the body, in the context of our primary identification in face of the mother, embodied by the source or mirror. God, according to Genesis, was above the waters, and the relationship with Genesis as it pertains to the role of Mnemosyne in Greek mythology is telling: the titaness (much like Tiamat) is not simply memory, but this memory derives from the relation between sky (Uranus) and earth (Gaia) – and thus holds the place of God in Sölle’s rhetoric at other places. Whereas Narcissus’ fate is sealed and marred by the injustice done to his mother, Sölle’s poem conveys a happier state of being in identification of the motherly source, not least for the attraction presented by a ‘return’ (l.13). Recollecting that land, earth or body are functioning as metaphors towards the same theological end in Sölle’s work, reading the line [REDACTED]

████████████████████' (1.9) indicates a specific functional relationship to the body that the poetic nature of the text undermines. Mothers especially fall into a societal functionality that denies self-recognition (Know thyself! That other oracular verdict). Also, mothers attain a certain affinity with memory in Sölle's work. Who then is not in need of memory? In the context of a Post-Auschwitz theology, in a country such as Germany where we speak of Fatherland and Mother tongue, the language to remember seems to rest at a very cropped and functional level. The "national" character of a global(ised) trauma commands this memory and demonises forgetting, without the awareness that forgetting is part of the process of healing, and that forgetting is never separate, is indeed at the source of every memory. The dream for grace, as a sign of care growing out of the desire for liberation, sits uncomfortably with the role of the scribe, the authoritative recording of memory, or the writing down of the poem that is prayer. Her body is not 'proficient machinery', neither can she forget 'the names' of past promises (whether taken as the victims of the Holocaust or as the children of the oracular promise, which also aligns this reading with the story of Mary). However, believing that on a fundamental level all living is connected in the hidden places of creation rescues the mother and the child for new endeavours.

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character we attribute to each persona, memory and forgetting. In the myth, Narcissus is lost to himself, because he focuses exclusively on himself. Echo is permanently detached from herself because she repeats, and thus remembers, only that which comes to her from others. Sölle remarks on the narcissistic indifference to the temporal: ‘For Narcissus, his death means the end of everything. Both past and future are inconsequential; what counts are the moments of self-mirroring, nothing more’³⁶⁹. Given Sölle’s acute existential theological concern for “everything”, as a reality that is both all-encompassing and cognisant of difference, her criticism levelled against Narcissus stems from the isolation incurred by his perpetuated, self-referential play. Eternity, to Sölle, is not an idealisation of sameness, of constancy of time (a perpetual status quo of a temporal datum, however blissfully conceived), but a realisation of the relationality held with “everything” in which presence and absence, living and dying, all contribute to this “greater whole”. Narcissus’ “greater whole” rests in the self-aggrandising manner of his reflection, the characteristic (and destructive) indifference to his context. Thus, Narcissus, never actually gains presence, because he can never apprehend himself as himself. With Narcissus, the self’s only relation to itself, in the gazing at the mirror, is never recognised for the self’s self-relation to itself. Narcissus’ desire for himself is deflected by the mirror’s apparent image of an alleged other as other. Narcissus fails to recognise his desire as a desire for self-presence.

The desire of the poetic persona of LL87 is wavering. In her resolution to drink only from one of the sources – memory – she is influenced by the judgment that memory is that which is lacking. Looking in the mirror, or drinking from the source, promises a moment of recognition. Simone de Beauvoir describes narcissism as the ‘ecstasies of the mirror’,³⁷⁰ where pleasure – not the love of

³⁶⁹ Sölle and Cloyes, *To Work and to Love*, 123.

³⁷⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* [1949], ed. and trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Vintage Classic, 1997), 644.

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Immersing herself in forgetting, the poetic persona also shares with those names, ██████████' (l.20) which are ██████████' (l.19). Associatively, the waters of Lethe are as the traces of ink that make a record of forgetting. Thus, while the embodiment of such alienation, in the figure of Echo, may be interpreted as Echo's absolute incapacity to articulate herself to others, her failure of expression nevertheless produces a material effect³⁷¹ – a colour of voice, a trace in the flow of time. The echo knows itself as a temporal condition, and thus Echo never knows herself outside of relation – she is the negation of the image because she remains in process. It is in the poetic persona's solidarity with forgetting that we recognise her sexuate belonging with Echo in the desire for the other who is the same. We have to wonder, then, if she truly needs forgiveness – God's or ours – or if the judgment passed by memory is not itself a sign for the self-importance in face of the vast majority of silent forgettings.

Inscribing a choice: Mirroring gender in the intersection of image and discourse

I shall discuss here briefly what such a reading has to say on the work of analysis in the thesis, at the level of discourse. Luce Irigaray, in her reading of Freud's work on femininity, sets in motion a reworking of the mirror of Narcissus into the *Speculum of the Other Woman* – no longer an account of male ego construction, but an account of women's relation to and in their sexuality. Where her critical assessment of Freud systematically unhinges the presumptions and

³⁷¹ Ringleben's close textual study analyses the „Liebestod,“ the death of love as a consequence of the mutual exclusion from touch inherent in seeing and hearing. Echo and Narciss present mirror images of the same mimetic situation. „Indem [Echo] nur im Hall ihrer Stimme zu vernehmen ist, „berührt“ sie allein das Ohr des Anderen, berührt ihn gar nicht wirklich selbst: Hören ist aufgehobene Berührung“ – Joachim Ringleben, „Woran stirbt Narziß? Widerhall und Spiegelbild als tödlicher Schein. Zum Liebestod von Echo und Narziß; Ovid, Metam.III, 339-510“, in *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen aus dem Jahre 2004*, Philologisch-Historische Klasse (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 355 .

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presuppositions posed by the (male) desire of the analyst (Freud) regarding femininity, her self-conscious reflections posit the role of women in the discourse of a male analytic and the dimension of female desiring as a starting point that is not merely passive reflection of a pre-ordained heteronormative sexuality for women. It is Kristeva's work that identifies this "other" woman with the mother, at least in the connection I see between the otherwise divergent projects of Irigaray and Kristeva. While Kristeva pursues an analytic strategy that moves backwards in the oedipal dynamism, and unsettles the terms of oedipalisation itself (this I see as the fundamental "logic" of abjection, and its "basis" for contextualising the semiotic), Irigaray mines the symbolic fractures that bear down on the exposition of the feminine, that likewise establishes itself as a countermovement to the singularity (or sameness) operative in the institution of the male as dominant discourse strategy. The point at which both projects meet I see developed in the awareness fostered around the female body – already two attributive claims on the (existential) integrity of 'woman' that should remain highly contested. Both have much to inform a discourse on desire as in-formative impetus of a body-consciousness, a sexuate identity that can assert its presence and transcendence in the context of prayer.

Kristeva's work on the mother is such that maternity is not sufficiently described in societal or naturalised, biological features. Maternity is organic – growing out of the double-bind between a woman's desire that relates her to her pregnant body and to her sexuality. What is being offered as natural consequence of motherhood is a socially coercive role which ostensibly negates any true affection between child and mother, one where the mother would not exhaust herself in her "function"; she, too, would continue to be in creation of herself, that is, in the position of experiencing her body in consciousness as a sexuate being. In order to expose the role of the image in the discourse on difference and the desire of the imagination of women, Irigaray's portrayals of Freud are helpful for us to

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think through the role of Oedipus in light of an evaluation of narcissism. I want to cast back the myth of Narcissus onto Irigaray's text in the figure of the *Speculum* – both speculative play and mimetic deferral. In the detour via Oedipus (in the case of Irigaray), and abjection (in the case of Kristeva), I want to briefly sketch out here what Irigaray's reflections do to my understanding of the role of femininity and its relation to sexuality, and sexuate identity in the dynamics traced within this thesis between poetry, prayer – prayer-poetry as an intersectional discourse – and the thesis text in light of women's subjectivity.

Irigaray questions the strenuous compulsion of Freud to establish symmetry between the subject-formation of man and woman in light of the oedipus-complex. She dissects this desire for symmetry according to its gendered implications and traces it back to the implicit valorisation of production as a male achievement, reproduction as a female function – a split between active and passive that so long found its defence in biological analogism presented as scientific fact³⁷². Despite the difference in set-up of the Narcissus myth in light of the pre-condition of Echo, the dynamics between Narcissus and Echo commonly aim at a similar valuation. Echo, the echo, has no inherent value, she/it is merely the acoustic image, a reproduction of sound produced by another, and an incomplete representation at that³⁷³. But who is to say that the “product”, posed here as a primer, was complete? When Irigaray notes that science requires the evidence of the product to hazard a verdict on the process of production (and reproduction), then the contours of such a product are precisely the discursive

³⁷² Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 14.

³⁷³ Ringleben points to the empty chatter of Echo as a misuse of language that brought on her curse by Juno: she did not communicate. His thesis is that in their successive self-absolvement [sukzessive Selbstauflösung] the couple does retain a point of contact in their very negation. Ringleben, “Woran stirbt Narziß?,” 356f.

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contention we find in such accounts as Simone de Beauvoir's reflection on what it is to *become* a woman. Irigaray's pithy statement:

The same re-making itself – more or less – would thus produce the other, whose function in the differentiation would be neglected, forgotten. Or else carried back into mere extrapolation, into the infinity of some capital letter: Sexuality, Difference, Phallus, etc.³⁷⁴.

The extrapolation carries the weight of the valorisation of the male in opposition to the female. Hence, only the phallic mother, the Mother, exists for this discourse: as the forever immaterial, and as forever sustaining (male) interest, namely by a desire for the male.

If we are to trace the relation between image and Real (another capital), between image and discourse, then reading Narcissus' death as a return to his own mother in the submersion in the water is enlightening. Here Narcissus' mirror-image is not his own product, does not follow after, but perpetually stands before himself. The mirror-image belongs as much to the mirror as to the gazing Narcissus. The image only exists in the primordial reality of an (intended?) ideality, i.e. a coming to be imagined and transcending one's own physical presence (God's dream). The valuation of this production of the image, however, still requires us to take account of the watery surface that enabled such reflection. The inconsistency of that surface does not profile in the situating of Echo and Narcissus towards each other. Water, like Echo, remains a cipher for that which is forgotten. If we allow ourselves to set the Narcissus myth into a discussion around gender, the following situation presents itself: Narcissus forgot the world around himself. Echo embodied the memory of spoken discourse, but had no body to hold on to that memory. Instead, her fate was to be forgotten. Alternatively, we could say Narcissus remembered nothing but himself, while Echo remembered only to reflect the other, but could not reflect herself. The poetic persona of Sölle's poem

³⁷⁴ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 21.

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exemplifies both scenarios in turn. Facing up to the double-sourced pool, itself a figuration of the mother, the *choice* of the mirror (water) is between the plunge into forgetting, or the re-surfacing of memory. Having solidarity with forgetting emerges then as a modality of petition for grace. The poem itself is a reckoning with the coming to identity anticipated for grace – prayer as a moment of release from the pressured functionality of this world’s self-proliferation.

Thus, the category of women’s subjectivity is not a means by which to deflect, and forget (!) the difference between the deadening image (whether idealised or negated) and the dynamics of discourse, but to expose their tenuous relation in face of the affirmations and rejections that produce their contours. While I cannot claim to speak Sölle’s subjectivity – not even my own as a fully conscious individual – I can mark out the poetic relationship of an imagined subjectivity in light of my reading. In its imagistic presuppositions, posed by the *role* of lovers, mothers and artists, their momentary indifference to the temporality of their respective functioning is embedded in discourse, i.e. is profiled against the mirror of language, our mutually interdependent socialisation into language (our facing up to the watery mirror). This mirror is twofold, precisely because it finds points of reflection in two languages – the interior language of the poems (their “origin” in German idiom), and the exterior reflection thereof in English in light of the critical apparatus employed (curiously aided in large part by French feminist theory). Where I see the German poems function like the waters of Narcissus’ pool, in that they can aid meditative self-reflection, mirroring ourselves back to us (the assumption made of modern lyric poetry), they also pose as a window into our mutual dependence upon recognition by ourselves and others as more than the “immediate” image. Were Narcissus to have seen Echo (like the disturbance of the water that the myth includes) standing behind him – a voice that recalls, reminds, remembers – he would have discovered that he is not a singular being, but a relational becoming.

3.2. Lovers: Transcendence of Subjectivities in Relation

In this section I want to trace the complexities of the poetic expression given to the role of lovers in light of the desiring relationships the poems enable. The desire of the thesis at this stage is determined from the context of a loving (i.e. faithful) discourse, and to accentuate the direction (intention) of such desired relations in view of the activity of prayer. This approach then foregrounds the gendered body and the role of the woman lover in particular and is led by analysis of a set of poems selected on the basis of facilitating images of water on the one hand, and exemplifying the position of lovers on the other hand. In an attempt to clarify the differentiations between gendered subjectivities and sexuate bodies in light of love, the two concurrent images (lovers and water) alter in their interrelational dynamics in the course of each poem. The present selection not only situates Sölle's poetry within a specific feminist perspective on nature poetry, but will more crucially enable a critical differentiation of the relationship between erotic desire and sexuate bodies presented in her work, whose desires are often marked by the symbolic transformation from one medium to another.

- “To believe someone’s felicity” [FL25] is a particularly helpful example for situating some of the recurring imagery – water, light, movement – surrounding sexual play in Sölle’s poetry, crucially tied to a poetic reflection on the *conveyance* of experience that *grounds* the identity of the lovers in the *work* of transcendence. Identity is expressed in flux.
- “The theory on the glass of water” [ZU145], set up as a debate on sexual play, not between sexual partners, but amongst a group of women, reinforces this identification between being and doing prevalent in Sölle’s assessment of identity. The poetic persona’s resolution to speak her mind comes here as a loving gesture towards the other women’s indifference. Commitment to the sacramental

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elements, to Sölle, also nurtures a necessary self-care embedded within the relationship celebrated with another.

- It is in “Green poem” [BR52] that we begin to fully grasp the significance of the posited erotic self-relation that correlates being and doing, not as an assertion of self, but as a transcendence towards a relational existence that marks out “love” as a fundamental condition for living (cp. BR84). To be living (in prayer-poetic terms) is to believe.

Thus, lovers focus the discussion on a coming together. Whereas conceptualising relationality appears intrinsically tied up with sexual politics, the concrete effects of desire – in their direction and impetus – are measured up against a general capacity for ecstasy by which transformation is put to *work* (i.e. subjectivated). Elemental shifts occurring in Sölle’s portrayal of lovers, and the properties attributed to water and its containment are playing a significant role in her aesthetics.

3.2.1. “To believe someone’s felicity” [FL 25]

Love and sex, as topics of interest to theoretical elaborations of intimacy and connectivity within Sölle’s poems, are closely related, often to the point of posing interchangeable terms. This is not to say that Sölle would not differentiate the two: rather, sex is a particular expression of love to Sölle and has not only physical and emotional qualities, but often serves to illustrate our bodily capacity for transcendence³⁷⁵, amongst other things, experienced in sexual pleasure. In Sölle’s existentialist theological vocabulary, we can trace a more general connection between love and a dimension of faith, where the body finds liberation only in the context of this world, that is, in a care-ful relationship with the world. In faith, the

³⁷⁵ This implies a sacramental value given to such expressions of bodily transcendence, as the discussion of “The theory on the glass of water” [ZU 145] will show; cf. Section 3.2.2.

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body is not merely existent, but is existentially relational. Sex, understood as a particular practice (embodied sexuality), by extension also figuratively marks the means by which to relate and bring about a godly encounter (eventing the divine). With the focus on lovers as the subjects of such relating, this section reflects upon the concrete expressions of sexuality as modi of prayerful engagement within the situation of prayer deprivatised.

Beginning with FL25, what we see here is the way certain images follow directly on from those raised by the Narcissus myth in relation to “Levadia” [LL 87]. Although not thematising the unrequited love of Echo, the same difficulty at bringing her love to expression is reflected here against the paradoxical affirmation of experiencing felicity (*Glück*) – joy or *jouissance* – on the one hand, and sharing its joyful expression on the other hand. Sölle’s prayer-poetic expression is not in the first instance to be thought in separation from the deprivatisation that began our analysis of intercessory prayer after the Death of God. Rather, the wishing expressed in prayer, also in prayer of praise is to be critically reflected against the localisation of desire for the believer. Praise in prayer is as much a celebration of the joys of “what is”, as it is an expression of the wish that ties the person at prayer into community with the joys witnessed in another. In meditative prayer such joy is commonly (however arguably) deemed to be localised in God, while the case for deprivatised prayer has to search and articulate such joy in the relation (emotional, physical or otherwise connectedness) to others; in this, deprivatised prayer is profoundly this-worldly, but no less transcending in the experience given of exuberance. Connectivity is not unmediated. It is crucially indicative of an awareness of difference between oneself and another that is at the same time sublated in the recognition of the connectedness. Connectivity, the potential of touch, is at bottom a condition for transcendence (Sölle elaborates this further with regard to ecstasy – see below).

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Sölle delineates sexuality along four interpersonal dimensions: ecstasy, trust, solidarity and wholeness³⁷⁶. (She builds on Phyllis Tribble's work here³⁷⁷).

Our sexuality, in the widest sense of the word, concerns our capacity for relationship. When sexuality is reduced to the sexual act or to genital orgasm, the integration of the whole person in a relationship is hindered and the potential extent of ecstasy is diminished³⁷⁸.

Ecstasy in the context of deprivatised prayer is not to be mistaken with a charismatic frenzy whereby the faithful distances her or himself from the social environment. Sölle parallels a concern for sexuality (as a general capacity for relationship) alongside a concern for the whole person in relationship. Ecstasy is closely aligned with both pleasure and imagination. Thus, not only a physical relatedness, suggested in the more restricted understanding of sexual act, or the even more localised understanding of genital orgasm, is given profile in Sölle's understanding of sexuality. The pleasure of relating more broadly (one's sexual identity not diminishing by predefined roles) is an exercise in transcending, in seeing oneself as more than the (material and sexual) object with regards to others or oneself:

...in mystical ecstasy another boundary is abolished, the one tradition has erected between understanding and enjoying. Mechthild von Magdeburg describes this dancing or leaping as follows: "There I leap into love, from love into understanding, from understanding into enjoyment and from enjoyment beyond all the human senses. There I shall remain and yet circle still higher"³⁷⁹.

³⁷⁶ Sölle and Cloyes, *To Work and to Love*, 144

³⁷⁷ Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Overtures to Biblical Theology Volume 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978).

³⁷⁸ Sölle and Cloyes, *To Work and to Love*, 125f.

³⁷⁹ Sölle, *The Silent Cry*, 183. "In der mystischen Entrückung wird auch die Grenze, die traditionell zwischen Erkennen und Genießen besteht, aufgehoben. Mechthild von Magdeburg beschreibt das Tanzen oder Springen mit den Worten: "Dann springe ich in die Minne, von der Minne in die Erkenntnis, von der Erkenntnis in den Genuss, vom Genuss über alle menschlichen Sinne. Dort will

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The “leap” thematised in “To believe someone’s felicity” [FL 25] oscillates between (and merges) understanding and enjoying, not least by way of reproducing its movement in the course of the poem. In reflection of religious symbolism, sexual *jouissance* (in the poems most often rendered with felicity, for the German *Glück*³⁸⁰) transcends the singular body, and yet poses difficultly for transmission: certainly as one line of inquiry, Sölle offers us poems which identify the transference and transcendence of loving relationships in elemental shifts or transformations³⁸¹. The transition from water to light (not only reminiscent of the Genesis account) bears crucially on the concern for spiritual integrity in our sexual relations. “To believe someone’s felicity” [FL 25] does more than question the unity *between* (precisely not of, as if this were a material possession by one who is to be identified as self-same) lovers. The role of sexuality within a relationship is here indicated as a dimension of faith. It is not merely a question of regulating sexuality through religious ceremonial practices³⁸²; it is a question about the ethics of participating in sexual activity, and this includes our relation to language (namely, by articulating the joys *of* sexuality in such terms that do not mask language as if free from sexual politics, nor alienate sexuality from the body in an abstract discourse on love)³⁸³. In this light the shift from the calm surface of language – the water as mirror – towards the sudden leap, expressed in the FL25, takes on special significance.

ich verbleiben und doch höher kreisen (Dinzelbacher, 1994, 210),” Sölle, “Mystik und Widerstand: »Du stilles Geschrei«” (1997), Bd.6, 235.

³⁸⁰ E.g. FL25, 30, 78, BR22, 25, ZU33.

³⁸¹ An example treating oral sex where the light features significantly is “A love poem” [ZU 34]; one where water and light retain a dimension of difference is “Incurably here” [ZU 33].

³⁸² A concern to be picked up on in discussion of “The theory on the glass if water” [ZU 145].

³⁸³ Sölle expresses this awareness in her poem “Further attempts at learning to love“ [VL 79] where she states: [REDACTED]’ (ll.11f.) – pointing to ableist discourses and homophobia in subsequent lines.

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While both the swimmers are immersed in the image presented here by the mountain lake, the poetic persona observes first the mirror image of the mountain range (we might equally suppose a reflection of the shape of her breasts, that would link the representative of the earth with the feminine form). Only then does she note the partner’s dissolution into threads of drops – into an echo of the lake, having become one with the



water. In the subsequent correlation between [redacted]’ (1.8), the threads of drops have further transformed into the rays of sunshine, and leapt “into transcendence”, a movement beyond the watery relation to the poetic I who appears to understand the enjoyment of her partner, but whose [redacted]’ (1.8) is characterised differently in the poem. In view of sexual relations, the poetic persona’s [redacted]’ (1.9) is indicative of the joy for the partner’s felicity in the same move as the choking imparts a certain difficulty in equalling its movement. Choking in German is a self-reflexive verb, so that a more literal rendition would have been [redacted]’ (1.8), i.e. she swallows her “self”, which can be read in multiple ways. She makes herself disappear. This is at once a negation of self as it is a conscious participation in the felicity of the other, for whom she has both ceased to exist in the ecstasy of the moment, as well as having become one with that ecstasy, the desire of that other one. Insofar as the poetic persona is deemed to recognise herself lost, she cannot mirror her partner’s felicity, cannot in turn disappear into the other’s ecstasy, but resides in the lake as its witness. Insofar as the poetic persona expresses herself as having given over her self-

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consciousness to the mutual ecstasy of that moment, her self's negation gives way to the depth of the lake whose watery surface can merely mirror their exterior bodies. It is the transformational movement, their mutual participation with and in the water that gives the watery surface a depth and a transcendental direction towards the felicity of a loving relationship.

Whereas the second stanza details a participatory process, the third stanza suggests a more sober assessment in verbal reflection: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]' (ll.10f.). Language as the screen or mirror of reality here comes up against a different representational economy, a mimetic shortfall, partially for the fact that mere description is not enough to mark the transcendental relationship experienced and envisioned in the previous stanza. Whereas in the depiction of the swimmers, their relation and separation was naturally carried by the elemental force of the water and the light, this subsequent stanza draws on the more obviously problematic relationship to faith indicated in the opening of the poem. An understanding of halos as religious signification of persons of faith seems a weak image to the frustrated poetic persona. However, the return to the elemental force attached to light and fire, in the reference to heat, offers a different interpretation: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]' (ll.17f). In this turn towards a psychological reading of the image of the halos, the poem addresses a crucial aspect of language as a collective imaginary space. In language we are all believers and practitioners. Whether the metaphors work for us and with us is as much a matter of faith, as it is a matter of our desire for relationship. Both need critical examination of the context from which we emerge, be that water, language, or experiencing our bodies as sites of sexual desire.

3.2.2. "The theory on the glass of water" [ZU 145]

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As a poetic conversation, not amongst sexual partners, but amongst women about the sexual act, ZU145 offers an interesting counter-point to FL25. Where in FL25 the lovers were immersed in the water, “The theory on the glass of water” [ZU 145] distances, and differentiates, the discussion on the handling of water, provided in the image of the drinking of the glass of water that doubles up with the act of having sex. Their metaphorical

relationship is made explicit in the titling of the prayer as ‘theory’ and is set out as a debate between a group of young women on the one hand, and the poetic persona on the other. Despite my avowed non-biographical stance in this thesis, the popular association of the poetic persona to be consonant with the author helps here to emphasise the contrast built into this poem of an individual, mature woman, over against a group of young women. It



accentuates Sölle’s aims with de-privatised prayer: an unmasking of a theoretical, public consensus on private affairs and the way this inflects on the constitution of the material body of the individual. Whereas the previous poem had more of the personal love lyric that favours intimacy as a private property (which the explicit nature of her text affronts in the very act of publishing), this poem is overtly confrontational with its public, also an institutionalised public, as the reference to the sacrament in the poem reveals. Sacramental dispensation of water in baptismal blessings, but also the role of women in marital relationships become contentious points of reflection to the sexual identity of the poetic persona.

The thesis set out at the start, in fragmented speech, is that casual sex is “no big deal”, that sexual liberties harbour no more serious implications than to be

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drinking a glass of water. From this basis the poetic persona discloses her case to the reader, in a heightened state of self-awareness, as she proposes a counterpoint to the judgment of the young women: [REDACTED] (ll.5f.). Traditional, conservative views on linking sacrament and sexuality would infer the need of an institutionally regulated (read “safeguarded”) sexual behaviour confined to heterosexual marriage, providing the sanctification of sex for the purpose of procreation and not for (female) pleasure. However, the subsequent mention of evil to be discarded in oblique reference to the grating and mopping bucket likewise plays on the negative associations of subservient women which the poetic I is far from reaffirming. Rather she means to clean up with housewives’ tales, pointing to the vitality of the image of the water as positive identification for sex and sexual pleasure subsumed in her notion of this sacrament.

Sölle made negative headlines with ecclesial authorities early in her career, declaring amongst other things that alongside the Bible, reading the newspaper might be more important than to be reading the catechism³⁸⁴, and sharing a cigarette may be deemed a more original sacramental action than sharing out the Eucharist³⁸⁵. And yet, her poem is more cautious in both its assertions and criticisms than these controversial outbursts. What happens in connecting the image of drinking a glass of water with the concerns for having sex? A sacrament does not by itself call for its incorporation into an institutionally legitimated order; it does however identify a relationship to the divine that is conscious of an interaction marked by difference. The poem does not assert a contextual specificity of the sacrament as requiring institutional boundaries. Neither is reverence extended to human authoritative hierarchies administering the sacrament to those receiving it. Instead the poetic persona declares the participatory action itself to be sacramental. This position causes her shame with reference to a theological

³⁸⁴ Renate Wind, *Dorothee Sölle: Mystic and Rebel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 11.

³⁸⁵ Sölle, Falken and Mautner, *Himmelsleitern*, 13.

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discourse on sacramentality in general, as that which is set apart from the mundane, and an orthodox Lutheran understanding of the sacraments in particular, which holds baptism and communion to be the only legitimate sacraments (other sacraments can be identified as variations of one of these formative two). Shame is not directed towards sex or the embarrassment over one's sexuality. Rather, the comparison drawn to the mundane act of drinking water, as a life-sustaining action, is inspiring shame in its association with a more archaic notion of sacramentality. In the modern and "sexually enlightened" (*aufgeklärt*) times represented by the detached behaviour of the young women shame is connected to the religious sensibility that sacralises what it beholds. What is the significance of holding on to a notion of sacrament detached from its socially regulative function? If the sacrament no longer glorifies hetero-normative decency, what does it do?

Marcella Althaus-Reid says: 'Theology is a sexual act, a sexual doing based on the construction of God and divine systems which are male and worked in opposition (and sexual opposition) to women'.³⁸⁶ Althaus-Reid offers us a candid definition of the kind of interchange that theology seeks to describe. Theology, as a discipline, serves as a descriptor and prescriptor of the exchange between human and divine godhead, by systematising and controlling the means of producing symbols of divine significance and measures for their interpretation: ortho-praxy and ortho-doxy. This affirms an institution whose powerful control over "religious sensibilities" touches each individual and draws clear boundaries of the decent and appropriate behaviour, thought and ontological justification of salvation, particularly salvation understood as social vision of church. Althaus-Reid's explicit equation of the interpretive strategies of theology with the act of having sex not only addresses a conventional taboo – sex is at worst decried by the Church

³⁸⁶ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 36.

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Fathers as ultimate sin, at best evaded by confining it to (heterosexual) marriage, which, however, leaves the bodily dimension of sexual ethics unaddressed, implicitly excluding sexual misconduct from theological debate – it also points to a number of intrinsic problems with the business of theologising itself. She asks what role pleasure, sensuality and experience play in the way that theologians relate to their work, and how their work addresses the relationship that faith inspires to the divine. If the divine is not to be possessed, not some *thing* to be controlled, if the divine is evading objectification, then our human means of approach has to have a different significance from that experienced in sexual oppression (and indeed, the logic of exchange that underlies the sexual act constructed on oppositionality is an expression of a hierarchical order, an oppressive order). This understanding echoes also in Sölle's understanding of sexism:

Sexism in theology is not just a habit, of men accustomed to rule, which would be easily corrected, it is idolatry: the source of life is being mistaken for patriarchal power. That those created in the image of God are two, dependent on and in reference to each other, that precisely is being denied in a purely male theology, when instead of the promised justice suddenly only the already seasoned order re-emerges.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁷ "Sexismus in der Theologie ist nicht eine relative leicht korrigierbare Angewohnheit herrschaftsgewohnter Männer, sondern Götzendienst: die Quelle des Lebens wird mit patriarchaler Macht verwechselt. Dass die im Bilde Gottes Geschaffenen zwei sind, aufeinander angewiesen und bezogen, gerade das wird in einer nur männlichen Theologie geleugnet; wenn statt der verheißenen Gerechtigkeit plötzlich die immer schon bewährte Ordnung durchschlägt." – Dorothee Sölle, "Zur Freiheit Befreit – Zum Schweigen Verdammt. Das Bild der Frau im Christentum" [1989/90] in "Mutanfälle," Bd.3, 301.

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Does the poem in its appeal to the notion of sacramentality introduce a social vision that liberates its individual participants, or is this a re-emergence of the old order? In reference to the poem we can observe that the third stanza shifts focus by diverting our attention as readers to a personal memory, a rather peculiar description of fetching water. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (ll.7-9). The air of an age past, indicated by the 'grating,' and the uncouth connection

indicated by fetching water from the toilet basin, hint at the outdated, discarded connection between sex and sacrament by the young women. And yet, how does the act of fetching water fit into the parallelism expounded upon throughout the poem between having sex and drinking water? The reference to the grating as penetrable barrier seems significant. Situated mid-flow between tap and toilet basin, designating the place for the mopping bucket, the grating identifies an arbitrary boundary and an aid to handle the water drawn here with a distinct purpose: cleaning. Between personal hygiene in the case of the toilet basin and household hygiene in the case of the mopping bucket, fetching water becomes a balancing act in day-to-day industriousness which ultimately calls out to question what the 'lesser evil' (l.11) is – and who is standing judge. Cleaning, solely a woman's occupation at one point, is a necessary duty (evil) in housekeeping for the sake of the family, and for keeping up appearances in social context; *this* water knows strict functional applications.

Transposed to the conditions given for sex, this functional relationship to water/sex, albeit glorified by marriage, has no pleasurable role, but becomes labour. And yet, the grating also rests suspended in between bucket and basin. The bucket can be identified as the artefact of alienated labour, sex as martial chore.



**Image 1: *Cleaner's sink*,
Logie Kirk**

Photographed by Katja
Neumann, 2014.

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Likewise, the indifference of the young women to casual sex is imaged by the water's wasting away, rushing along without any notice or use into the drain of the sink. What then does the grating indicate? To remain within the metaphorical play indicated by genital intercourse, as water's functional interpretation, the grating is required for the bucket (womb) to receive the water (spermatozoon) and the subsequent ordained labour here is bearing the child. If the grating stands in for the conditions sustaining such sexual relations, the grating serves the heteronormative control over sexuality in the politics of femininity (namely as a means to reproduce the patriarchal order). I would suggest that the disagreement between the women in this poem is not to be fixated upon a stance on marriage (for which the poem by itself provides too little contextualisation), but that the disagreement stems from the indifference indicated towards sexual play by the young women that identifies these women in alienation of their sexuality – a sexuality where their bodies' reproductive functions are controlled, and where this control becomes the justification for rendering the act of having sex as a meaningless pastime.

The poem suggests a reading of the conditions in which sex is performed that denies liberal toleration of harmful sexual practices – within the context of its older legitimisation in marriage, or its casual, modern counteract. The desire for sexual fulfilment as the product of love-making is itself a labour that sacramentalises the body in its relationship to the other. If fetching water marks the awakening of female sexual practice, it cannot deal with sex being confined to the boredom of a household (marital) chore. Within the traditional frame of reference, sex was not (certainly not in theological discourse) a pleasure to be irresponsibly enjoyed. Where sex in a conservative frame of theological reference serves the purpose for procreation alone, pleasure is the effect of responsibility

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displaced³⁸⁸; in this splitting of responsibility and pleasure, sex becomes increasingly liable to abuse. And yet, the attitude of the young women is equally identified as abusive to the issue of sex. Criticising the narrow objectives and dangerous silences on the conditions prescribed for sex in earlier days, and reprimanding the prejudiced rejection of an older generation's virtues by the young women on the other hand, the poetic persona cannot resist disclosing her longing for responsible, meaningful and joyful sexual relations. The poem would suggest a timid plea, a prayer for female sexual experience to be treated with the respect due to a sacrament, irrespective of the alleviating conditions available with modern contraception. Thus, without vilifying the act of having sex, this careful criticism in the image of the water flags up the wider politics associated with sexual behaviour.

Water, in the way it is being introduced previously, carries notions of ritual purity, of the healing and cleansing function of its sacramental use in baptism. As such it signifies a shift from the old life to the new, experienced by the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-30). [REDACTED] (ll.11f.) – liberation cannot reduce the body to an irrelevant “aside”, liberation cannot neglect the body and remake ‘evil’ into no more serious concern than differing opinion, or “purely” ideological reversal of normative values (itself a way to shield power from ethical, social considerations). This ‘evil’ is not directed towards sexuality, but towards neglectful and irresponsible attitudes towards sexuality and the body situated in public (and theological) discourse. The poetic

³⁸⁸ Thomas Laqueur points to this in his analysis of Freud's narrative on the female orgasm. While the ‘[I]bido knows no sex’ (233), Freud's account of the migration of the source of pleasure from clitoral to vaginal orgasm is the effect of a cultural coding of the body along heteronormative power-relations. ‘The history of the clitoris is part of the history of sexual difference generally and of the socialization of the body's pleasures. Like the history of masturbation it is a story as much about sociability as about sex’ (234) – in other words, the woman is required to repress her sexual pleasure in the socio-cultural acknowledgment of male dominance – Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 233ff.

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persona is not out to discredit or moralise to the young women, but to point to a sacramental vision of sexuality which invites shame to take on a different role, an almost insatiable pleasure and hope for a differently shared union – also in a sacred dimension – in the fullness of being to be carried through in all living acts. In this light, her conclusion draws on a pantheistic piety which affirms the sacramentality of all creation in celebration of divine existence. The [REDACTED] [REDACTED]’ (ll.13f.) foregrounds the mundane origin of this sacramental element. It also describes a deep-seated longing, an urge of the water to become more than it is. In addressing her difference, her shame over against the group of young women, the poetic persona offers an honest perspective on a theological struggle to find something in the act of having sex that is more than two notionless bodies, a recognition that the pleasure communicated in sex is situated between these bodies (communion). Communication is at its best when it avoids purely mundane or insignificant, functional speech, and places the self in correspondence with the one addressed.

In the context of a Christian interpretation of the role of sexual behaviour, the emphasis on water and the imagistic association of the grating as a contextual border also throws up a material presence of something other than itself (something other than the water as such) that contributes to the sacramental act. By shifting her understanding of the sacrament from the confines of strict contextual boundaries (not unlike the change in life of the Samaritan woman who honoured the rule that Samaritans could not interact with Jews) to a more inclusive vision of reality, Sölle eradicates the socio-normative boundaries which identify and categorise forms of behaviour as permissible and acceptable for associations with the divine. The question of sexual ethics is thus broadened to apply to the relations we have to both – the divine in the sacrament, and the other human in the sexual act: we can no longer differentiate between the two (sacrament and sexual act). With regards to theology, there is a more general point

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to be observed here: in linking the image of having sex with drinking water, the symbolism for flesh and spirit which find relationship in baptism addresses not only an ancient initiation rite, but an awakening to sexual ethics – a realisation that the individual body affects another body in its ontological situatedness.

3.2.3. “Green poem” [BR 52]

In contrast to the lovers at play in FL25 and the women in discussion about sex, reflected against a sacramental discourse in ZU145, “Green poem” [BR 52],



begins from a seemingly solitary poetic I in search for her absent lover. Each of these examples shows a latent correlation between the elemental, the sexual and the existential that a discussion of women’s subjectivity and sexuate identity is aiming to bring to profile. Whereas in “To believe someone’s felicity” [FL 25] love transfigured from water to light (a

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transition I have come to understand, amongst other things, to symbolise heterosexual desire³⁸⁹), “Green poem” [BR 52] builds from a relationship between water and earth (which seems indicative of an affirmative, not a repressive, desire in and of the feminine, as we will see here). Deliberating upon the place of the gendered body in light of female sexuality, I draw attention to a development in Sölle’s theological writings that begins around the time of publishing *Spiel doch von brot und rosen* (1981), but which resonates with images in Sölle’s poetic work more generally, certainly as early as *Fliegen lernen* (1979). The earth, as material focus of a this-worldly, secular theology, finds changing characterisation in her work, ranging from the promise of fulfilment of the body, to the consciousness in memory and its relation to God (at one point God and earth have memory, at another God is memory)³⁹⁰.

This attested earth-based spirituality marks out a special place for the elemental “design” of Sölle’s poems, one which affirms the locality, or “place” (in Irigaray’s analysis) of women’s desire that is not rooted in desiring the desire of the other (self-alienation in the evacuation of consciousness unto femininity). The earth as a place of dwelling (in the feminine) is not left behind in the move of transcendence indicated by the rain, but the poem captures the relationship between earth and water such that the singularity of the poetic persona integrates into the wholeness of being on this “wet day”. In this sense I understand “Green poem” [BR 52] as a hesitant affirmation of auto-eroticism as well as her capacity to transcend in loving solidarity to the world in absence of the male lover (even though he is granted access through the dream-space that ties them both into the context of the earth). Contrasting to FL25 which shifts between the situation

³⁸⁹ This relationship suggests itself prominently in “A love poem” [ZU 34] and is further strengthened (in my view) in light of the more gender-ambiguous poems such as “Penelope or on marriage” [FL 73], and “After a performance of shakespeare’s tempest” [ZU 28].

³⁹⁰ A good example can be found in “Separation” [FL 42].

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described in the opening of the poem, and a retrospective reflection: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (l.11f.). BR52 offers us instead a distinctly more introverted perspective for reflection. There is no reflection upon the poem within the space of the poem. Instead, the poetic I addresses a “you” that doubles up with the readers of the poem, on whose desk its text appears. At any rate, the reader is made privy to a scene of great intimacy, and the poetic persona seems conscious of that. In its this-worldly focus, the transcendence imagined in the loving relationship portrayed by the poem lends itself to a discussion of the existential position given to this woman lover’s subjectivity at prayer. Thus, offering a dimension of self-pleasuring crucially different from “On the difference between masturbation and love” [ZU 38], where the emphasis is placed on the physical isolation but largely uncreative effect of self-pleasure, “Green poem” [BR 52] introduces at once a more creative and less isolated view of pleasure in its relation to imagination. This imagination, it is to be noted, is rooted in the earth, and her (its) greenness³⁹¹ and speaks of a pleasure that persists in the absence of the lover whose relation to the earth is mitigated in the transformation experienced through the rain that directs the desire and erotic attention of the poetic persona to the earth.

‘Instead of humanizing eros, the Christian tradition has often brutalized our drives by separating eros and agape, a separation that threatens to erode the source of our vitality’³⁹², states Sölle. In BR52, erotic desire is translated into an imagined relation with the greenery brought out by the rain. In this sense eros is not humanized, but “naturised”. Reading her poem in this way is not to disguise an apparent tension between the self-pleasure that is here valorised as an opening up to the other at the same time of being a paradoxical self-affirmation in the moment of self-forgetting. The poetic persona is envisioned sitting at [REDACTED] (l.1), before

³⁹¹ Hildegard von Bingen’s *viriditas* / *Grünkraft* – cf. Sölle, “Mystik und Widerstand,” Bd.6, 150.

³⁹² Sölle and Cloyes, *To Work and To Love*, 145.

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her not the work of the day, but [REDACTED] rain' (l.2), which curiously [REDACTED] [REDACTED]' (l.3). That this greenness can serve as a reference for the newness of life (in Hildegard von Bingen's sense) sits here in tight contrast to the mundane, everyday situation described: every day we all sit down (or as the case may be, go) to work. The dullness of a rainy day, the dullness of the everyday is countered by the surprising newness or greenness to be encountered every day. In this sense, green is also a conscious reference to the liturgical season denoting common time. The peculiar relationship drawn up in the reference to 'your desk' (l.1), sitting down to work at the work-place of another, not only introduces an imagined relationship to an absent partner, but also serves as a point of transference between setting to work and being greeted by creation – the desk symbolising the world whose creation is attributed to another. The implication for this relationship drawn up between love, work and creation is crucial for our understanding of time in the reference to greenness. We find here a different narrative for "In the beginning" that ties the poetic persona, and her work, into a cosmic vision of [REDACTED]' (l.14) [REDACTED] l.24) as it translates into an image of grace.

In its structural features, the poem stands out for its notable attention to stanzaic form. Instead of varying lengths, each of the eight stanzas counts three lines, with the exception of Stanza Six which has four lines. Stanzas One, Two, Four and Five begin by introducing an action by the poetic persona: 'I sit' (l.1), 'I woke' (l.4), 'I go' (l.10), 'I note' (l.13), interrupted only by Stanza Three's opening on the 'dream' (l.7), and Stanza Six's opening on 'sleep' (l.16), both of which displace the poetic persona from active, wilful participation in the course of action indicated by the rain, at the fore in Stanza Seven. That the rain changes not only the poetic persona's perception, but her position within the created order is obvious from the fact that the agent of the first half of the poem, the capital 'I', moves into the closing line of the stanza, and into lower case 'i' (l.22). The final stanza

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emphatically returns focus on the poetic persona in its very dissolution: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]³⁹³ (l.23)! As in waking to her dream, the poetic persona is made and unmade in her relational identity with creation. The poetic persona's assessment and self-perception retains an element of active and creative agency on part of the poetic persona as one joining in with the newness celebrated by the rain in the sharing of her dream that roots her with the rain in the earth.

We learn in Stanza Two that the rain is '[REDACTED]' (l.5), but its strength rests in its moisture: '[REDACTED]' (l.8), '[REDACTED]' (l.14). The rain's endurance not only carries the poetic persona who begins to '[REDACTED]' (l.9), but persists in carrying along her past dream also (l.7). [REDACTED]' (ll.10f.) not only introduce a first change of focus for the poetic persona, who falls out of her own sight, but also echoes the language of the New Testament, in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37), as one fallen into the hands of robbers³⁹⁴. Having extended/expended herself in the desire for the other, the poetic persona is both absent and vitally present to all the greens. Hence, the anthropomorphism underwriting this image in reference to the absent lover seeks out a different kind of wholeness, beyond a psychosocial frame of reference (rain is not commonly understood as sentient "being"). However, as is the crucial focus for Sölle's poems at large, it is not the reflection of herself that is sought in the other, but the (self-)recognition of finding oneself perpetually in relation with all living things in such a way that the individualistic notion of privacy is a futile screen and its taboos a mockery to every living moment. The rain then is not only positively affirmed in its capacity to show the world in its greenness – marked by the fluidity of imaging

³⁹³ The German reads, 'So kam ich vom ich zur ichlosigkeit'.

³⁹⁴ "unter die Räuber gefallen oder geraten sein" is a standard idiom in German, deriving from Luke 10:25-37.

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longing by the solitary poetic persona who savours her relationship to the rain as a creative exchange for the physical absence of her partner, or the temporal distance to her dream. In the process of this, she learns to encounter herself anew, through her responsiveness to the rain. And in this sense occurs a negation of self by the poetic persona, arriving at herself, and at her pleasure, as a loss of innocence that is intrinsically ambiguous³⁹⁷. While the finish to Stanza Seven suggests a negative impact on the self-perception of the poetic persona, being '████████████████████' (l.22), the more distinctly affirmative celebration of the world's newness in the final stanza suggests a beginning in greater solidarity with creation where 'everything' is '████████████████████' (l.25).

3.2.4. Conclusions

“To believe someone’s felicity” [FL 21] places *jouissance* as the ecstatic encounter with transcendence by the poetic persona. Instead of being absorbed in self-forgetting, the body becomes the site of shared memory, a relational site celebrated for the involvement she plays in the other’s joy. Although the pleasure gleaned from this is not synonymous with reaching ecstasy herself at this stage, it marks a sense in which her awareness of the other is irreducibly interlinked with the capacity for (albeit not with the expression of) transcendence. Becoming towards one another is an act of becoming intermediary with that other – a permeable boundary. “Theory on the glass of water” [ZU 145] follows up on that debate as it pertains to a sexuate self-consciousness in light of the institutional (and) societal forces that regulate and normativise sexual play. It is in light of instituting forces that the self-care necessary in what the poetic persona deems healthy (i.e. ethical) sexual praxis takes on “religious” signification: having sex becomes here a language of the sacramental. “Green poem” [BR 52] then is the

³⁹⁷ The withered peach blossoms seem reminiscent of aging skin, amongst other connotations with peaches.

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more self-consciously poetic reworking of using the language of sexuality and sexual play as an occasion to think through the commonly silent prayers of our caresses: what will we dare to ask those we love, and how? Whereas the majority of examples cited from Sölle's poetry thus far do not seek to build competing visions of love-making, Irigaray's concern for the valuation of the caress has important implications for the psychosocial integrity of the female body in sexual encounters (and the expression of her sexual identity). Rather, Sölle's poems thus far have presupposed a certain all-inclusiveness to sexual practices determined according to their *faithful* vision of each partner. This desire expressed in the affection of the lovers in mutual consciousness is a site (a place?) of co-creative activity.

That there is an erotic dimension to the relationships we build with the world at large, with the people present, but also with those absent, is a realisation with weighty significance for the symbolic exchanges used in much traditional language of public, but also private prayers. 'Fecundity of love between lovers – the regeneration of one by the other, the passage to immortality in and through each other – this seems to become the condition of procreation and not a cause in its own right'³⁹⁸. Procreation, like the *pro nobis* of intercessory prayers, inter-cedes by the affirmation of creation – that is the creation of each subject in relation to the other and the fecundity of recognition it promises. In this sense, loving mothers, too, can be understood – in their inter-generational interdependence, to be not merely reproducers (succumbing to a functional view of the mother as a symbol of fertility) for the sake of generational continuity, but are subjectivities responsive to this fecundity in dialogue with their children.

³⁹⁸ Luce Irigaray, "Sorcerer Love: A Reading of Plato, *Symposium*, 'Diotima's Speech'," in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Athlone Press, 1993 [orig. French: 1984]), 26.

3.3. Mothers: Recognising the Other's Difference

Whereas the previous section considered the gendered body in loving relationships more generally, and the woman lover's sexual identity in particular, the next section considers a range of texts that specifically draw attention to mothers with reference to their children. This shifts the primary focus away from the experience of relationship between subjects, and onto the questions raised by conception and generation more broadly as a way to contextualise the social and societal implications present in Sölle's prayer-poetry. What featured in the myth of Narcissus in more latent terms, Liriope's rape and Echo's punishment for collaborating in Jupiter's adultery, have profound implications on the interpretation given to mothers, not merely for their relation to their children, but also for their self-image regarding the maternal body in negotiation with her sexual identity as a woman. In light of Sölle's specific treatment of memory – as we recall a prominent theme for rethinking theology after Auschwitz – the connection drawn up in various poems between God, memory and the earth that is particularly suggestive in reflections on the mother (as we have seen in relation to "Levadia" [LL87], but here can also be drawn up with reference to the passage from Luke in which Mary is given over to remembrance – cf. Lk 2:19). Mothers appear in varying contexts and shapes within Sölle's poetry: poems that explicitly address the mother of the poetic persona utilise images of trees, whereas tears are invoked not only to express women-mothers' losses, but also for expressing the difficulty of entering into solidarity with (other) mothers³⁹⁹.

³⁹⁹ Solidarity is key in "Chile in the summer of 1978" [FL 62], "For a wet heart" [VL 104], "Retrieving" [ZU 139] – poems addressing the terror tactics of disappearing in South America. Other poems address the joys of motherhood, specifically in light of an intergenerational exchange – "Portrait of an old nun in denver colorado" [VL 44]. For brevity's sake I restricted this study to those texts featuring a relationship with water, which rendered the selection with more traditional images of motherhood under reworking in Sölle's poetry. Her work indicates a poetic dialectic between the solidarity established between the lovers and the emancipation necessary from the mother (as a role) that

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Discussing the importance of emancipating ourselves from a phallogocentric interpretation of “the” m/Mother (pointing specifically to the figure of Mary), without scapegoating the mother in the process, requires more than simply affirming presences; it requires reconciliation of the differences arising between the semiotic and the symbolic (a project that far outreaches Sölle’s poetic, but whose *desired* effects are at the forefront of much of her thinking specifically with regards to the role of memory, in my view). This is why the final section of analysis will turn prominently to the question of co-creation in artistic expressions. I will begin here by a discussion of motherhood in self and other-identifications: in “Open hands” [LL36] the mother finds identification by the address of the poetic persona, whereas in “I’m playing the guitar you say to me” [BR81] it is the mother who addresses her child, as much as she addresses her role in the figure of the guitar as musical intercessor with her child. Only in “Pietà or the shekinah of god” [VL 47] do we find that motherhood is displaced by bereavement to which the poem responds in careful negotiation of the embodied loss. This flags up mothers’ roles as distinct points of entry into a deprivatised body of prayer-poetry that encourages participation and creative involvement: instead of the emphasis on discipline and obedience fostered “in the name of the Father”, Sölle’s interpretation of Mary (and other women) characterised by a “creative disobedience” or subversive obedience is crucial⁴⁰⁰. That Sölle is keenly aware not to introduce an overbearing mother, or overburdening the projection of a motherly figure in the economy of her writing, comes to the fore most strongly in light of poems that

enables a renewed solidarity amongst the generations. Generations – this is not insignificant – are a crucial category for investigation in much of German literature, cf. Laurel Cohen-Pfister and Susanne Veas-Gulani (ed.), *Generational Shifts in Contemporary German Culture*, Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2010), 96.

⁴⁰⁰ In Dorothee Sölle’s “Phantasie und Gehorsam,” Bd.3, “Politische Theologie,” Bd.1, and the essay “Mary is a Sympathizer,” in *The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity*, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1984).

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concentrate on the transmission of experiences, and the challenges of building upon a consciousness in memory that is transmitted across gender difference.

While I cannot give scope to the numerous other treatments of mothers in Sölle's work, I will provide comments to situate the characteristic differences in treatment of mothers presented here.

3.3.1. "Open hands" [LL 36]

The mother in patriarchal culture has often been rendered as a threatening image. To get back to "mother", in real terms, one needs to step beyond the monolithic "the" and its sentimental halos that restrict her body, her (self)-image, and her sexuality. Let me begin by reflecting on "Open hands" [LL36]. The opening line is kept ambiguous, so that we are not sure if this is a prayer to God about the mother, or God herself is addressed as mother. Reading the situation in the spirit of the latter, Sölle, in the other-identification of God as mother, appears to criticise an underpinning phallocentrism by which the terms in which mothers find representation can be negotiated. If the mother simply replaces the father in our reverence/reference to God nothing is yet gained in the course of this displacement in relationship to an eternal feminine. "She" is, just as the father before her, phallic, and we succumb to a position of inferiority underpinning the power-relations of any hierarchical system. LL36 brings this point home by agonising over the expectation of encountering a phallic mother: a mother so utterly powerful and rich that all we need to do is ask! The question remains how this asking serves the relationship with the mother. Do we bring nothing other to the relationship than "lack"? Upon asking, the poetic persona comes to recognise not the mother herself, but her castration: there is nothing to give and the lesson is futile. In this sense the castration is mutual: not only does the mother not fulfil (and thus does lose her image as absolutely plentiful), she also cannot rescue the poetic supplicant from the humiliation of begging. The poem's tenor points to another direction yet. It problematises the manner and expectation of prayerful exchange (typically

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operative in the signification of confession and intercession), and the attachment to nourishment and nurture implicit (or at least implicated) in the role of mothering. What does our asking point towards? In the recognition of ours and other's needs, where do we place the/our mother(s)?

On the premise that we are created in God's image, "Open hands" [LL 36] offers us an example of frustrated self-identification. In the wish to be mimicking a divine mother, the poetic persona recognises her inability to create



life, as she feels herself bound up in the empty gestures of her open but empty hands. The image is dead, has no resemblance and no connection to life in dignity and enjoyment amidst the loving and caring relationship anticipated or at least desired for by the image of God as mother: ' [REDACTED]' (l.17)! God as parent and benevolent teacher pre-existing (her) creation is made suspicious by the unavailability of the promises (of power?) received in face of disasters such as Chernobyl. The invitation to ask is not met with an equal assurance against fear. The final stanza hints at the underlying problem of the poetic persona, namely, to be asking compassionate questions in order to change the face (image) of the earth, and refuse the cold indifference of the ever-threatening nothingness. What happens in the exposure of this lie, and the death of the image – mother, poem and stone?

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While the image of the male-creator God has traditionally found its defence against theodicy in the notion, amongst others, of Christian freedom – after all, humanity was blessed with autonomous will – the female imagery employed here problematises such defences. How? Instead of attributing the evil in the world with personal sinfulness, absolving God from implications in sin (and after all, *this* God, tradition tells us, sacrifices his son to put our case right with him...) the poem identifies a world in which relational gestures no longer serve to bring forth creative, living responses. In the relationship between ‘God my mother’ (l.1) and the material condition of existence envisioned as a dyadic playfulness (‘██████████’, l.4), a move from the plentiful one to the dependent many is experienced by the poetic I as being faced with the deadening isolation of finding no echoes, no mutual responsiveness and no meaning in continuing to repeat the model that the persona had assumed to be normative for creation – motherhood. Copying the role model “mother” does not lead out of dependence; it intensifies it, it radicalises dependencies. It does not release the subject from the burdens of sin – if sin is still the category for social and “natural” (“objective”) injustices, but adds a new dimension to it, because sin is no longer identified as the deserved punishment for the subject, but is a threat to be held out in face of those more vulnerable in creation. As mother, God is defined against her relationship to her children, and against her function as provider and nourishing presence.

Thus, the suffering of her creation is negatively attributed to an assumed neglect of care on her part, and her presence effaced by the identification with the passivity of stones, dead to the gestures of life that presupposed her condition as mother: her sharing and life-giving nature. The ideal mother, whose falseness is keenly felt by the poetic persona, cannot retain herself, is effaced by her creation because she has no being outside of sustaining the life of another at her own expense. Whereas the mother-God as infinitely plentiful cannot fully be exhausted

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– or extracted from the idealisation received⁴⁰¹ – neither can creation attain to self-recognition on the grounds of its dependency. But this infinity contradicts any sense of consequence for our actions. This naively conceived dependence shrouds a more sinister exploitative economy. Our retribution against (exploitation of) the divine mother rests on the resentment of her as that being to which we owe our sustenance. And yet, this belies our experience. It belies the anger which the poetic persona identifies in the face of this lie – which is at once a lie to herself, a false expectation and sense of security about God the mother who does not here will to be herself, but negates herself in her creation.

The “mother” nourishes, the “father” punishes – within the sexist ideology underwriting the image of a male creator God and His defence, women do not attain to the position of autonomous willing. (As we can still see today in some Pentecostal theologies, women are not granted autonomy: they are commanded to obey – father and subsequently husband.) A woman who utters her will to be one dissonant with that of male authority is stereotypically deemed wilful, and wayward, and consequently no longer protected by the laws established by the “father”. The assumption remains that the mother ought to be caring in order to be truthful to her role as mother, beyond her anatomical relationship in pregnancy until birth, and feeding the baby until weaning. What is being offered as natural consequence of motherhood is a socially coercive role which ostensibly negates any true affection between child and mother, one where the mother would not find herself exclusively defined by her “function”; she, too, would continue to be in creation of herself.

The ‘lie’ exposed in the poem is twofold: firstly, the image that is given of God is a lie, insofar as it belies the reality which we are facing, by offering a

⁴⁰¹ And on those grounds, she draws upon herself the resentment of her creation, as if she refused to yield what she was destined to give (up).

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romanticised understanding of the role-model “mother”. The scandal of this female creator God, the mother of creation, rests with the frustration about a mother who is in fact not in charge, who cannot command (create) the world in her image.

Infinity may characterise her care, but not her resources. Secondly, the poem questions the devotion to such a romantic ideal, as a reverse image of a patriarchal God. Mother God does not condition creation sufficiently where she is described solely in terms of reproduction, a model for repetition, rather than co-/creation. In the face of a humiliated earth, the mother cannot but incite to ask different questions, which at times might only know one response, the solidarity of grieving. This is at once an image of a mother which exposes the myth of the self-sacrificing mother and unmasks her societal infringement: as woman she is made to suffer, and is not issued with the power and control to decide upon the destiny of herself, or those she begets. Thus, the ‘lie’ rests in the connection drawn out by the wishing and asking, hers and ours.

Theologically, this places the representation of the mother at the heart of the question raised by Sölle on the role of *Stellvertretung*: each role lives by the tension between its material condition and its transformative capacity. The mother, as a source and mirror (cf. Section 3.1) to our self-relation in community, bears the seeds for our apprehension of the existential dimension of sin. Sölle articulates this in close proximity to the work of Søren Kierkegaard⁴⁰² when she writes:

⁴⁰² Søren Kierkegaard notes that the formula for genuinely not being in despair is also the formula for faith, a premise I retained in my use of the relation between faith and the life of prayer. Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980) 49.

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Sin is much more a matter of despair than of disobedience and idolatry. Sanctification, not mere justification, is the result of salvation. That we are created in the image of God connotes neither the total mystical union between God and humanity nor the total otherness of God⁴⁰³.

If what is asked for in prayer is for our own personal justification, for our own personal gain or sense of self-worth, then not only do we betray the ethical demand inherent in any act of creation (with references to the resources we draw from and the relationship we build with others), but we misunderstand our own relationship with the divine we supposedly petition in prayer. To be giving up opening our hands, questioning God in the face of the earth, in our worldly sociality, is to fall into despair. 'For even if this self does not go so far into despair that it becomes an imaginatively constructed god – no derived self can give itself from first to last: in its self-redoubling it becomes neither more nor less than itself⁴⁰⁴. In Kierkegaard's description of the case in which despair is rooted in a wish to be oneself we see a peculiar move from the self's introspection to the absolutising of this self's self-relation or inflated self-image. What could be deemed a case of narcissism is also a case of fearful ambivalence towards the means by which to relate to the world. The agony of the poetic I in response to the lack of care in the world inspires fear and defiance simultaneously.

Fear induced by the mother's neglect of the world is expressed as a cutting off from divine providence (of being nothing but dead image, stone), as much as the fear of finding herself to have attempted to imagine herself the image of a divinity that does not exist, or who is ostensibly reduced to nothingness (being image to nobody in the literal and figurative sense). Fear in both cases denies a positive identity with the mother, leading to an estranged relationship with that romanticised ideal to which the mother had been reduced. Fear is expressed in defiance insofar as the self-recognition of the stony image confines the self's self-

⁴⁰³ Sölle and Cloyes, *To Work and to Love*, 45.

⁴⁰⁴ Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, 69.

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relation in its narcissistic foreclosure from any relational transcendence to itself, or any other. Instead of struggling in anticipation of the sanctification of the world, the poetic persona discontinues her obedience and dependence to God the mother. Instead of asking anew what it might be we are given in the image of the mother, the poetic persona detaches herself from the rightly identified mis-relation without therefore yet gaining herself. Read in view of identity politics in psycho-analytical discourse, the self can only emerge from a position of recognising desire of another as constitutive of the act of self-creation, and creation at large; the self invents itself in a state of desire which is dreaming. In the naming of the desire the self and the other change their beings towards being in relation while simultaneously emerging as differentiated beings. A narcissistic abnegation of desire as “failure of the other” aborts the wish for the other, aborts imagining relation to the other. Here becoming image to nobody truly means that our repressed desires reinforce a narcissistic navel gazing without which this self cannot continue to identify its negation (and that means, its desire’s negation) with the other who now is perceived both as threat and as bearer of negativity, cause and origin of the experienced lack.

What ‘God my mother’ (l.1) teaches is to open our hands in praise, charity and pleading – she teaches prayer. With an emphasis on the work of our hands (Sölle repeats a phrase attributed to Teresa of Avila many times to emphasise that “God has no other hands but ours”), eager and active to relate to and join in creation, the final stanza carries the weight of disappointment and discomfort: having learned that nothing can be venerated to retain its gracefulness and sacred character by virtue of holding to a notion of divine creator, we begin to note that everything becomes liable to abuse, including our conception of self, of (living) creation: we are dead images, made from stone with nothing to offer, no sense and no feeling, to change the world. Here the image of the closed hands, characteristic of common gestures of prayer, has nothing of the reassurance and gathering of self;

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instead, it reduces us to nothingness. It serves here the poetic persona's recognition of a futile projecting of an image of God as omnipotent care-taker that should prevent the self from slipping into nihilism. Neither God the father, nor God the mother, thought of in terms of traditional role-models of power, enable the collaborative actions needed for envisioning (creating) a world that can claim justification, i.e. find itself at unity with its inhabitants. Joining hands in prayer means to come together in sharing – without the death-wish of possession, the sickness unto death Kierkegaard calls despair. Neither a focus on God, self or creation can offer a holistic image on which to mould ourselves. We have to proceed in performative encounters.

In considering herself 'image to nobody' the poetic persona bespeaks a condition typical to a modernistic nihilism that knows itself no longer in reference to an other. In this the poem speaks to a passage from 2 Timothy: 'For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, and boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, ..., holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power'⁴⁰⁵, which in its Greek text features the verb *astorgos*, often rendered as hard-heartedness⁴⁰⁶. The poetic persona finds herself made from 'stones,' confined to a hardened shell, rather than being one with the earth with all its seasonal transformations for which she yearns. The poetic persona's expression is not one of resignation, but of agony at the realisation of this alienation. In Sölle's work, the 'earth has memory'; the earth and God are of one element. A passage reworked in numerous poems by Sölle, taken

⁴⁰⁵ 2 Tim 3:2-5 (NRSV).

⁴⁰⁶ *Astorgos* is a transliteration of an adjective derived from a verb, and takes the form in the original Greek text as *astorgoi*, since it is modifying the plural "people" (*anthropoi*). According to Fritz Reinecker's *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (trans. Cleon Rogers [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976, 1980], p. 644], *astorgos* means "unloving, without family affection, without love of kindred, destitute of love toward those for whom nature herself claims it. The verb without the neg. pref. [i.e. "a-"] denotes primarily and properly the love between parents and children".

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from the prophet Ezekiel makes this clear: ‘I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh’⁴⁰⁷. And yet, stones are not univocally negatively marked. While commonly associated with death (reminiscent of the Jewish practice of placing stones onto a grave upon visiting, as much as tomb stones themselves), they also provide a directive for memory in the flow of time. When the poetic persona laments her being imagined by a creator God who does not serve to protect life, her likening to death is predetermined – God as mother here is accused of ceasing to dream and imagine her child as one being alive. Being imagined by God, another form (and more crucially, another direction!) of dreaming, is a recurring topos in Sölle’s writing⁴⁰⁸. Memory is a corporeal existence, and like stones in a riverbed, impact upon the speed and direction of its flow, marking its interactive boundaries. Conceptually memory serves an ethical function to dreaming in prayers of intercession where the dead are re-membered for the sake of a future, communitative identity so important to Sölle’s understanding of history and the role of God that Sölle problematises in her considerations on the death, absence and powerlessness/unconsciousness of God (official trans. reads “helplessness”).

Having left the all-powerful, all-plentiful, and all-benevolent Mother-God-Substitute behind us, we find that the challenge posed to the mother in “Open hands” [LL 36] is measured against the potential for co-creation on part of the child as differentiated other. In contrast to lovers, where their identities were gathered in the prayer-poetry around the modality of coming together (an approach that constitutes each partner in their partiality towards each other [3.2]),

⁴⁰⁷ Ez. 36:26 (NRSV).

⁴⁰⁸ A collection of exegetical essays is entitled *Träume mich, Gott: Geistliche Texte mit lästigen politischen Fragen* (1994) (Dream me, God: spiritual texts with annoying political questions), where we also find a reprint of her reworking of Mt. 25:31-46 and her frequent allusions at the close of the poem to Psalm 1 (cf. “I your tree” [LL 12]).

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mothers' identities are pluralistic: they are gendered and sexuate identities, but also critically tied into the instituting dynamics of their role within society.

Inverting the direction of analysis here, mothers find identification in a succession of departures⁴⁰⁹ which the loving relationship (marked by the term solidarity) between mother and child counteracts. Supposing an underlying intention in mothering that fosters children to become *loving* adults, the recognition of the mother as well as of the child relies on the acceptance of generational difference, i.e. their differing positionality towards the work of creation experienced in maternity (and maturity). This is not to say that age is, in itself, a marker for this generational difference. While mothering proposes a different perspective on maturity, challenging and nurturing the identity formation in the child, the role of the foetus in maternity and later the child in motherhood brings its own subjectivity to bear on the kind of creative engagement given to this nurture. Where the mother had to determine her own otherness within herself already during pregnancy, the mutual recognition of child and mother negotiates the mother's body from the vantage point of this generational difference⁴¹⁰. In the present context I focus on the exchange and negotiation of roles between mother and child, with a primary focus on the mother's subjectivity developed in the chosen poems.

3.3.2. "I'm playing the guitar you say to me" [BR 81]

⁴⁰⁹ Reminiscent of the 'expatriate' that is the child in Kristeva's "Stabat Mater," 146 – Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," trans. Arthur Goldhammer, in *Poetics Today*, Vol. 6, No.1/2, 1985, 133-152.

⁴¹⁰ A fabulous poem treating an imagined maternal relation between the poetic persona and a nun can be found with "Portrait of an old nun in denver colorado" [VL 44], which draws explicit attention to the sexuate nature of the mother-daughter relationship. Unfortunately I could not include this poem in the scope of analysis presented here.

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Although BR81 does not feature water prominently in the text, its reference to crying opens out a number of relations that pervade Sölle's poetic oeuvre, and the selections made for this study. Tears in Sölle's work are rarely a mark of loss, exhaustion or anxiety, but more often are the gift of solidarity amidst the struggles⁴¹¹. BR81 points to a more problematic construction of solidarity and the image of the mother, precisely because it is not the telling of a Mater dolorosa, but of a transitioning

relationship in mothering.

The poetic persona who gets to be identified as the mother initiates a transference in the course of her address to her son by offering the title of mother to the guitar he is playing. The level of intimacy and the wish to join together in action/participation marks the vision Sölle has of motherhood were it not governed by fears on both sides of the relationship⁴¹².

Lines such as [REDACTED]



⁴¹¹ "Give me the gift of tears" [FL 35] and "For a wet heart" [VL 104] are prominent cases of this.

⁴¹² Interestingly the relations narrated between mother and daughter do not seem to share this point of contention. "Mother and daughter go for a walk" [ZU 37] for example shifts between the wandering couple and the lizards they observe at play on their walk.

████████████████████' (ll.9f.) and '████████████████████'
 (l.15) draw this out from the perspective of the mother⁴¹³. The latent break-down in communication that her transference veils, is voiced by the allusions to the song “All my trials” (trad.): ‘your mother was born to die’. Fear and desire are repeated focal points in the earlier considerations on the mother’s body and sexuality, and are here played out in the communicatory situation, of speaking and keeping silent and of the music that is invited to bridge that void – the fear of death (of the relationship). Elizabeth Grosz offers an excellent outline of Kristeva’s notion of the abject that comes to bear on my reading of the guitar:

If the object is the external support of the subject, the abject is more the fading, instability or even the disappearance of the subject, its precarious, imaginary hold on the object. The abject is that part of the subject it attempts to expel, but which is refused the status of object. It is the symptom of the object’s failure to fill and define the subject⁴¹⁴.

Initially, the guitar is cast in support of the mother, as physical object, but at the same time, this object is out of reach from her apart for the imaginary conversation instigated through the poem. Only insofar as the poem recognises the guitar’s ability to “speak”, the guitar does not ultimately fail in her/its function to define the subject: maternal relation. Instead of trying to expel the guitar from discourse, as a hindrance to engagement between her son and herself, the poetic persona takes on a perspective by indirection. The guitar contours the abject relationship that otherwise would be beyond signification by its song – the hushed tears of the child, namely the mother of the poem (i.e. the poetic persona). Her instability and vulnerability are addressed by the voice of the guitar: ‘your mother was born to

⁴¹³ A poem such as “In the house of the ogre-man” [BR 15] may be deemed to show the reverse, i.e. the perspective of the daughter to her father. However, the ogre-man, aside from being a reference point with US politics during the Cold War, is to be understood primarily as a metaphorical image of male aggression.

⁴¹⁴ Elisabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Crows Nest, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1989), 72.

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die'. These words, however, also belong to the son, are part of his performance in singing.

Christiane Olivier offers a significant insight into the relationship of motherhood and the embodiment of the law of the father, in patriarchal speech, that may help to elucidate the problematic role of the guitar further:

If we accept the share of language that he has in mind for us, we accept silence... To become what the other wants us to be, to give expression to what he thinks: could any death be worse? Man is not equipped to give birth, even if woman runs to him in the hope of being "delivered". The only woman he can give birth to will be still-born⁴¹⁵.

Allusions to still-birth, to abortion and the death of children are numerous in Sölle's work and have to be understood, just as love-making and the wider discourse surrounding sexuality, on a broader scale of reference. In the context of BR81, at least on one level of reading, we have a communication that has not been delivered. The son's engrossment in his play is a refusal to engage with the mother. However, the poetic persona reclaims a share in his language in identifying the guitar as mother, subverting her silencing and the refusal to answer her questions by drawing into a different kind of proximity to him, one where she no longer demands, but listens. The close of the first stanza complicates this relationship between mother, guitar and son: [REDACTED] can be read in two ways. It may refer to the mother greeting the guitar (now shared focus between her [mother] and her son), or it can be read as a recognition that the mother has become for her son the guitar. The reference to age likewise remains ambiguous. Whether it is the mother who has become the old mother in recognition of the guitar, or the guitar being the old mother who was there before the son's mother (or even before the son's mother was with child) does not

⁴¹⁵ Christiane Olivier, *Jocasta's Children: The Imprints of the Mother*, trans. George Craig (London: Routledge, 1989), 112.

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invalidate this reading, but points to a further complexity in identifying the tenor of the poem. What is clear at this stage is that in recognition of their (mother and guitar) mutual need for attention (a sign of participation/ interaction) by the son, the guitar serves as a go-between or indirection to the intended interaction. (Stanza Two picks this up in view of the hope for voluntary engagement, indicative of the son's autonomy from her [mother].)

Grasping the gift of being in the moment with her, sharing his pleasure (of playing the guitar) with her, the poetic persona says, 'tell her not to be coy!' No false shame of fear of being exposed in such a way that would compromise the "image" of the mother ought to be present in their interaction. The participation of their (three-way) conversation is mutual, once the son is tasked to pass on the greetings to the guitar. However, a hint of sadness is detectable. The focus of a shared existence between mother and son, an existence that orientated the one on the other, has given way to a more mediated relationship presented in the tears that are as much the mother's as the guitar's and the son's. From one perspective, the mother is set in competition with the guitar. It is the mother's greeting that diffuses the danger of a substitution or replacement amongst the three. She [mother], too, has a relationship to this guitar, the old mother. Just as the song (be they spoken or unspoken words) of her son is accompanied by the playing of the guitar, so the poem of his mother accompanies him. Thus the poem in its retracing of the 'old mother' [guitar] is a prayer of resisting the fear of death reiterated in the song. The framework of prayer-poetry at this point serves the mother to have the shame of her isolation from her son taken away from her and instead join in in solidarity with the guitar. She is able to reposition herself not as victim of a fearful exchange, but as one who attests to the creative reworkings of their relationship where her nurture is not the sole or everlasting reference point between them.

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Stanza Two makes the tension, implicit in the first stanza, explicit: the mother does not want to expose her fears to her son by holding on to a role of herself that he has outgrown. Thus, the resistance this poem traces is twofold: internal for the mother and external in the communication between mother and son. Finding a place for mutual recognition, akin to the sisterhood emphasised in other poems, appears a more difficult task between mother and son. Listening for the guitar's voice, the mother, having held back her own fears, does also not want to force her son into submission by making him expose himself to her. However, she does not abandon the relationship either, even though it takes on a different direction: 'she makes me happy your guitar' bespeaks the relief of identifying the pleasure of engagement against an object other than herself. What remains unsaid between her and her son, the guitar becomes the messenger for, allowing the mother to forget (at least momentarily) the fears and worries that beset her usual questions. It also enables the son to confer a different relationship to his mother. Thus, in the final stanza the subjectivities between mother and son can be read to have found some form of resolution. It sees the death of the mother without the disappearance of either the son's or the mother's subjectivity as a co-creative development. In the transference with the guitar something else has been passed on, a connection that breaches the fears of isolation and abandonment. The guitar is the abject object, not for the son, but for the poetic persona (mother). In accepting her death (song), the poetic persona is born in/to a new relationship with her son as one in which her son is not isolated from her generation, but active participant in the mothering work of consolations music imparts, as the grandmother in this intergenerational exchange.

3.3.3. "Pietà or the shekinah of god" [VL 47]

Where Section 3.2 expounded a juxtaposition between felicity and grief that posited felicity as the more insurmountable to mediation, "Pietà or the shekinah of god" [VL 47] attests to the personal and public relationship built by grief in relation

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to the body “left behind”. This is not only the corpse, the remains of the beloved who is being mourned; it is also the body (and bodies) of those living, who are tasked to reconceive the relationship to the departed, and reinventing themselves in relation thereto. Focussing on this consideration for lack – in VL47 here, and FL69 in the subsequent section – the *figure* of Mary comes to contrast with her particular role for women in intercession. Not the smooth, fair featured medium, the Mediatrix, but the broken body of the Pietà mirrors back to the reader how the female body, the conception of woman and mother, relies upon its recognition by another. The reception of Mary within Protestant theology has been scarce and Sölle’s free incorporation of devotional practices that exceed a Protestant frame of reference is a telling marker of the kind of (ecumenical) perspective that can be gleaned from her work. What Sölle makes clear in her theological writings on Mary is that she is not willing to give up on an aspect of tradition if it can be found to have any potential for serving the cause of liberation. To her understanding, Mary is submissive, but also subversive⁴¹⁶. Thus, and this is crucial, Mary’s dolorous tears are missing in Sölle’s poetic reworking of the Pietà in VL44.

Mary’s construction within a patriarchal church harnesses an interpretation of power that requires submissive restraint on the part of the feminine; subduing her agency. She is the guardian vessel, and her power, the phallus, remains resolutely in the hands of male authority. In its idealised feminine attachment it is at once removed from the threat of death – the phallic Mary is a vehicle to resurrecting male power, and to this end her suffering *ad infinitum* becomes glorified in the depiction of the Mater dolorosa. Her tears serve the affirmation of male power, and not the healing process of mourning. What remains concealed from Mary’s ambiguous relationship to power is her self-image. As Lisa Isherwood put it so poignantly:

⁴¹⁶ Sölle and Cloyes, *The Strength of the Weak*, 46.

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[F]eminists have to ask what is being smoothed and what “matured” if the phallus is not detachable from the mother. This constructed mother has a phallus where an umbilicus should be – a rigid organ of meaning in place of a flaccid life-rich aid to becoming, the cutting of which sets the process of individuation on its inevitable way⁴¹⁷.

Reading Mary as phallic Mother of male desire (I forego Isherwood’s specific concern for the fetish here) renders her ‘a complete objectification for self gratification based on lack of human relationality’⁴¹⁸ – an empty vessel into which male desire pours itself (cathexis). What many discussions, particularly of Catholic devotion to the Virgin Mary, have brought to the fore is a discourse on purity and pollution that is intimately tied to the question of human sex and sexuality. Carnal sin, the body, sex – in their negative connotation – have been repeatedly attached to the female body, whereas the male body has been redeemed in its power of sublimation and position in sacrifice. Mary is the mother without sexuality, if not altogether the sexless angel. Her veiled figure contrasts with the naked depictions of Eve, and in strong correlation she embodies the redemption of Eve, as Christ embodies the redemption of Adam. And yet, such a neat parallelism was eschewed by the Church Fathers. Mary’s serving role does not lead to a deserving recognition of the work

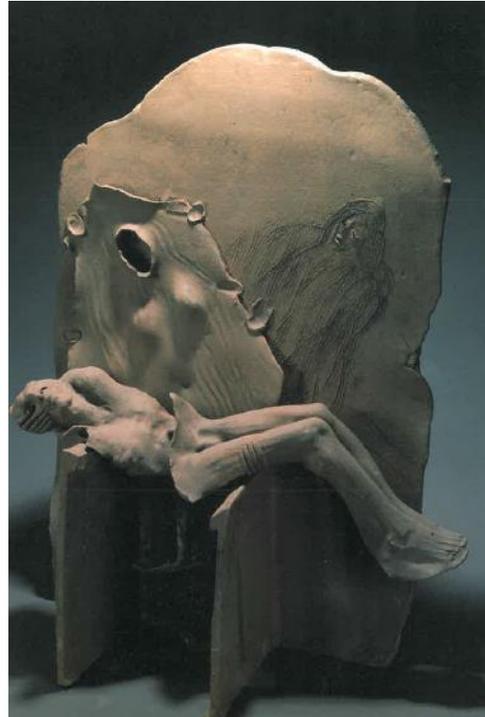


Image 2: *Pietà* (1981) by Mary Frank

Ceramic, 36 3/4 x 28 1/2 x 17”
Collection the Artist

Photographed by Ralph Gabriner

© Abrams, New York 1990. Reprinted with kind permission by the publisher.

⁴¹⁷ Lisa Isherwood, “Our Lady of Perpetual Succour: Mother of Phallic Fetishes? [Queering the Queen of Heaven],” in *Post-Christian Feminisms: A Critical Approach*, ed. Lisa Isherwood and Kathleen McPhillips (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 119.

⁴¹⁸ Isherwood, “Our Lady of Perpetual Succour,” 120.

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she undertook, neither does her reception in a male dominated tradition enable a



view of Mary that speaks to women as women.

Reminding ourselves of the crucial issues emerging from previous sections of this thesis, attributing a sexuate identity is a key project in affirming Mary as a (potentially) subversive figure through her interpretive function for motherhood. To Sölle, the Magnificat exemplifies Mary's 'unconditional acceptance'⁴¹⁹ of mothering (in spite of an unwanted pregnancy). This Mary is not ultimately powerful, but tirelessly protective of creation. Mary's motherhood is radically merciful because 'she did not operate on the principle that everyone should get what he or she deserves, a principle that leaves inequality of opportunity intact'⁴²⁰. In her obedience, the Mary of Sölle's interpretation is not the angelic figure. She is the woman who defies her own position of inequality with a resistance to the judgement of others by

⁴¹⁹ Sölle, "Mary is a Sympathizer," 45.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 45.

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embracing a new life – that of her baby and of herself as mother. This marks a very different reading to the Mary of Patriarchy. Sölle explores the dynamics of the phallic Mary in terms of a desexualised symbol for women ‘to teach self-oppression’⁴²¹. Mary’s strategic idealisation serves systemic domination. It is Julia Kristeva who points out that the

ordering of the maternal libido is carried farthest in connection with the theme of death. The *Mater dolorosa* knows no male body except that of her dead son, and her only pathos (which is sharply distinguished from the sweet and somewhat absent serenity of the lactating Madonnas) comes from the tears she sheds over a corpse⁴²².

In Kristeva’s description we touch upon a problematic correlation in the phallic mother’s will to power over life *and* death that is disconnected from her sexuality. What Mary gains in the life of her son, she loses in his death, phallic power. Where there is ‘no male body except that of her dead son’ to whom the *mater dolorosa* would relate (the “real” father in heaven clearly remains absent for imparting consolation), the mother is left bereft of her phallic power. Valorising the unique relationship between mother and son without casting power as the ultimate possession of either party, praying over the situation of loss exemplified by the figure of Mary requires a careful redressing of her sexual identity as mother grieving for her child. Transformation harbours in the tears shed ‘over a corpse’.

With “Pietà” [VL 47], as a depiction of Mary at the threshold of identity, the reader encounters a doubled recognition of the pain of loss and self-loss amidst the grieving: we can identify both, the traditional phallic interpretation she received, and which Kristeva alerts us to, as well as trace the moments of empowering weakness – namely her receptiveness (really a form of attentiveness) to the world – of which Mary’s subversive potential speaks according to Sölle. Mary is a

⁴²¹ Ibid., 42.

⁴²² Kristeva, “Stabat Mater,” 144.

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sympathiser. Written in reference to the sculpture by the artist Mary Frank (1981), the poem emphasises a certain obedience to pain that has enveloped the Pietà – [REDACTED]’ – as she has lost not only the son she mourns, but the means by which to recognise her gestures towards loss. Mary is not only a sympathiser to all manner of living, in the figure of the Pietà Mary also harbours sympathy for death. To reconceive of herself in life, Mary needs the sympathy of others if she is to recognise herself as bereaved mother. In the juxtaposition of the two bodies depicted in the poem Mary is helpless, deformed and distorted by comparison to the ‘smooth limbs perfect body’ which she continues to hold on to; [REDACTED] [REDACTED]’ (V1 47). The dead, male body is smoothed, eternalised, perfected – and frightening. As Kristeva observes regarding traditional depictions of the *mater dolorosa*, the death of the male is given over to a source of power that serves to transfer and sublimate its existence. ‘Mary’s suffering has nothing of tragic excess about it: joy and indeed a kind of triumph supplant her tears, as if the conviction that death does not exist were an unreasonable but unshakeable maternal certainty’⁴²³.

Sölle marks this kind of reading by a caution against typical associations with “charity”, as ultimately self-serving, as following a judgment rather than the ready acceptance of the needs of life, irrespective of circumstance. In the poem, we find no resonance with triumph. Precisely because it is not Mary who strikes us with her traditional dolorous beauty, we are given to understand that Mary is a ghost unto herself – her care for the dead body is but a futile echo; it achieves nothing for herself, but it externalises her own fractured relationship to her son. Here, ‘maternal certainty’ is unsustainable, because in the *wake* of her pain she finds herself overwhelmed by it. The ‘unreasonable’ care for the dead body rehearses a modality in the relationship between Mary and her son which lost its

⁴²³ Ibid., 144.

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reciprocity. Grieving threatens with self-loss. Without the memory of the face that belongs to her, if only in the past, [REDACTED]’ (l.25f.), Mary remains mute and isolated from both the child she carries, and the humanity of living in relationship. She cannot *own* her pain, as long as she cannot give to it a human face:

[REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
 (ll.29-33)

In her grieving motherhood, mirroring the love she held for her child, Mary retains a relationship to her dead child that forces her to let herself be carried away, to share the death of her son by abandoning herself, and sending her soul into exile. This ‘Mary rejects “performance” as a measure of human value’⁴²⁴, in the poem one such performance is “living”. In this way her silence marks a necessary response to her affliction⁴²⁵. What she once held no longer remains; her grief has gone to journey along in search of her lost son.

The strength of the Pietà rests in her persistent witness to that loss despite the apparent defacement. Have past tears wiped away her face? Or is it the loss of tears, having been struck by shock over the loss of her son, that trap the mother at the verge of self-annihilation? As long as mourning persists in its muted stage, it cannot transcend its own suffering. The mourner cannot transition towards articulation until she has fully embodied her loss, giving her the physical means to articulate and recover a memory of the departed *and* herself in recognition of her grief. Negotiating the transition from care to grief, the depiction of the Pietà

⁴²⁴ Sölle, “Mary is a Sympathizer,” 45.

⁴²⁵ Her bodily memory of carrying her child is carried over as a mark of psychological pain to having been violently and irrevocably separated and is met by the societal speechlessness that renders this loss not only a tragedy, but a trauma.

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mourning does not mean we leave the dead behind, it means we await the consummation of her witness with patience: ‘Militance and charity are united in her, and she becomes an image of hope for those who have been cheated of their lives’⁴²⁷. In this way, the Pietà becomes a “sympathiser”⁴²⁸ with death, and her obedience to pain a subversive act in restoring her subjectivity without betraying her witness to the death of her son.

I note here then that the death of the son is not the mother’s end, nor is it her “phallic triumph”; instead it points to a relationship between delivery and death that is at the core of our experience with pain and crucial in the development of *com*-passion. In this, the Pietà mimics an older theological motif in prayer: the compassion of God with “his” creation. In the context of deprivatised prayer after the Death of God, the image conveys a similarly telling reading. Mary continues in prayer (i.e. care) to God (i.e. in the embodiment of her son, Jesus), even after his death. While this yields no “profit”, no reciprocity, no consolation, it does gesture towards an inclusiveness that reconciles the dead with the living; it delivers justice insofar as the care given in life continues and extends beyond the “act” of living. By doing so, peace, and that means in the context of grief a piece of consolation, serves as horizon for the gesture even where it cannot be attained from that gesture. In contrast to other poems presented here, “Pietà” [VL 47] retains a certain solitude of the image, albeit presented in the relationship between the living and the dead, that is recognised in the absent face whose tears have yet to be shed by another.

⁴²⁷ Sölle, “Mary is a Sympathizer,” 47.

⁴²⁸ *Sympatisant* in German has highly politicised connotations. As a term it serves to identify a person’s perspective towards a cause of action undertaken by another or group of other people. It belongs to a set of terms that were used to denigrate leftist political sentiments and activism. If you were party to the group undertaking action, you were considered a “subversive element”, posing a threat to the ruling system. A sympathiser was ‘guilty by association’. Cf. Sölle, “Mary is a Sympathizer,” 46.

3.3.4. Conclusions

Recognising the Other's difference needs to entail respecting another's positionality. Despite Sölle's repeated emphasis of solidarity within her prose and poetry, such solidarity does not come at all costs. Motherhood, in its institutionalised guise, seems particularly bolstered against any attempts at breaching its authoritative stronghold. However, Sölle not only flags up in "Open hands" [LL 36] a radical criticism of the phallic mother, but also voices a yearning for a mothering relation that transmits other values than those for which patriarchy has instituted its mothers. In this light, a deprivatised prayer that makes use of God in the image of a mother is not merely a redesignation of the Our Father, but challenges us to speak in gestures that do not belie our concerns and our relationships with our parents, or other parental figures. In "I'm playing the guitar you say to me" [BR 81] the transience of parental guidance, expressed in the worries and fears of the poetic persona, makes way for a intergenerational perspective in which the poetic persona departs from her old role into a more distant, but at once more equal observer of her son as she turns the conversation into an occasion of co-creation whose impulse has stemmed from the comforting presence of another medium for transmission: the guitar. Instead of disciplining her child, reprimanding or demanding attention to be directed at the conversation at hand, the mother recognises the change of conditions surrounding their communication, a differently contextualised prayer. Only in "Pietà" [VL 47] do we find this role of the mother displaced by bereavement. In the embrace of death, the "Pietà"-poem prompts her readers to negotiate the dying of the relationship between mother and son by returning the mothering compassion to the bereaved mother again. In our tears she may recognise herself, and remember her son.

3.4. Artists: Mediated Encounters

Water has served repeatedly as reference point for mediation, as context of encounter. However, over the course of analysis thus far we have increasingly

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noted the ways in which water relates to other elements, such as light, earth, and stones. Where water marks the fluidity and becoming relation between subjects, and is referenced repeatedly in view of love, sexuality and felicity, stones mark out the polar opposition in the performance of the flesh, its despair over not satisfying (not being bread). That such dualism must make us suspicious, working itself in a seemingly hetero-normative dialectic, must be noted here, but will itself serve as a point of clarification to come to focus in Chapter Four. What then will be picked up in terms of reception, analysis too must reflect in light of the role of the artist.

The artist who is deeply involved in the lives of others forges a link between art and human needs, rejecting the ideology of art for art's sake or art for the artist's sake. We desperately need artists and cultural workers who are accountable to their societies⁴²⁹.

A look at the role of the artist, whom Sölle charges here with a demand for ethical accountability, offers us here an interesting perspective for the envisioned, artful interaction.

The previous section has discussed the “Pietà” [VL 47] in the context of the role of the mother, even though it would have likewise merited to profile against the conception of the artist, being as it is a literary reworking of a piece of art, a sculpture. Sölle rarely focuses on the artist in a direct way, as the focus remains on the artist's creations. The plastic arts – sculptures and architecture in particular – feature in comparatively large number. In the context of art-works (contrasting to Sölle's theological appraisals), however, stones take on an increasing flexibility that I attribute to the performative capacity invoked for art⁴³⁰. Insofar as Sölle's

⁴²⁹ Sölle and Cloyes, *To Work and To Love*, 93.

⁴³⁰ The double-spiral staircase at Graz, for example, becomes a metaphor for the relation between heaven and earth in “Letter to the builder of the winding stairs into heaven at graz” [VL 83]. “Difficulties with chuck ‘n freddy” [VL 138] which I quote in regular intervals throughout this thesis, in defiance of the memorial for Karl Marx, celebrates his achievement in loosening up ‘hardened conditions’ (1.50).

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aesthetic vision does not prioritise the medium of expression by which we are given access to prayer (linguistic expression does not trump other media), it does foreground each medium's capacity for living transcendence. The ways in which Sölle envisions a transition from one piece of art-work to another (in the shape of her poetry) is giving body to a consciousness that is both individual and collective, and in that the *work*⁴³¹ reveals the artist in his or her making (cf. Mt. 7:16). This kind of description, however, (dis)places the artist and the role of the artist at the expense of an envisioned performance materialised in the art-work. The transformation of the "Pietà", we have seen in Section 3.2, did not rest in her flexibility, but in the endurance of herself in spite of herself: mourning displaced her creativity. In reading, our focus is not with the dead child for whom she mourns, but for the mother whose transformative pathway out of mourning requires our compassionate response to her loss.

Identifying the artist requires us to think further about the place from which the *work* of art issues in relation to the art-works; it is art that enables the birth of the artist. Tracing the creative process back to the artist in this manner identifies the artist as much with the mother and lover, as with the child. It is in relation to the question of gender – given by our concern with women's subjectivity, and the woman artist – that we have to recognise what is at stake in localising the place of the woman-artist. Luce Irigaray points to this in her discussion of the interval as a place of desire:

⁴³¹ Work to Sölle has three dimensions: it is 'self-expression, social-relatedness, and reconciliation with nature by way of this experience' (Sölle and Cloyes, *To Work and To Love*, 83.)

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It seems that a fetus [sic] would be in a place. And man's penis for as long as it is inside the woman. Woman is in the house, but this is not the same type of place as a living bodily site. On the other hand, place, in her, is in place, not only as organs but as vessel or receptacle. It is place twice over: as mother and as woman⁴³².

What Irigaray addresses as 'a living bodily site', Sölle addresses in her existential awareness of the individual rooted in community. Insofar as my study thus far has made use of feminist theory and discourses of the body in order to discuss and describe an emerging discourse on Sölle's prayer-poetry as woman's poetry, and the performative aspect of a deprivatised poetic of prayer at that, it is only consistent to the line of inquiry that the artist would emerge as the displaced place of woman-lover and mother. If the body of the prayer-poetry (the text) is itself the performatively constituted gendered body, then the artist in the same mode of transference is this body's consciousness, an intersubjective consciousness suspended between author, reader and text. Identifying mother and woman in analysis is the progenital consciousness of a work of art under the aegis of women's subjectivity that at all times creates itself in a heterogenous collectivity of consciousness-es. This interval, between role (ideal), and embodiment, situates and places readers and (their) works of art into a symbiotic relationship with the text. This however, leaves the text itself vulnerable, and naked for as long as we – as readers and co-creators – are not willing to risk putting ourselves in-line with the text. The call for creativity resides in the intertextual demands, the desire to be in a place. In this sense the thesis itself is a representative of deprivatised prayer, even though it has shifted its linguistic dress-code from poetry to analytical prose⁴³³.

⁴³² Luce Irigaray, "Place, Interval: A Reading of Aristotle, *Physics* IV," in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 52.

⁴³³ In light of the use of the term "co-creator" Sölle says: 'My creative power is my power to renew the world for someone or for a community. Through it I attempt to rebuild the house of life out of the

3.4.1. "Because all creatures need help from all" [FL 69]

Creators, workers, lovers – these are interchangeable titles to the same role in a process of becoming for Sölle (even when they may focus and structure the discourse surrounding the context of such becoming differently). Amongst the creatures needing help, I would like to propose the poem, as art-work, that needs the help of its readers to realise itself as the work of the artist, here thought of as the intersubjective consciousness opened up by the text between reader and author of the poem. If we allow ourselves the seemingly trite association between the 'shimmering blue' (l.25) and the



"blue planet", as a metaphor for the earth, one of the more fundamental starting points to Sölle's vision of creation comes to the fore: co-creational interdependence in the context of a global ecological vision. The brothers and sisters create [redacted] [redacted]' (ll.9f.): the [redacted]' (l.2) glass is not a factory production – it is "hand-made", it is mouth-blown. Ecology is not synonymous with economy in its capitalist dimension, but ecology is often understood in terms of processes of exchange nonetheless. The care expressed in

ruins in which we now live. One premise underlying my concept of co-creation is that the first creation is unfinished. Creation continues; it is an ongoing process' – Sölle and Cloyes, *To Work and To Love*, 37.

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the controlled motions of the glass-blowers translates in the poem into the playful caress observed in the poem between the colour of the glass (its specificity or corporeality), the light and the water. It also emphasises the combination between doing and saying; hand and mouth are raised as symbols of menial act and verbal act, which in a traditional idiom, come together in prayer in the folding of the hands and the utterance of the words of prayer. Prayer then is a creational act, and a performative act at that; saying and doing cannot be thought apart. In the writing of the poem, too, do the work of the hands, and the means of production in the verbal, its need for linguisticity, join together. Thus, the poetic persona's offering situates her in contemporaneity with her brothers and sisters, in turn [REDACTED] (ll.12f.).

The title of the poem tells its own, darker story: despite its echoes with religious sources. It derives from Bertolt Brecht's poem "Von der Kindsmörderin Marie Farrar" (1922) [Concerning the infanticide Marie Farrar]. Taking up a theme popular especially in 18th century German literature⁴³⁴, in the theme of infanticide Brecht uses the historical case of Susanna Margaretha Brandt's trial as a foil for his socio-critical ballad. Farrar's social disgrace of bearing a child out of wedlock, like her historical counterpart presumed guilty and sentenced to death⁴³⁵, is overturned in the final couplet of each stanza, appealing on behalf of Marie, and placing responsibility back in the hands of the reader: 'But you, I beg you, check your wrath and scorn / For man needs help from every creature born'⁴³⁶. With this in

⁴³⁴ Barbara Mabee, Art. "Infanticide" in *The Feminist Encyclopedia of German Literature*, 258f.

⁴³⁵ The case of infanticide has been taken up by various writers since the trial and execution by beheading of Susanna Margaretha Brandt in 1771 at Frankfurt a.M. Her case became the inspiration to Goethe's "Gretchen"-*Tragödie* in *Faust* (1775), to "Evchen" in Heinrich L. Wagner's *Die Kindermörderin* (1779), and to many others.

⁴³⁶The German line has *Kreatur* (creature, in the biblical association of creatureliness that encompasses the human) where the translation reads "man" in a presumably generic sense. The line of poetry is quoted from Bertolt Brecht, "Concerning the Infanticide, Marie Farrar," trans. H. R. Hays,

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mind, the title to Sölle's poem offers a possible indication on the source of pain that is needed to be swallowed in the poem. Having previously encountered the glass of water in section 3.2, where the form of the glass was contrasted with the bathroom sink, attitudes towards sex and sexuality come to the fore in the current poem again. Here, however, the relation to creative (and creational) processes is more pronounced, not in an antagonistic exchange with the 'young women' (ZU 145, l.2), but in collaboration with the 'sisters and brothers' (FL 69, l.25). The aspects of age and aging, here too find mention: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (ll.17-19). Set in contrast to the pain and humiliation of the second stanza, and succeeded by a parallel analogy with blindness, we are invited to correlate blindness with pain, as well as with youth. In this sense, youth is not the simple state of being, the blissful naivety glorified, but a troubled position, not only to the young person in pain that seems to be remembered here, but also to the older persona who has to live in response thereto.

At the centre of the poem, in Stanza Two, we have a phrase that resonates profoundly with the prayer of the rosary, the Hail Mary: 'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death'. The correlation of Sölle's text with the Hail Mary on the one hand, and Brecht's poem on the other, provides the context for an intricate response and dialogue focussed on the figure of the mediatrices Mary/Marie. However, the position of Marie differs from Mary's and from the poetic persona in a number of ways. Marie Farrar's story is reported to us for the sake of her child's death (or murder), not for her blessed offspring. She does not rejoice at the birth, she is overwhelmed by the demands. The persistent repetition to hear her out at the end of every stanza of Brecht's text reinforces our awareness of our position of and predisposition for judgment in the face of need. In fact, the text requires us to assume a position of negative judgment

in *World Poetry: Anthology of Verse from Antiquity to Our Time*, ed. by Katherine Washburn, John S. Major, and Clifton Fadiman (London: W.W. Norton Company, 1997), 908.

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on the poetic persona as a heuristic tool in order to enable us to see the dynamic of the situation Marie is facing in the text. The intention of the young Marie is set up negatively already in the title of the poem, which alludes to her as child-murderess (*Kindermörderin*). The poetic persona's plea of her innocence – or at least lack of bad intention despite suffocating her child⁴³⁷ – associates the 'pain of humiliation' of Sölle's poem for the reader with the loss of a child more than with the social disgrace of a pregnancy out of wedlock. Suffocation stands in for post-natal abortion. Despite the conscious choice involved in abortion nowadays, the pain that accompanies the loss of the foetus nevertheless requires emotional and physical healing⁴³⁸.

The other point of reference thrown up by the Hail Mary that is of interest to us here in the context of this study is the relationship of the rosary and the practice of indulgences that is associated with it. Sölle's poem assumes a perspective of reconciliation, where Brecht's is still pleading for redemption. While Brecht's text inspires pity and petitions the reader for absolving her case post-mortem, without denying her (potential) guilt, Sölle's text evokes an awareness of relations that exceed cause and consequence in favour of a creational sense of belonging-with all creation, in joy and suffering that ultimately announces

⁴³⁷ In "No more ashwednesday" [FL 31] with its reference to the Holocaust and the remaining traces of dead children in the context of a museum exhibition, suffocation is again used in correlation with shame.

⁴³⁸ In the poem "Aborting" [VL 7] Sölle extends the use 'abortion' as a metaphor for economic (and political) struggle for survival. Whereas the first stanza pictures the problem in view of the brutal, military violence, Stanza Two points to Western support of such outrageous practice. Stanza Three then gives over to the theological vocabulary [REDACTED] (ll.16f.). This is not only a reflection of the unfeeling (Schleiermacher's religious feeling springs to mind) attitudes, but also the neglectful care within society which is no longer in community or communion as religious language would assert. [REDACTED] (ll.18ff.) rejoins the pleading of Marie Farrar, and the muffled cries of her baby.

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reconciliation (or at least offers reconciliation up for creation): [REDACTED] [REDACTED]' (l.16). Marie's case is given in reported speech without ever giving the poetic voice over to her – Marie is irrevocably dead, even where the case by the poetic persona is made to her pardon in view of her sorrow and suffering. In Sölle's text it is the author whose [REDACTED] [REDACTED]' (ll.14f). In the reference to formulaic prayers of intercession, Mary is not the recipient. She is the sender. Instead of the plea for help, the poem poses itself as the timid work of intercession that is not passive, and not over-confident. I find a voice here that is not work-righteous, but self-conscious and obedient⁴³⁹ to the sorrows and joys which happen to be the material situation from which this voice emerges. Both as literary response to Brecht's poem, and a prayerful reflection of our readerly relation to humiliation, the poem not only identifies with the pain, it also lives to see the recovery from it (the reference to 'humiliation' of course equally carries connotations with the Stations of the Cross and the anticipated glorification of the incarnation in resurrection). This Mary, in contrast to the Pietà, has undergone the transformation that raised her from the dead.

To qualify this, let us return more directly to the issue raised at the start of the discussion about the artist. We noted before that the work of the artist is the realisation of the art-work in intersubjective consciousness. And to hark back to a common criticism of Sölle's theopoetry, that art is always at risk of aestheticising pain. With reference to consciousness it is fairly obvious that it is never art "itself" that aestheticises pain, but the artist or reader who identifies and interprets the material context to 'smooth over' (we remember Isherwood's diagnosis on the phallic mother) a painful encounter. If pain is a reality in the text, and is not smoothed over, then we have to identify the rupture of the text as a traumatic event (Kristeva's work again springs to mind). That Sölle's text to my mind has a more directly hopeful outlook, pointing to the transformation of the poetic persona in

⁴³⁹ Associative links with Gal. 5:22f.

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her relation to the Marian figures, and the glass of water in hand, is due to the responsive character of the text and the assertive ‘But’ (l.17) that introduces the final stanza which is given over, in typical prayer format, to the thanks of (and for) creation. In the ‘i never want to be so young again’ (l.17) the retrospective framing of the poem invites us to share. The glass of water, unevenly blown, as the performative context of the poem as art-work and recipient of art-work is passed on to the reader, no longer as a wish, but in the gesture of thanks.

3.4.2. “Wishes in the garden of barbara hepworth” [FL 78]

Sölle focuses attention to a number of art-works in her poetry⁴⁴⁰ and gives great care in her literary re-conception of these works (something she does not do with every poem in her oeuvre⁴⁴¹). The poem “Wishes in the garden of barbara hepworth” [FL 78] is taken from a section which Sölle titled ‘Gegen die alles beherrschende kälte’ (Against the all-powerful grip of the cold), a phrase which is reminiscent of a much-loved image of Sölle by Franz Kafka who concludes that literature needs to ‘split the ice of the soul’⁴⁴². Poetry in its issue as prayer not only has to keep the soul ‘ice-free’, i.e. moving in the potentiality of the imagination: it

⁴⁴⁰ “Letter to the builder of the winding stairs into heaven at graz” [VL 83], “Charles bridge” [VL 153], “Difficulties with chuck ‘n freddy” [VL 138], “Contemplating an interieur by vilhelm hammerschol” [VL 160], “Penelope or on marriage” [FL 73], “Here not” [LL 89], “After a performance of shakespeare’s tempest” [ZU 28].

⁴⁴¹ Ursula Baltz-Otto und Fulbert Steffensky, *Das Brot der Ermutigung*, Dorothee Sölle Gesammelte Werke Bd.8 (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 2008), 13.

⁴⁴² “Ein Buch muß die Axt sein für das gefrorene Meer in uns” – from “Brief an Oskar Pollak, 27. Januar 1904,” in *Franz Kafka: Briefe 1902-1924*, ed. by Max Brod (New York: Schocken Books, 1958), 28. This passage is given varying English translations. However, in the citation as Sölle uses it, she replaces frozen sea [*gefrorenes Meer*] with ice of the soul [*Eis der Seele*] – that is, she interprets the reference to the sea in line with the convention of mystic writings as image for the soul. For a literary debate on the role of Kafka’s image to her see Sölle, Falken and Mautner, *Himmelsleitern*, 36f. and 66.

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has to labour at making a place for the self (in the discourse surrounding women's subjectivity) that embodies the desire for God as a desire of God; God's desire for incarnation affirms a gendered position. When we revisit the discussion on desire, as started in Chapter Two, the reference given in "God" as a communitative event is significant to the self's charge of embodied prayer-practice.

Elaborating on Lacan, Judith Butler speaks of the redoubling of desire as 'taking a form that is outside of itself... what desire wants is the Other, where the Other is understood as its generalized object. What desire also wants is the Other's desire, where the Other is conceived as a subject of desire'⁴⁴³. Desire marks the moment of recognition that another truly is beyond oneself while also anticipating that this beyond can appear *for* oneself. In this sense, if God is posed as the third in the logic of relationship, as 'both inside the relationship, as a constituting passion, and "outside" as the partially unrealized and prohibited object of desire'⁴⁴⁴, God's lack, or "invisibility", leaves scope for us to actualise God in the manner of our relationships to others in the act of creation, our acts of recognising human creativity with divine intent. The intention of our wishing in prayer is that which demarcates the normative scope of the visual field of God in which divinity can touch, move and exist. The importance Sölle attaches to the notion of flexibility, as a marker of life, and the re-tension of contradictory creative fissures that expand the meaning of valuable life beyond the intelligibility of human rationality, identify an underlying humanistic idealism that walks a fine line between affirming the ornamental and artful for its own sake and categorically functionalising the ornamental as vehicle (mediary) and expression of life by virtue of its organic structure.

⁴⁴³ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 137f.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

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This tendency does account in part for the preference of elemental images accruing in Sölle's work with reference to the divine which are considered to be distinctly fluid, such as water, wind and light (their more ambiguous status in view of ice and fire remains to be discussed later), while metal and stone – and to a lesser extent earth (which remains highly ambiguous) – occupy a more closely defined relationship to notions of the human. The reception of some of these images by the Christian tradition, and outside of it, appear to be crucial in understanding Sölle's deliberate juxtapositions and interpretations in her poetry. In "Wishes in the garden" [FL 78] we find a reference to a piece of art-work, in the form of a crafted and creative space, an organic structure that is complemented by the design of the artist's work with various materials sculptured in the context of a definitive agri-cultural space: a garden. It also doubles up as theological trope. There is a suggestion, a mode of approach to the piece of art in terms of wishes, situating the work of art in an idealised space, an idea of a potentiality invited by the work of art and its cultural reception via the theological reception of the biblical narrative of creation and salvation. We are invited to dream again about the way theology may shape our encounter with the divine.

The silent listening to silence is also an essential possibility of art and our relationship to it. The plastic arts enable us to hear the silence of nature or of things with an unequalled intensity. ...the most ordinary implements, things we use every day, are withdrawn from the noise of our gestures so as to make available to us the unheard-of aspects they had, and still have – the aspects that we too did not prick up our hearts to hear. This silence, so powerful and strange, nonetheless dwells in the greatest proximity to us, in our dwellings⁴⁴⁵.

"Wishes in the garden of barbara hepworth" [FL 78] offers a vision of prayer, reflective of a piece of art which is crafted by a female artist. If art – as Hegel's aesthetics teach us – truly can be separated in purpose along the lines of

⁴⁴⁵ Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Ark of Speech* [orig. 1998], trans. Andrew Brown (London: Routledge, 2004), 52.

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the material with which we are confronted, then it is interesting to note that we here face a mix between the “original” art-work in form of the sculptures in the garden, and the literary art-work in view of Sölle’s lyrical description. If the one were truly to be reduced to the “things themselves”, the other to “the inner perception”, what are we to make of reading the attentive description of the appearance of the art-work in the reflection of the poetic persona’s wishes? This difference in starting point seems significant in view of the role of gender as it plays out in the poem⁴⁴⁶. Barbara Hepworth, as artist, is cast into the role of God the mother, who the poetic persona wishes to listen to, to accompany (maybe even in the musical association to that term), but whom we approach in the movement of tracing the shapes within the garden. Different from the frustrations expressed in “Open hands” [LL 36], the art-work which is received by the poetic persona here is listened for beyond the confines of language and beyond the works of our hands. The notion of play is crucial, shifting and changing from one medium into the next without disturbing the organisation of the whole. The freedom Sölle expresses in the ‘wishes’ relating to Barbara Hepworth’s garden – with regards to God’s act of creation as well as God’s undoing in the two opposing scenes in the gardens – allows for a critical evaluation of the role of memory that I see exemplified in her repeated reference to the stones, the missing of stones and the handling of stones that dominate the poem. In the second instance, I mean to compare the relationship between the role of images of female embodiment and reference to light, water and stones. As a body caught between grieving and ecstasy – the stones raise the question of memory and of creation (also of creating memories) that has to be reflected against their constituting role for an encounter with and potential embodiment of the divine.

⁴⁴⁶ The resonance appear especially strong in contrast to “Incurably here” [ZU 33] where the pre-text to her poetry is a hymn text, a piece of devotional music by a male author, with a distinct reception history of male-dominating images for God.



Image 3: *Barbara Hepworth's Garden, St. Ives*

photographed by Alison Jasper, 2012.

© Bowness, Hepworth Estate

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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There are three sections to the poem: the first dealing with absence and becoming, the second with language and time, the third with space. The movement described in the first section, which informs the tone and character of the poem, begins with a wish to retreat or recoil, initiating a narrative of withdrawal of self in order to emerge in the collective, a movement of desire by the self to be other and be with another. But this vision is not one of an open-ended and incomplete creative act, as could be associated with the missing presence of the artist invited to complete the visitor's dreams. Instead the opening line stresses the harmony of being at one, being whole: [REDACTED] (l.1)⁴⁴⁷ indicative of a reversal into a smooth form, an orb, reminiscent of origin, a return to unity and a making small in playful allusions to the womb. We seem to be asked to "become as the children" (Mt. 18:3), in this case become like a foetus, blind but sheltered in her mother's womb. The 'see' of line 6 in German could be both the vocative form (singular) and the first singular present indicative to "to see". Thus, the poetic persona does not only seek to understand (see) from the perspective of unborn life, but also wants to alert us to our position in relation to this unborn life which we [REDACTED] (l.7). At the dawn of creation – indicated by the 'light' (l.10), but prior to God's call of creation that brought the earth and humans into being, we belonged (certainly as far as the image goes) with the water, which

⁴⁴⁷ "Ich möchte mich zurückkugeln" (l.1). Literally: 'I want to back-roll'. The use of '*kugeln*' instead of '*rollen*' suggests the association of a body curbing in on itself, rather than crossing distance. I.e. the emphasis here is on the shape of the action, and not primarily its direction in space: the point of departure is not in question but rather the act of becoming towards one's departure. The collapsing into the shape of a ball brings with it the visual associations of child's play: somersaults, and tossing marbles. While a body '*rollt*', a ball (or marble) '*kugelt*' (apart from some areas of colloquial speech, such as '*sich kugeln vor Lachen*' an expression to indicate dying with laughter that we find again in emoticons for *rofl*). Thus Sölle's opening phrase already combines the images of her poem: body and marble, used here in relation to sculpture, not the child's toy. In relation to the continuation of the verse, the question is not with the manner of tossing – or feeling tossed about – but with resting on the shape and its own centre of gravity to which the work of art invites a (temporal) return.

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has nothing of the primordial chaos in Sölle's phrasing, but carries a peaceful calm [REDACTED]' (l.12). The 'womb of our mother, symbolized by the nourishing waters of paradise and our symbiotic life within it,'⁴⁴⁸ are offered from a different perspective, one which shifts from the Garden of Eden, in the work of art of Barbara Hepworth, to come of age in the final section.

The transition is indicated by historical consciousness since, as Sölle continues in saying: 'there is no way to become an adult while remaining in a "dreaming consciousness" and in symbiotic attachment to the womb'⁴⁴⁹ – neither God nor human can remain in potentiality; they are compelled to become realised, actualised in participation. In the juxtaposition of light and stone and their respective forms we encounter a play with notions of essences that for all their essential qualities are unfinished creations. It is in this context that Sölle introduces her first reflection on theology and the task of writing theology, as an artful language that brings out the longing for that which is missing. The temporal discrepancy of envisioning existence prior to creation is a tension which informs Sölle's understanding of theology, as that which has to learn to [REDACTED] [REDACTED]' (ll.14f.). Likewise, it problematises the image of creation as a calling forth of creation, as itself an act of language by God. But this divine logos seems less transcendental than theology would make us think: language in Sölle's poem is more akin to a concrete, discernible reality (if that is to be a notion tied to the intrinsic quality of temporality), rather than picturing language as the ultimate medium, a source of relations and reference-points. Language is not the source; it is the articulation of form⁴⁵⁰: a result of perpetual

⁴⁴⁸ Sölle and Cloyes, *To Work and To Love*, 74.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁵⁰ A conception not dissimilar from Romantic thinkers such as Friedrich Schlegel to whom the discussion shall briefly return in Chapter Four.

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modulations relative to its context⁴⁵¹. Time and matter form a correlation within the image of the stone (present [marble], missing and remembered [menhir]) to which the artist (Hepworth) invites the visitor (poet).

The arrangements of the artist, the walking through the garden by the visitor and the reading of the poem each in turn focus our perception of space, time and texture. The transformative scope of these interactions is indicated not merely liturgically, as I will come to explore with reference to the final section. The lines [REDACTED] (ll.49f.) resonate with an observation documented by Hepworth herself, that:

the unconscious grouping of people when they are working together, producing a spatial movement which approximates to the structure of spirals in shells or rhythms in crystal structure; the meaning of the spaces between forms, or the shape of the displacement of forms in space, which in themselves have a most precise significance⁴⁵².

Where Hepworth relates this significance back to the response given to the object created for a perceptual purpose in the act of drawing and carving, Sölle converts this spatial analysis into a temporal frame, and one where displacement⁴⁵³ is not taken lightly in our concern over the representative character in gendered subjectivities. The artist and mother, the lover of art allows creation to continue. The sculpture garden is envisioned as a playing field of the elements, light and stone and water are at play, creating a spatial and textured kind of music.

⁴⁵¹ In how far a “perfect language” would have to be identified as the articulation of the form of its source may have to remain open for debate. What seems striking in this respect, however, is that Sölle’s poem questions the possibility of pronouncing a verdict on creation predating the knowledge of human work undertaken in relation to the “raw material”.

⁴⁵² Extract from “Chapter 1: The Excitement of Discovering the Nature of Carving, 1903-1930,” in *Barbara Hepworth: Carvings and Drawings*, with an introduction by Herbert Read (London: Lund Humphries, 1952) cited on <http://barbarahepworth.org.uk/texts/>, accessed 20/04/2014.

⁴⁵³ In Sölle’s work the associative frame of reference to displacement is commonly closer to victims of war and repressive political measures, but also to psycho-social trauma.

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play which cannot take on the position of another, but which savours the dream or wish to fall into the silence of recognition with the other: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]⁴⁵⁵ (ll.31-34).

The intrinsic horror of forgetting that haunts much of national, cultural and political debates in Germany – then and now – brings Sölle to appeal to art for its capacity to create and sustain cultural (social) memory. What liturgy achieves within the framework of religious practices, art here has to enable within a secular space. And yet, the work of art is no such common, utterly secular place within “common” perception – neither is praying equal to conventional language acts (while making use of common language prayer characteristically remains set apart from the everyday in form of gesture, intention and significance). The opening wish to find a relation to the work of art that directs and situates ourselves differently is closely linked to a heightened perception and appreciation of the way the elements interact with the design. Lines 31ff. offer both an invitation to be addressed by the art-work, and an admission that in one’s own situational context language does not permit an affirmation, an adequate response. The initial lack of hope on the part of the poetic persona is given shape in the course of the poem in order to make appear that which is lacking in its absence. Curiously, then, the poetic persona finds herself running ahead of the artist but it is in the paradoxical return to language that the poetic persona takes on the role of artist on herself, becoming co-creative.

A re-inscription of hope, in a language and a living (walking/ reading/ practicing) that has undergone the abuse of centuries, a revaluation of being and non-being is given a special emphasis in the appellation to the creator of the art-

⁴⁵⁵ ‘barbara hepworth sprich du / in steinen und lass das licht spielen / sag was ich nicht sagen kann / und nicht vergessen will’.

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work by invoking both the victims of the past centuries – the deaths never to be forgotten – and in a shift of emphasis, the reminder of the hope that is rooted in the fabric of our material origins, in which the art-work is situating ourselves as readers / visitors: everything is very good. Creation has a positive presence, and ought not to be relegated to a past engendered to suffer its temporality as a form of effacement. Instead creation begets creation. Creation becomes towards its own point of departure.

The final two stanzas in particular are striking as they bring out a number of images that recur in her work: the upright walk⁴⁵⁶ (in this instance juxtaposed to the biblical condemnation of the righteous goats who are condemned in Christ's judgment, the image of prayer as praise on bended knees, and the petition to God to remain dreaming, as prerequisite for our ability to remember and co-create). However, remembering is not a tacit turning back(ward); remembrance crucially remains an imaginative endeavour, flexible and attentive to the here and now which it contextualises. What in liturgical terms is detailed in anamnesis (briefly touched upon in Chapter One), a passageway for relationship, the poem reflects against the art-work and the work undertaken by artist and recipients alike. Thus, the third section not only introduces the dimension of sound, or hymnic quality: '██████████' (l.37) and '██████████' (l.56). It also repeats the phrase '██████████' (ll.38; 44; 53) three times, each time with a different preposition: 'from', 'between' and 'to', marking out a certain sense of changing perspective.

In contrast to LL36, FL78, written almost two decades earlier, considers stones as living structures: '██████████' (ll.59f.). While "Open hands" [LL 36] uses the reference to stones with reference to death as a matter of sin against creation, "Wishes in the garden of

⁴⁵⁶ This image is already familiar from "The long march" [RG 17].

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barbara hepworth” [FL 78] offers a more hopeful relationship to stones as responsive textures and situated memories of past and present. The sculptures serve as the pretext to the poem and function as temporal markers. Not least in the association between stones and grave stones, but also the menhirs as memorials to human craftsmanship, the insistence of the missing of stones as image to those forgotten, those who received no burial, those who are not mourned for, instils a silence that goes underneath the skin (cp. ll.41-44). Where this section opens on the fearlessness of art, it ends on a promise to ‘becoming together’ differently which carries characteristically sexual connotations. It is with reference to communion and resurrection that the role of liturgical space as a platform to “practice” comes together with the role of artistic creation: if we follow Chrétien in his statement that the ‘appearance of beauty does not *take place*, it *makes space*,⁴⁵⁷ then it is the event-character of performing prayer that joins this aesthetic appraisal of beauty with its ethical demands on our evaluation of the space in which we find ourselves. As a liturgical space, the garden of Sölle’s prayer can go full circle from absence to presence and the critical self-positioning undertaken within the course of the wish that is being articulated here: realisation.

3.4.3. Conclusions

In the transition from mothers to artists we have increasingly had to consider the role of the child, of creation, artistic and otherwise. Insofar as the artwork (the woman’s body) has pride of place in Sölle’s poems – and stones become a reiteration of death, or the tombstone of our existences in many instances, while life springs from the waters of the sea, the rivers, rain, tears and wells of the world – Sölle pursues a curious inversion that moves outwards rather than inwards. Where Irigaray (we recall the opening quote at the outset of this section) leads us to rethink the manner in which interiority – and the womb – can ground our

⁴⁵⁷ Chrétien, *The Ark of Speech*, 79.

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thinking positively, Sölle's inversion of the valuation of stones and water externalise and explore the relation with that otherness as an embodied dimension. "Because all creatures need help from all" [FL 69], in the playful transition between intertextual references and artistic object of the everyday – the blue glass – the poetic persona enables a growing sense of the fabric of sociality in its textual expression. "Wishes in the garden of barbara hepworth" [FL 78], aside from its profound resonances with biblical material, posits the performativity of the work of art for the role of the artist at the centre of attention. It is not simply that the shaping of art, the placing and creation of place in the course of the "installation" of the artist's "garden", is performance, but that the walking through, the reception of this art, mirrors and transforms its performative scope. Here, finally, the difference (so often induced and fortified by fear) is made redundant between artist and observer: observing art becomes an artistic discipline of a "religious" language: prayer-poetry.

3.5. Lovers, Mothers, Artists – their analytical picture

Lovers, mothers and artists interlink thematically. Lovers can be established in their interrelationship, their focus upon each other, which comes to be self-forgetful. Mothers, in contrast, are marked for their remembrance – "Mary", we read in the Bible, 'treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart'⁴⁵⁸ – and with a focus on the loss of mothers, the role of motherhood as an institutional image. Here the resistance to the mother and of the mother to being entirely subsumed by her child is crucial to retain the sexual position of the mother in the dyadic relationship between mother and child. Artists, in a likewise creational and co-creational focus, merge the role of mothering, of bridging the generational exchange, and contextualising the subject within a social fabric. "The need for self-expression, for sharing not just our defeats and our cynicisms but our hopes and dreams as well, the need to make public what we feel and expect is not

⁴⁵⁸ Lk 2:19 (NRSV).

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satisfied by analytical talk'⁴⁵⁹. Sölle is making a case for the ecstasy of poetic language as a means to transcend and break away from the sexual alienation and repressed discourses on desire in the public sphere⁴⁶⁰. (We recall that Echo, in her lack of a body, is fundamentally alienated from Narcissus). While her poetry was not set out to programmatically foreground human sexuality, Sölle neither felt any need for censoring her poetic work. 'We are erotically connected with the world'⁴⁶¹, and this world finds expression as much within the structures of language as well as in our relating to the world through language (this is the ethical charge of language: that it be loved and not instrumental to abuse).

In the course of analysis we have identified themes and imagery that position and negotiate women's subjectivity in the context of prayer-poetry. However, analysis itself is not enough, just as theoretical considerations were not enough to ground the discussion intended and attempted here. "Analytic action", requiring the horizon of an aim, is by definition positing a functional situation that causes problems in the treatment of poetic text and artistic material. Embodying – allowing for a creative incision into analytical categorisation – comes at the cost of systematicity. It is then the task of Chapter Four to interpret the limits of my approach – in translation, in theory and in analysis – to the scope of vision facilitated in a conception such as deprivatised prayer, a prayer and artistic reckoning of the place of the personal amidst the pressures and opportunities given in the permeable boundaries of the liturgical framework that identified the believer in public worship. The personal location of sexuate and gendered identity of the believer holds the stake in establishing a praxis of faith that envisions, transmits and carries the biblical promise of liberation today.

⁴⁵⁹ Sölle and Cloyes, *To Work and To Love*, 129.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

4. Liturgies of Translation: the Gendering of Liberation

Sölle's work, in its unsystematic approach, abounds in the kind of play that challenges her readers to think ahead. Hailed by her US colleagues as a feminist *avant-la-lettre*, in search of an approach to theology that crucially does not succumb to the indifference of postmodern subjectivism, her work remains always in the making. Her own commitment to theopoetry intends a language that can articulate relationship differently from the subject / object split. Sölle noted: "The artist who is deeply involved in the lives of others forges a link between art and human needs, rejecting the ideology of art for art's sake or art for the artist's sake. We desperately need artists and cultural workers who are accountable to their societies"⁴⁶². To be writing a thesis, giving due attention to the creativity involved in such an endeavour, presupposes a different positionality to literature from that assumed by "creative writing" – the thesis text may trace the transformative process inherent in the literary text under consideration "objectively" only at the cost of its own denial of being itself part of such a transformation. If I want to forge a link between prayer-poetry as a discourse, and the need to account for my analysis as part of my own, ethically sound involvement in the making of reception, but also in the making of the liberation I see at issue in the poetry, then I need to hold myself accountable in light of the institutional context of my own writing. This is a thesis written for examination.

With the analysis given in Chapter Three, in its primary focus on poetic personae and prayerful expression, Chapter Four will draw out the situation of the thesis-text in relation to its "primary source", prayer-poetry. It has to be noted from the outset that whereas Sölle's hermeneutic follows the liberationist principle of a contextual approach to theology, this study has at all times understood its primary text to be the poems. This is not to say that I have not endeavoured to

⁴⁶² Ibid., 93.

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provide a range of contextual perspectives, but the thesis, as part of an institutional exercise, has documented its analytic aims and outcomes in a manner quite different from the overall creative impulse given in Sölle's work. While I would have loved to provide a more playful text, the critical engagement offered here is not altogether un-creative. Paying close attention to the manner of engagement with Sölle's prayer-poetry, this chapter draws together what the theory and the analysis of this discourse brings to the critical praxis of this thesis-text in light of Sölle's liberation hermeneutical paradigm. Prayer-poetry, inevitable for the operation of a thesis, has been re-embedded within an institutional framework within academic prose. And this comes at a crucial cost in terms of the scope of my argument: this thesis works in a *temporally* different frame from that given by prayer (understood theologically), and a socially different *location* from that customarily given in lyric poetry. Where prayer-poetry, as Chapter One identifies, realises – “practices” – a piece of resurrection, of future hope (for the liberation of all), the thesis-text retro-actively examines that which has come into being in response to its own embodied engagement. In order to address these concerns, between reader or readerly participation in reception, the foundational constitution of liberation in light of gendered subjectivity, and translation as a literary *Stellvertretung* of transcendence, this chapter will retrace the thesis step by step from the vantage point of liturgy, as it offers a participatory frame of reference in identifying context – time and place – as distinct and significant to the life of faith.

The thesis, in the proposition that prayer-poetry provides an intersubjective work of art that critically and creatively engages reader, author and text towards a becoming in solidarity with the divine project of liberation, has to consider three things: first, the place of translation (Section 4.1), formally and conceptually; secondly, the place given by this thesis text to its readers, especially in view of its demands on critical participation (Section 4.2); and finally, the place of liberation,

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cast here as the horizon or project/ion of its literary endeavours, which are also the literary endeavours of the thesis (Section 4.3). We have developed the role of language on various aspects throughout the thesis, but here I want to show how language's capacity for translation operates on a number of levels. Not only have I argued on the basis of my translations of Sölle's prayer-poetry, in its linguistic *trans-position* from German into English, but I also have come to understand discursive shifts, such as the vantage points offered by genres of prayer and poetry, and gender difference. These acts of translation are significant to my understanding of Sölle's engagement through prayer, in its critical import as well as its invitation to join in solidarity with creation. Co-creation and deprivatisation, as key theological markers of this study, facilitate an imaginative encounter with the liturgical frame that Sölle's notion of deprivatised prayer contextualises and expands. Likewise, Sölle's hermeneutical agenda for liberation impacts on the direction open to this study. Where Sölle, informed by the political struggles of her day, used formulations on prayer – a focus on faith praxis – as a way to criticise (and correct) a theological over-emphasis on systematicity that marked a hostility to life (certainly the life experienced by women), this study pursues academic praxis. In this it is furthest removed from the manner of speaking in a poetic register, even though both lay claim to criticism (and creation for that matter).

4.1. Translation and Liberation

Whereas there is a certain, and sometimes frustrating, creative restriction in the format of writing for examination, translating (no less governed by a string of decisions and adjudications) has been exceptionally rewarding. It was the one place, in the course of my studies, where the strictures and demands of the thesis seemed least inhibiting. It should be noted that I did not aim to substitute Sölle's (original) German texts, and that I see my translations not as efforts in converting German into English – in exchanging one linguistic imagination for another. One of my concerns is embedded in my wish to express faith in a language that is not

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my mother tongue. Practicing faith “in translation” is a daily engagement that needs to overcome the alienating tendency of language to dissociate lived experience from idiom (and vice versa). This situation is of course not unique to second language speakers. The challenge remains the same for all of us, though I dare say it presents itself as more obvious outside the familiarity of one’s language family. To learn, unlearn, and relearn what we give precedence to in structuring our experiences and expressions of faith requires our critical attention here.

4.1.1. Translation

‘All translation is poetic; even the very work on its own is poetic,’⁴⁶³ said Friedrich Schlegel. Translation, like every conceptual activity, is caught between, on the one hand, a relationship to ‘the real’ and, on the other hand, a claim on ‘the ideal’ of its source. Where the ideal (*langue*) keeps linguistic potential open, the real (*parole*) necessitates material concretisation (a concretisation that remains inherently instable: meaning remains historically determined). This (self)-referential relationship is the basis of representation and foundational to Saussurean linguistics⁴⁶⁴. Katharina Reiss points to a *functional* equivalency between source text and target text focalised on their respective communicatory content⁴⁶⁵. The transitory nature of translation re-locates, i.e. transports, in order to deposit the message it carries. Reading with Michael Halliday, such locations pattern themselves according to ‘functional components of the semantic system of

⁴⁶³ Friedrich Schlegel, “Philosophische Fragmente” (1796) as printed in *Friedrich Schlegel Werke* (Kritische Ausgabe) ed. by Ernst Behler (München: Schöningh, 1958ff., Band XVIII, 1963) cited in translation in *Translating Literature: The German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzweig* (Approaches to Translation Studies, No.4), ed. by André Lefevere (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977), 61.

⁴⁶⁴ This develops in consequence of the foundational relation drawn up between the signifier and the signified – Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally et al, trans. Wade Baskin (London: Owen, 1960), 65ff.

⁴⁶⁵ Katharina Reiss, “Type, Kind and Individuality of Text: Decision Making in Translation,” in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), 168.

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a language [which are] (a) ideational, subdivided into logical and experiential; (b) interpersonal; and (c) textual. [...] the field is reflected in the experiential meanings of the text, the tenor in the interpersonal, and the mode in the textual meanings'⁴⁶⁶. Whereas the interpersonal function appears to correlate with a theological concern over prayer, poetry analysis foregrounds the experiential meanings of the text. Both continue to express and embody a representation of “reality” that is continually fluctuating. Translating between prayer and poetry emphasises that which is always already at work in any act of representation: the revelatory moment of recognition in the process of translation establishes equivalence by virtue of a trust in the familiar of the unfamiliar (the “new” no longer uncanny, nor the repressed, but finally there!).

The equivocation of one term of the exchange with another does not negate the existence of its “linguistic other”. If only in the mind, in the cognition of the translator, a multiplicity of terms adheres to the same meaning (understood as the discursive object of exchange that in other discourses may be occupied by the place of truth, beauty or similar concepts⁴⁶⁷). Thus, translation, one may find upon reading various theoretical elaborations, is in love with sameness. In order to belong to its source text, the target text is asked to mimic closely the character of its “origin”. Considerations on truth and origin abound, but the question this raises for me in the context of Sölle’s prayer-poetry is what we, as translators (I include my readers in this description), are seeking to correlate. It is obvious that two different linguistic systems, such as English and German – despite their connections – never do equivocate in sound, structure, or even interpretive

⁴⁶⁶ M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective* (Victoria: Deakin University Press, 1986 [1985]), 29.

⁴⁶⁷ The capitalisation upon any such point of reference in discourse renders their absolute status. This we find mirrored in mathematics in the use of “position vectors” – the ontological basis for reference (or value).

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horizon, as my training within the English academy has proven time and again. Their linguisticity remains the sole point of transference. And as with every potentiality, *langue* is in love with *parole*, derives its currency from its relation to praxis. Linguistic behaviour, however, at times differs radically between English and German, and this is in no small part due to the grammatical and socio-cultural function of gender. Received associations⁴⁶⁸ in metaphorical play have posited some of the most complex issues to my translations, having to weigh the cost and benefit of idiomatic speech and poetic innovation. Language, just as gender, is performative.

Luce Irigaray gives a clear description of the basis of exchange that underlies our principal negotiations with the self-locating of our gendered identity and our religious search for transformation, the passage from one to another that is not at its heart objectifying of the other, alienating in its process (leaving one and all members of the relationship equally detached) or self-deprecating. (What goes for the framework envisioned for gender, likewise goes for other contexts, such as the discourse between prayer-poetry and thesis-text⁴⁶⁹). Elaborating on the

⁴⁶⁸ Sölle increasingly loosens up gender-associations in her poetry by inventing feminine neologisms. Perhaps one of the most immediately obvious examples is “*Mondin*” (trans. “moon woman”). The “*Mond*” (moon), by contrast to other European languages, is a masculine term (as is the day), whereas the sun and the night are feminine. Cf. “Selene the moon woman” [ZU 29].

⁴⁶⁹ It may then be of little surprise to my readers that in the strongly affirmative emphasis placed upon prayer-poetry in the course of argument, I have struggled to manipulate the thesis-text at a level where I would not fall prey to the same movement of depreciating the work I undertook in writing my text. In consequence I differentiate between the thesis text as such, which still follows a primarily functional agenda and in that sense is placed into the negative, and the work encapsulated in the line of argument (my “work of art” so to speak) which retains an element of critical and creative hope for change. This division is indicative of the discrepancy between liberation hermeneutic at work, and thesis text; the transformative quality of its method is contextual. My work, the work carrying the argument, unfolds in lived con-text. Although the perspective of a literary subjectivity textualises the concern for liberation, liberation in its conception and consummation transcends the text.

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problematic relation to “the Other” that also underwrites theological arguments on transcendence, Irigaray points out:

The Other constitutes a love of sameness that has no recognition of itself as such and is raised to the dimension of a transcendent that ensures and guards the whole world entity. In this way God functions as the keystone of language, of sign and symbol systems.⁴⁷⁰

The ontological function of God in language is the eternal self-same, but ever tied up in the beyond that shall never be known. However, if our witness carries (us and others) towards a recognition of transcendence that does not objectify God in this function, language of God becomes itself inviting, a time to proceed, process and provide. To this end, translation, in establishing itself as an equivocation of its source, relies on a textual ethics in evaluating this relationship. The target text aims to be at once entirely itself, and yet requires the closest affinity and congruence possible with its source text. The evasive quality of language, namely to depart from our body, to re-enter into body, but never “itself” be fully present, is part of the play that allows for translation to take place, and for comprehension to take place – a grasping that is done in unison with others who provide the context of that activity. Having discussed the gendered context of our understanding of genre, the text under translation likewise is set in a complex dialectic relationship between textual genre, linguistic flexibilities and apportioned agency between text, language and writer (whether author or translator). Thus, consonant with a study sensitive to the issue at stake in a liberation hermeneutics, translation grows out of a desire for liberation, for being confined to a singular context or situation of existence.

Regarding the excessive nature attributed to the discourse of liberation, Bakhtin’s remark on verbal art is informative: ‘the word is not a material thing, but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It never

⁴⁷⁰ Luce Irigaray, “Love of Same, Love of Other,” in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 112.

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gravitates towards a single consciousness or a single voice. Its life of the word is contained in its transfer⁴⁷¹. This notion promotes not only a historically critical approach to morphology, but also emphasises the problematic realisation (or concretisation) of a word as meaningful by itself: the quality emphasised by verbalising and thus embodying a poem has to meet a crucial condition – it has to be heard, also. Taken as guiding principle, as that which formulates the relationship (between form and content; written word and spoken discourse), meaning modulates the relation between source-text and translation: in the *Stellvertretung* of its source the translation remains partial; it is this partiality that keeps the poetic motivation of the interpersonal function alive⁴⁷² without devaluing the *communitative* event of its being heard or its potential to be heard.

4.1.2. Translating *Stellvertretung* into Liberation

By adopting (and adapting) Sölle's work on *Stellvertretung* for this thesis, I do not look to prove false the analysis of earlier critics⁴⁷³. Instead, as I see it, *Stellvertretung* enables a discursive strategy that invites the reader into the conversation, breaking away from an everlasting self-referential play in language. Thus, *Stellvertretung* both opens up a place for expansive conversation, enriching

⁴⁷¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, (Theory and History of Literature, 8) ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, 9th ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003 [1984]), 202.

⁴⁷² Judging, for the purpose of translation, the original text by either its message or its form alone will inevitably misrepresent its avowed uniqueness. The means, motifs and adjustments to translations become largely arbitrary. And yet, in translation (as in commentary), the original text would be colonised to a vast extent by annotations and explanations directing the reader's attention and interpretation at every stage without allowing the text to unfold in its character, if it could not allow itself to pass judgment over the original text.

⁴⁷³ The criticism opened out against Sölle's theological dialectics by Otto Reidinger would propose very different questions about the relationship between the thought of Hegel and Sölle. More interested in Sölle's writings, I follow an approach that facilitates her own work more creatively than systematically.

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the focus of associate actions, gestures or speakers, and destabilises a progressive reification of institutional power, logocentrism, or obedience to genre (as may be the case for this thesis). The relationship described by *Stellvertretung* offers an ethical perspective for ontology by no longer building on an exclusive origin at the cost of a negated other. Liberation in this discursive set-up is not at the binary opposition of oppression, that is, it does not require oppression to persist to remain a vital procedural function. Instead, liberation is a process of renewal in the sense of continuously facing up to the world in its diversity.

Reception is at the core of translation. So it is the reader as much as the ‘translator [who] is caught in the dialectic relationship of discourse as the medium of expression for the subjective – the personal voice – and the ST [source text] as a concrete subject’⁴⁷⁴. This is true not only for the linguistic demands for reproducing text in a different idiom, but also for the discursive situation opened out in the negotiations of prayer-poetry. The contraction indicated by the hyphen that proposes their interlinking relationship lends momentum to a vision of liberation (in this Sölle’s remarks on labour-pains seem well suited, not least with reference to co-creation)⁴⁷⁵. Reading transforms the text, not merely as an instance of translation, but also as a material presence with conceptual reach. Since I am not a native speaker of the receptor language, I may appear closer to the source texts in intuition⁴⁷⁶. However, I find in English a means of dialogue with Sölle’s texts that

⁴⁷⁴ Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, *Translating Poetic Discourse: Questions on Feminist Strategies in Adrienne Rich* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publ., 1985), 34.

⁴⁷⁵ While I do genuinely want to stay as close to the (original) text as I can, this inevitably means that I stay as close to my experience with the text: that is, my socialisation into German as my mother-tongue, as well as my perception of the connotative and denotative sense of the English lexis transmuted by that linguistic perspective.

⁴⁷⁶ I am not ‘one in the wishing’ [FL22, l.28] with Sölle – certainly not in the context of providing a thesis-argument – but instead my prayer speaks to a desire to make a home in a language that is not my mother’s tongue.

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enables and invites my presence in that language. Amidst Sölle's poetic 'i', I too can dwell (echoing Hölderlin) and can dwell in my difference! In translation I speak, maybe for the first time, and ironically the words are still not mine, shall never be mine to possess. My prayer, even when conceived as a prosaic *and* creative discourse, is marked by that difference, by being more than one, having added a context and a subjectivity into analysis that accounts for more than is in the primary source, namely my presence to the text. There remain however crucial absences, certainly to me, in writing.

Where translation seeks to account for a process, the play between absence and presence, worked through in Derridean accounts of the "trace"⁴⁷⁷, seems to entrench a dualism that is neither helpful nor solvable. Language is a relatively young medium. As noted in other poems, it is also a deficient medium (cf. FL78), for it cannot show at once the ambiguities and paradoxes that are systemic to negative theological reflection. On those grounds language harbours a notoriously positivist urge, of naming what is there, of sharing a hope of what is to come, of identifying with an aspect of a whole to which one is to supplement one's own very being(-in-process) – this is also language's *added* benefit, its intrinsic value. Language lives by the exchange, providing shared points of reference. In this it invites repetition: attempts to say again and again what it was that made the experience what it was. The *pleasure* of recasting, repeating, researching the light (language's points of transference with a real) in the situation of analysis joins in the transformative process set in motion by the thesis' procession / progression, its textual liturgy. If the thesis-text is to "become" (Irigaray) towards prayer-poetry, it requires an ongoing reception, a participation with the text that identifies itself in solidarity with another. It has to be a text that acknowledges its agency within the dynamic envisioned between source text and target language. This is where co-creation becomes a vital component.

⁴⁷⁷ E.g. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978).

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4.1.3. Prayer

As we have seen, translation remains partial. While this clearly indicates that some associations and connotations will alter in translation, I concur that translation – from a linguistic perspective – is nevertheless always possible. This does not imply that there is a necessary parallel between grammatical structures of one linguistic system to another. It does however mean that each language system has sufficient means by which to modify a sentence to develop congruence across differing linguistic systems. Source text and target text point to a conversation at work beyond the level of the sign; in the context of their own unique linguistic situation their sameness is to be identified in their unspoken desire to relate to each other, to be in communion with one another. Sölle notes that ‘religious language... does not disown itself in its translation into secular language, more to the point it comes to its fulfilment,’⁴⁷⁸ Irigaray formulates this for a philosophical context stating:

The sameness of women, among women, would always occur from and within openness, expansion. Generation. Threshold. Their Other without capital letters. Which is not to say that it has no reality or dimension that goes beyond the capital letters. Perhaps going beyond certain graphics or discourses already written down and consecrated? A cosmic, creative fermentation that is always and forever free. Though this is not it [sic] say it has no signs, no rhythms, no symbols, no god(s).⁴⁷⁹

The *communitas* enacted in prayer reaches beyond the purely verbal; it renders the transcendence captured by its origination in difference as a moment shared, a point in time and space that provides sameness in its emphasis on mutuality. A reader’s gendered subjectivity here becomes part of the process described by deprivatisation – a critical contextualisation of the prayer to be embodied in our reading and in its linguistic performativity. The diversity of expression given shape

⁴⁷⁸ “Religiöse Sprache... verleugnet sich nicht in ihrer Übersetzung in weltliche Sprache, sie kommt vielmehr darin zum Ziel.” – Sölle, *Realisation*, 19.

⁴⁷⁹ Irigaray, “Love of Same, Love of Other,” 115.

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not just in discourse but in language as a linguistic body marks itself out as the stranger encountered in transcendence, of a body raised in self-consciousness, to apprehend itself outside of itself. The deprivatised lyric is that which transports translation back into a text of different origin; this text's prayer remains caught up in the act. Defined along parameters of transcendence – from word to act – and their dialectical interplay, prayer is deferential. Prayer generates relationships, conceptually, and practically. This, as we shall see in Section 4.2.1 is also the case in the relationship between poetry and analysis, sponsored by the discourse that attends to prayer-poetry in liturgical reception.

Allowing ourselves to think prayer-poetry alongside the work of deprivatisation (a doubled contextualisation of the personal in the public and the private outside the private...arriving at a renewed intimacy), and co-creation on the level of the text, enables an understanding of translation as a transformative encounter with and in language, across languages. For prayer-at-work, as itself the location of co-creation-in-time (another context), the implication this view of language and discourse has rests with prayer offered without ex-change (in the sense of a substitution); prayer joins in. This continuity (sameness) retains its differential dimension in the body (voice) that does not speak to “indebt” the other: ‘learning is unlearning/ speaking is to keep silent / ... is receiving a gift’ (VL43, ll.20-22).

Prayer is not affirming itself as inherently productive, or reproductive for that matter; instead, prayer proclaims “the new creation” only insofar as it sublates the difference between creator and creation. Prayer prefigures transformation, is part of that transformative process that keeps open a space for the new when it envisions for its subjects (those held in prayer and those praying) a future to be. Prayer is an act of *Stellvertretung* for the not-yet or the no-longer to which the subject of prayer and the prayerful subject (i.e. the person at prayer) gives critical

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context, i.e. presence in a communitative consciousness. Prayer is not, as it is customarily understood, a necessarily communicative praxis⁴⁸⁰, and the goal, the “success”, of prayer-poetry rests not in the absolute certainty of a message sent or received. When I refer prayer-poetry back to a communitative praxis, this is indicative of its liturgical importance in gesturing, signifying a time and space whether in language or otherwise that shares with the mysterious. Doing is believing; Sölle affirms a faith of curiosity – the mystical amazement! – that facilitates our ethical engagement in critical faith, also in the context of prayer – curiosity is responsibility. That you have to be able to tell if a theology is written before or after Auschwitz, is a point made regularly in Sölle’s work⁴⁸¹. I would state that it is likewise necessary to be able to determine if a prayer was written with a desire for liberation for all – that is, a desire that acknowledges its own sexuate perspective on desire in order to respect the other’s desire.

And what about my own desires in writing this thesis? Until now, I dedicated time and space in this thesis to other scholars’ reception, arguing for and against the place they would assign Sölle’s work in light of various research agendas. Although I hope that my own agenda has been suitably documented, my desire, and with it, my own sexuate positionality in relation to the texts I work with, have not found concrete articulation. I write from a concern for women, those encountered in my source-texts, those I have had the pleasure of working alongside, and those who I would wish to have read my work (this emphasis on women is not to say that men could, should or would not read my work; it merely

⁴⁸⁰ The distinction I draw here is between a participatory focus and an emphasis on the message to be conveyed. Praying in solidarity with others may not at all times need to mean anything “significant”. It may be a simple day-to-day gesture that provides the performative context for intersubjective consciousness to enact itself.

⁴⁸¹ This is especially true for public appearances, in speeches and interview. Cf. Sölle in *Welches Christentum hat Zukunft?*, 19, and “Auschwitz und kein Ende” (1981) in “Aufrüstung tötet auch ohne Krieg” (1982), Bd.1, 129f.

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indicates that I am more invested in the idea that other women participate, thus helping me to formulate the difference in the “sameness” presumed by the label “woman”). It is fair to say, then, that one of my desires in writing this thesis was to establish for myself a sense of what it means to be praying as a woman. In fact, I felt very much uneasy with this “as”, since it verbalises a sense pervasive to heteronormative behaviour where women have to mask themselves as women, that is, they have to “play” at being women desired by men to meet the target (i.e. secure their object status). What would be needed in prayer to bring my own gendered subjectivity and experience into its work? In prayer, traditionally addressed to a male Godhead, the gendered relationship has to be critically reflected if God is to be recognised as a relational becoming emanating from the context of love. Love of self, as much as love of other is needed when you want to feel worthy of asking in prayer in the face of despair – the face of our perpetual self-alienation⁴⁸². In this sense, silence can be the most preposterous herald of self-neglect. Therefore “deprivatising” prayer requires a voice that is unafraid to create alongside others, in solidarity with others. Women here can begin to speak their own language, co-creatively, without negating or refusing men to speak their share.

Prayer raises our voices, in co-creation, founding our call in the love of the language we have to offer. Language, I noted in Chapter Two, requires faith; if it is to abstain from being a tool in our self-alienation, it requires love also. Alienated language – the language of advertisement, for example – has lost its capacity to express love. Prayerful language is a language of desire that does not substitute itself for the object of desire. Neither does it aim to satisfy desire; prayerful

⁴⁸² In this I resonated strongly with Luce Irigaray’s observation in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1984): ‘Unhappiness is sometimes all the more inescapable when it lacks the horizon of the divine, of the gods, of an opening onto a beyond, but also a *limit* that the other may or may not penetrate’ (17). Although I did not pursue a focus on “Divine Women”, I recognise the need for women to negotiate a feminine divine. Cf. Luce Irigaray, “Divine Women,” in *Sexes and Genealogies*, 55-72.

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language is a touch-stone for relationship. Deprivatised prayer no longer asks to keep the personal cloaked in the silent space assigned to the “private”, but this also means that our longing and loving become apparent in the context of prayer to a wider audience. In fact, they become recognised as political, socio-dynamic factors in the way we relate to one another. In “deprivatised” prayer, as a prayer of intercession, we no longer meditate on our personal and private confessions, which we bring before God (here nothing but the judgment-call of the super-ego) as a way of expelling the negative impact of personal failings in our conduct with ourselves and others. Formulated as a prayer of intercession, precisely because confession after the Death of God is understood also as a form of intercession, insofar as it divests God into human interaction, “deprivatised” prayer renders social responsibilities not only as an ethical imperative toward critical discernment, but also as the basis for a sharing of speech (Irigaray) that is focussed on justice for all (Sölle).

4.2. From a hermeneutics of hunger towards a liturgical reception

In Section 4.1 we have taken another look at language, continuing the discussion begun in Chapter Two: Saussurean linguistics inform us that the potential evoked in *langue*, as a general linguisticity, only finds meaning in the practice of its participants issuing their *parole*. In presenting translations as the basis of my argument, I source the question of prayerful language back to the acquisition of language in general, informed as it is by its language community. But I also address the assumption that prayerful language is distinctly different from other language uses. In the crossing over from one linguistic framework to another in translation, this difference found articulation in the grammatical behaviours of source and target language. However, in regards to *Stellvertretung*, translating from one language to another functions as the deprivatisation of a linguistic register, its material dress-code, in the public arena of languages in community. Dorothee Sölle’s hermeneutics of hunger, serving as an articulation of

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interpretation praxis that remains at all times in process – in flux – captures this performative emphasis given to translation in my reading. At the heart of the matter, translations have to *work*, without thereby obscuring the transformative vision given in the poetic texture of its source.

Sölle identifies hunger with a reading strategy that seeks out justice with/in the text. Likewise she chooses to discuss liberation along the lines of a thirst for transformation⁴⁸³. ‘Blessed are those that hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled’⁴⁸⁴, Christ says in the Sermon of the Mount⁴⁸⁵. In hunger and thirst we have bodily cues gesturing towards the need for communion, in the sacramental sense, of receiving bread and wine. In the longing for transformation of the spoken word, from water to wine, from wine to blood that runs through the gospel narratives, the body’s capacity to transcend itself is tied to its generative, sexuate faculty. Language and sexuality, both crucial components of the waters of life in Sölle’s poetics, share a sense of making that aims for relationship. Hunger and thirst both indicate a lack and a desire, a wish to satisfy or renew the body by providing nourishment. Sölle’s hermeneutic, read as a textual and praxis-orientated hermeneutic typical of Liberation theologies⁴⁸⁶, operates within a textual and bodily semantics that structure the demands of our taking and giving, our perceiving and longing within the horizon of our socialities. It is then the point of this section to work through the performance of this thesis, as itself a site of the liturgical, in order to address what I as author of my thesis-text received, and what I pass on to my readers. Doing so identifies the shape of the text presented for analysis in light of the poetic texture that enables the thesis-text to take on the role

⁴⁸³ Sölle, *On Earth as in Heaven*, (1993).

⁴⁸⁴ Mt.5:6 (NRSV).

⁴⁸⁵ Against the focus on emptiness prevalent in discussions on mysticism, we have here a return to the plentiful.

⁴⁸⁶ Schottroff, “Come, Read with my Eyes,” 49.

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of *Stellvertreter*. The place of the *Stellvertreter*, crucially understood by Sölle not as one pointing to a theology of atonement, but of co-creative engagement, introduces into the work of reception a transience that foregrounds participatory action-in-time – a liturgical response / co-response / correspondence.

The question about the relationship between poetry, or the poetic, to the criticism of poetry returns twice over in the context of my thesis: in the collaboration envisioned between prayer and poetry more narrowly defined, and in the expository nature of the thesis-text in contrast to the playful side of its primary text. Insofar as I presuppose a difference between poetry and analytic exposition I here already operate conceptually on a level of translation. Already in the designation of its primacy we have to ask if it is possible, as I would wish for, that the work of reception in the thesis and its primary text, the prayer-poetry of Dorothee Sölle, can [REDACTED]’ (FL22, l.28). In the course of Section 4.2 we will trace the “liturgy” of this thesis as it has emerged guided by its focal points in analysis: in the roles of women as lovers, mothers and artists. The increasing fluidity of each designation marks up the contested space of women and women’s bodies in the text; women, becoming conscious of gender as a collective and transformative tool, certainly in the reading employed by this thesis, are visible in the text insofar as they become the text, their bodies forever inscribed and performed by the readings we allow ourselves to envision. This reading, to be faithful to the hope expressed in liberation, has to acknowledge its gendered location.

Reception becomes the key moment for addressing the involvement of readers and commentators in this literary interchange, the work of reading. Not raising such a position to the level of systematic necessity (High Theory) but to the status of proviso for experimenting with language, mis-readings become part of the

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creative opportunities of the text⁴⁸⁷. We have already noted the problematic situation given for women within the literary establishment in Chapter Two with regards to the reception their literary works receive. The case for women as subjects of literature, analysed in Chapter Three, is no less fraught with problems. In either case the onus rests on the measure of judgment that is levelled against the author, or the text, on the basis of an established norm that draws its life from outwith the text it addresses. Gender as a collectivising and public discourse, we have to be mindful, is similarly normative if it has not found concretisation in the relationships between sexuate bodies. The analysis of the reception at work in my thesis in the context of the liturgical integrates the concern given to women in the course of the study, as well as the concern for praxis that Sölle takes over from Liberation theological methods as one coinciding with the starting point for critical tools of this study, the liturgical praxis offered at the Political Night Prayers, and the eating of the Psalms (cf. Section 0.1) that underwrite Sölle's biblical hermeneutics. To follow Goethe's chain of interpretation on the Gospel of John rendered by Faust: 'In the beginning was the Deed!' (l.1237)⁴⁸⁸.

This thesis, concerned with deprivatised prayer, analyses poems, personal as they no doubt are, for their capacity to voice gendered subjectivities embedded within and moving towards a community and towards expressions shared in the course of analytic action, a jointly created process in the act of reading, reciting, interpreting, repeating. As my concern is with identifying a space in this literary interchange that is enabling to women, that can offer a scope for difference in the seeming sameness of linguistic fluidity, the strategies employed have been deeply

⁴⁸⁷ Mis-reading mirrors the "amoral" charity Sölle attributes to Mary. My own perspective here is coloured by the exciting study by Benjamin Bennett, *The Dark Side of Literacy: Literature and Learning Not to Read* (New York: Fordham Press, 2008).

⁴⁸⁸ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy*, Norton Critical Edition, trans. Walter Arndt (London: Norton, 2001), 34.

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informed by feminist thinkers and by the role of gender in discourse that would focus on the feminine. Femininity, however, as Simone de Beauvoir's work and subsequent voices have alerted us, has been set up as an ideological tool. In the context of patriarchal discourse, femininity is both devalued (in men) and idealised (in women), but at all times it is matched to a normative behaviour that serves as ontological foundation to the birth of the sexed woman, that is, a woman's body desirable to men. From that perspective, to be dealing with texts on and of women's subjectivity, I have been able to identify gender as a generality with distinctive concerns for the community "it" evokes, and the playful invitations (temptations) given by the poetry to a renewed, and changed praxis of how biological sex, sexuality and gender relate in discourse (in line with Sölle's third step of her hermeneutics of hunger).

4.2.1. The making of Liberation: Thirst and Hunger

In her essay titled "Freedom as Thirst for Liberation", Sölle opens out the discussion by reference to Polish philosopher Stanislaus Lec who inspires her to go on asking: 'How can we move from nouns to deeds, to action? What are the correct verbs to go with *Spirit* and *freedom*? What are the verbs we actually need?'⁴⁸⁹. Sölle is mindful of the process-character of liberation that looks to make us free, but cannot fence us into a free-dom. In this light, the much-loved kingdom of God, as the new creation hailed by liberation theologies, should come as an interaction, a making of place that brings the past, the present and the future with it. In the image of the branded slave, freedom comes as the quenching water of life. In the hell of our ready-made prisons, water is the touch that cools our feverish anxiety over asserting ourselves in the role of consumers. In the desert of our soul, to thirst for God is to thirst for the liberation that invites ourselves outside our hermitage and into relationship. We can make the difference by letting go of the fear before

⁴⁸⁹ Sölle, *On Earth as in Heaven*, 90.

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the anticipated encounters with one another by articulating our thirst, by committing ourselves to the page, by inscribing our longing into the textual fluidity – ink, blood, water, tears... and, to speak with Irigaray, mucous⁴⁹⁰.

In the course of this thesis we have encountered a number of “nouns”: lovers, mothers, artists, deprivatisation, co-creation. And in my repeated reference to liturgy I have sought to capture the intention to move from theory into practice, not solely by reflecting upon moments of reception of Sölle’s work in other discourses, but also and crucially within the body of the thesis as a particular work of criticism. The “verbs” most readily associated with Sölle’s hermeneutic, which the thesis looks to retain within its reading strategy, are “contextualising”, “reflecting”, and – here we move into the third moment of her hermeneutic identified in renewed praxis – “acting” – a case of “embodying” that is both a “translating” of what has been encountered as a textual subjectivity in the reading of the text, and a “calling out” of those *passages* – processes – that can help us identify, challenge and rework the hopes and dreams, the agony and pleasures, that we experience and that build the repertoire for our creative expressions, namely our combined efforts in writing the story of liberation⁴⁹¹.

In Chapter 3.2 I quoted Marcella Althaus-Reid on the tight sexual constructions under which Liberation Theology operates. My thesis attempted to delineate the scope of *poiesis* under the assumption that it represent linguistic creation that moves away from the tight analytic controls of functional representation/reproduction. In doing so, I implicitly accepted a valuation of language that risks reiterating a logocentrism repressive of women in discourse.

⁴⁹⁰ Irigaray, “Love of Same, Love of Other”, 109ff.

⁴⁹¹ Insofar as sin is a social concept in Sölle’s work, liberation, too, is understood in a social dimension.

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This place, the production of intimacy, is in some manner a transmutation of earth into heaven, here and now. Providing she remembers? ... *Between*. In the interval of time, of times. Weaving the veil of time, the fabric of time, time with space, time in space⁴⁹².

Searching for what Irigaray termed the ‘interval of exchange’⁴⁹³, I have to qualify the exchange and its interval in light of the residual poetic “aim” that remains at the heart of *Stellvertretung*: self-sublation⁴⁹⁴. Representation-by-proxy (*Stellvertretung*), in Sölle’s reading, is not displacing the object of representation, nor is it dissolving the identity of the subject, but it indicates a relationship that is marked by difference. The interval opened up by *Stellvertretung*, as a place of relation between oneself and another in exchange of a poetic text, is not offering a new ontology of relation, but characterises that relation’s (playful) being in time. The *Stellvertretung* of poetic text is not an ontological category as much as a process in affirming, creating the existence of the one by and for the other. Whether we qualify our being in the context of fear or love is a secondary question, but that we find ourselves in a communitative situation is the entry into a recognition of sameness from which we nourish our sense of belonging.

Analysis of women’s roles within Sölle’s poetry reveals a theopoetic vision of liberation that sets the dialogue, the literary exchange in the production of the “work of art”, as a space for intersubjective consciousness in the service of *Stellvertretung*. Sölle writes, [REDACTED] [VL138, ll.122-126]. This everlasting “more” is crucial in informing translation as an act of co-creation. I do not *have* (possess) the words, but I enact my own representatives in the sounds I utter; that is, my speech deprivatises myself in light of my own body (externalising, projecting myself in the sound), and in light of others (who constitute the public insofar as

⁴⁹² Luce Irigaray, “Place, Interval,” 53.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁹⁴ Cf. Section 1.1.1, p. 84.

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they provide the normative framework to our mutual individuation, or differentiation). The emphasis on language here is not altogether logocentric. Sölle uses language as a metaphor for many contexts of transcendence. True to her foundation in materialism this is never thought of as language disembodied in her work. Prayer in theological discourse for Sölle provides a metaphor for liberation at work, but is also identified as a particular stage within a liberation hermeneutical perspective that brings about the transformation of theological discourse into a theopoetic engagement. Within the text, within a gendered conception of literary subjectivity, liberation for women becomes a question of textual performativity, enabling a vision to emerge from the text, a critical reception to emerge from its readers, and a discursive field of play to emerge for community, all of which is at once enriching, sustaining and challenging of the status quo.

The liberty for women to profess their loves is a crucial aspect of the project of liberation. Delineating women's subjectivities within the corpus of poetry, I have failed to reflect my own subjectivity as interlocutor between the text and my readers. I noted before that my reference points on women, partially informed by prevailing discourses on poetics and literary aesthetics, have remained in the realm of production and reproduction, presentation and representation, male and female, that is, in the context of binaries with a distinctly heteronormative flavour. Mary Gerhart's notion of the genric, and the understanding gained from Luce Irigaray's work around femininity and sexuate differentiation, have alerted me to the development of literary subjectivity as a co-creative, communal work in art (the work of art of the art-work) that mitigates the location of its readers in light of its textual subjects. In Sölle's textual subject matter, we find texts that are inviting, repulsive, disdainful, erotic and peaceful. I have chosen texts that dealt with women lovers, mothers and artists. Running the risk of objectifying women, my thesis is offering itself as a context for those women encountered in the text, as a place to dwell. I excluded many poems that would have merited discussion because

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they did not (overtly) feature women⁴⁹⁵ personae, even though I know that the one literary subjectivity I attach to all these poems is tied to the author. But I do not want to read the poetry in light of an extended biography (cf. Section 2.1). Instead, I want my readers to understand that the conversation with the text has always been imagined in terms of a collective of women's voices.

The poems present a public, a deprivatised literary persona of Dorothee Sölle that practices for us, and with us as readers, what it means to encounter women's literature. Each poem itself is the body of a woman in language. *That* woman however has been performed only in relation to me, has been identifiable only in the context of the analytic translation into textual liturgy. In acknowledging my performance of her, I have to equally acknowledge my being performed by the text: in each choice is reflected a personal struggle and a conflict with writing in this formal structure that marks the thesis as thesis. What is this liturgy? Does a thesis necessarily require centre and periphery, liberation and oppression, self and other, time and space? This thesis has proceeded inductively on the level of the text and deductively on the level of analytic framing. At their intersection, which resides in the context of prayer-poetry, we have found a discourse and a body of literature that localises the concern of this thesis in a particular time and space and points towards liberation even if it cannot detach itself from the oppressive frame that it belongs to: the judgment of academic criticism.

The dilemma of the thesis, as with any piece of writing, is to reiterate another voice – to borrow a voice – and yet be another one saying it in the assertion of being entirely myself. Luce Irigaray places borrowing among the paralysing conditions for women according to the logic of exchange and indebtedness invoked: 'We harden, borrow, situate ourselves on the edges of the

⁴⁹⁵ I hesitate to label these personae "female". Certainly some of Sölle's poems remain ambiguous on this matter – cf. for example the figure of Ariel in ZU28, and the role of Penelope in FL73.

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other in order to “exist”. As proofs of love, these comparatives eliminate the possibility of a place among women⁴⁹⁶. Sölle’s poetry has a distinct voice and character, and not only the translation, but also the context in which it is said in this thesis, must direct our attention to reading her poetry *among* women, and yet at the same time to remain alert to our differences. Although I would hope that men would feel equally encouraged to engage with her text, and would equally be able to follow the hermeneutic pathway laid out in this thesis, their starting position, their relationship to literature, is founded differently, and so the need “deprivatisation” addresses may be less striking. Accustomed to being perceived in the public light, on occasion gifted with the assertiveness or entitlement of having a place, a liberation hermeneutics for the male reader of Sölle’s work, I anticipate, would take a very different path through her imagery and language. It is Irigaray who points out that:

man and woman... cannot be substituted one for the other. I will never be in a man’s place, never will a man be in mine. Whatever identifications are possible, one will never exactly occupy the place of the other – they are irreducible one to the other⁴⁹⁷.

A reading from a different sexuate and gendered perspective may very well seek out other texts than those I have selected for this study, foregrounding, as many theologians have done, poems that consider the mystical tradition, poems that lend a hand not only to the critical appraisal of men, but also their struggle to break away from pre-established norms that do not reflect their own experience of relationship with one another, and with women⁴⁹⁸. I am aware that in suggesting

⁴⁹⁶ Irigaray, “Love of Same, Love of Other,” 103.

⁴⁹⁷ Luce Irigaray, “Sexual Difference,” in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 12.

⁴⁹⁸ Although I noticed a number of instances where the masculine stands in reference to oppressive patriarchal structures that would circumvent concrete engagement, Sölle’s poetry resonates with her theological focus on (right) relations. Thus, next to male ciphers such as the ‘ogre man’ and other descriptions of male positions of power, she writes that [REDACTED] [REDACTED]’ (VL 83, ll.29f.). This poem, celebrating the architectural

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this, I reiterate a male/female binary that I do not intend to uphold as absolute, or primary, but merely note as symptomatic of analytical language. The work undertaken by Irigaray and others is suggesting different parameters to talk about this difference that would group every “other” as Other⁴⁹⁹.

The thesis is bound to assessment criteria that prayer does not know. The lyric is allowed to maintain a “law unto itself”, a rhythm and colour that changes from piece to piece. The thesis too, has shifted, stepping from one foot (theology) onto another (literary studies), but ever-always asserting its accountability. And yet, as creative work (of the arts), as conscious reflection, the thesis follows similar aims as Sölle sets for her ethical artists⁵⁰⁰. Both lyric and thesis have to perform – at least have performative capacity for their readers. The difference lies in the fact that the poem is permitted to play and rely on the reader’s imagination to fill in the gaps. The thesis – at least on one level – ought not to leave anything to the imagination: everything is to be laid open before the eyes of the reader, or else one is under the suspicion of not having fulfilled the rules of engagement appropriately. The thesis is asked to show, to reveal, to disclose – is under a permanent pressure to speak (*Redezwang*), where the poem is free to take its time. And time is what makes the significant difference here:

genius of the builder of the “██████████” at Graz castle, is not out to demolish the structure presented by the male author; it is a joining-in with the pleasure of making use of the pathway ██████████’.

⁴⁹⁹ Speaking of an irreducible Otherness that is no less responsive to ourselves, Irigaray says: ‘We flee dialogue with a *you* irreducible to us, with the man or woman who will never be *I*, nor *me*, nor *mine*. And who, for this very reason, can be a *you*, someone with whom I exchange without reducing *him* or *her* to myself, or reducing *myself* to *him* or *her*’ – Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, trans. Stephen Pluháček (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 125.

⁵⁰⁰ Cited above, Section 3.4, p. 216.

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...predicative language [is] not capable of an adequate representation of the experienced – the being and truth of God... Dialectically opposed to this incommensurability is the mystical pressure to speak [*Redezwang*]⁵⁰¹.

What Herbert Grieshop's study explores with reference to the response of the mystics to the experience or ecstatic moment of embodying language creatively born from silence is indicative of the temporal difference between analytic language and poetry. Sölle equated the poem with that which transmits (expresses) experiences best. This is largely due to its performative and impressionistic character. It also, in line with her concern for prayer, rests on the "making present", or "giving presence to" experience. While prayer can believe to hold on to the momentary, by elevating it to God, the thesis lives in the knowledge that any attempt at theoretical construction, or material reconstruction, remains partial and forlorn. The thesis text is in despair, or more precisely, is in the despair of knowing its limitations⁵⁰². Because boundaries, differentiations, narrowing-down, clarifying are its business, this despair is also the very life of the thesis: without limits, it would not exist – or at least be presumed unsuccessful. By examining other texts, in its commitment to metatextuality, the thesis lives for the past, and commits its focus of research to inaugurating another text's afterlife. This thesis is a mourning song (as is appropriate, given its starting point with a theology rooted in the Death of God).

The horizon of expectation of the thesis then is one of longing for a renewed praxis, a changed praxis, in the context of a critical response that will never be manifest in the perimeter of its text, because the work of reception exceeds its

⁵⁰¹ "...die prädikative Sprache [ist] nicht zu einer adäquaten Repräsentation des Erlebten – dem Wesen und der Wahrheit Gottes – fähig... Dieser Inkommensurabilität steht allerdings dialektisch der mystische Redezwang gegenüber", Herbert Grieshop, *Rhetorik des Augenblicks: Studien zu Thomas Bernhard, Heiner Müller, Peter Handke und Botho Strauss* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1998), 28.

⁵⁰² I return in my thinking to Kierkegaard.

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(own) textual representation. Hence, my analytic categories had to reflect, as much as envision, a time and place for transcendence that remains rooted in the body of the text. In the figure of the work of art, reception points to an intersubjective consciousness, labouring in the context of deprivatisation on the one hand, and co-creation on the other hand. As categories they are expansive: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (VL138, ll.98-102). Where a thinker such as Luce Irigaray is self-assertive in refusing to follow protocol in the way she writes theory, and where Sölle uses her literary imagination, in the lyric, in order to free up spaces that are no longer tied to normative genre boundaries, I as the author of this thesis have not been at liberty to break away from expected norms. In this sense, I recognise myself in Irigaray's telling remark at the close of *Speculum*: 'But if, in the resistance set up against that male imaginary, distortions gave rise to discomfort, then, perhaps?, something of the difference of the sexes would have taken place in language also'⁵⁰³. I as author of my writing can no longer dwell in an assumed sameness provided by theoretical discourse. And yet, admitting I have not yet learned to trust my own writing, I already know that the text I present does not conform to that norm of which Irigaray speaks so candidly. Where my work generates itself is in the deliberate cross-fertilization of discourses – literary, theological, philosophical – that mark this study out as neither "typical" literary analysis, nor "proper", "appropriate" (recalling Marcella Althaus-Reid's work) theology, but as a go-between, a *Stellvertreter* in the space opened up to theology in literature, and to literary expressions of liturgical, i.e. communitative and communicative, reception that goes beyond the spoken word.

As we have seen in Chapter One, the Psalms, as prayers, not only ground the method by which Sölle engages the biblical texts, and I engage in translation; the demands of the Psalms are also at stake in the act of reading. The lyric

⁵⁰³ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 365.

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demands of its readers to speak out (to verbalise the text in order to find its grammatical position), and to align themselves with a reading community. Liturgy is such a reading community, insofar as liturgy offers an embodied reading direction: a pattern for action, and a means to remember those absent, and foster an awareness of the community present. Presenting a different reading community with Sölle's texts poses a number of problems. Sölle wrote both from the perspective of a generation and a national and gendered locality. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (FL 31, ll.29-31) – connotations, as here in “No more ash-wednesday” [FL 31], with the Nazi-past, may be lost on a younger readership, or on readers not socialised into the association of gas-ovens with the mention of ash. What may appear as unhealthy pre-occupation with the Nazi past is a conscious struggle to retain the memory of so many victims, named and unnamed, while also trying to move beyond a fixation on the horrors that disfigure their memories. Sölle notes this in saying: ‘one can really only truly live if one roots oneself into life in such a way, that one comes into relation with the people who have been here before us and with those who will be here after us’⁵⁰⁴. Foregrounding the situation of women, Sölle's poetry reminds us of those to be remembered in our struggles, making space for an intersubjective community of readers.

Prayer overturns institutional hierarchy, by inserting – or leaving open a space for – the person at prayer whose work bears institutional import. Deprivatised prayer recognises this dynamic as a situation of ethical responsibility – over against God and the world – and as an instance of co-creative engagement: personally I would describe this erotic creativity as the heart-wrenching act of turning yourself inside out to relate to another outside-in, for which you need

⁵⁰⁴ “...man kann eigentlich nur richtig leben, wenn man sich so im Leben verankert, dass man mit den Menschen, die vor uns waren, und den Menschen, die nach uns sein werden, verbunden ist” – Sölle, “Gegenwind,” Bd.12, 205.

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another's help (as is the case of confession, or, in a psycho-therapeutic context, of the analyst's work with the client). And this act does not solely hinge on the praying person's God-image. Because deprivatised prayer foregrounds our engagement in an ethical task while praying, we cannot hope for God to fix the world for us (in fact, such an attitude implies that we are not seeing ourselves as part of this world, but of a spiritual realm that is not affected by the world we pray for!). Sölle's critique on prayer draws attention to the affectedness by the world that requires reflection in prayerful action. Because we realise our affection for the world we are affected by the state of the world. Because we realise our affectedness we actualise our response, to God, as that which enables ourselves to envision the world differently, and to the world itself by working in solidarity with those oppressed and in hope of a liberation appropriate to the sufferings, but also the joys (to be) encountered.

4.2.2. Liturgical Reception and Gender

Whereas studies on poetics, on poiesis, on poetry and related disciplines tend to foreground the material conditions of the text, or dwell on intention and meaning, liturgy is either considered for the schematic ordering of events, or the theological vision it builds for time in relation to space. Reception criticism, itself traditionally based in biblical studies, explores the doubled context between textual production and redaction, and in the vein of Rudolf Bultmann's work has had a significant impact on Sölle's historical-critical approach. She does however call upon her readers to extend this critical reception farther onto the perspective of her readers, in the shape of an ideological critique that localises the historical concern of the reader at the present time with the passage read and interpreted. In this linking of reception theory with elements of reader-response criticism we are approaching reception not as the timeless extraction of meaning from an immutable text. Neither are we able to withdraw into our own personal readings of a text as way of safeguarding our position of authority that we assume by virtue of

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our role as critic. Instead, we find ourselves. In the context of Sölle's poetry this shows up in textual features of call and response as much as the underdetermined morphological structures, challenged to identify our relationships with the community which informs our reading. Reading Sölle's poetry is a liturgical making, an act of public worship (either in the Christian sense or in the logic of language – namely addressing our expectation of meaning derived from the text) that makes the individual apparent within it.

As we have seen in the course of this section, liberation is deeply entwined with the poetic, as a co-creative and deprivatised praxis of interpretation prompts us to assert. The traces flagged up by my own work in reception – not merely the reception of others, in light of the heteronormative framing of Sölle's corpus, but of my own approach to this study – indicate that I too need to put my cards on the table. How have I located myself in this study, and where has that left my readers? What has been passed on and what passed over in the foregrounding of women-lovers, mothers and artists, and in the analytic and imagistic emphasis provided by water, as a trope for sexual play, literary fluidity, and theological topoi – chaos and creation, passion and compassion, suffering and pleasure, blessing and threat? Sölle's poetry has fostered an awareness of my gendered existence that did not ask me to conform, but to recognise in writing a fluidity that could serve as common ground. Accustomed as I have been to the sexualisation of women, exploring ways of articulating passion (both suffering and loving) has opened up a space where I could be a little less afraid in owning up to my wishes and desires, precisely because doing so did not render myself the object of another's subjectivity, but one that invited myself to take part in a wider process of disclosing, situating myself amongst the voices that have been called upon in the course of deprivatising prayer.

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In my wish to retain the integrity of the liturgy that is emerging in written context by virtue of tying prayers and prayerful texts together in analysis, the body of the thesis appears primarily as structured event. Its playfulness resides in the intersection of discourses, the transitions and transformations of its cross-disciplinary vocabulary that oscillates with the fragments of poetry brought together. In Sölle's comments on poetry, and in her remark on the liturgical character of the lyric⁵⁰⁵, we not only find a particular literary aesthetic reflected, but we also find an emphasis on praxis, on embodiment and the role of voice (and call) that emanates throughout Sölle's texts, literary and theological. Arguing for the event of the text as participatory creation, liturgy is set into play on a textual level. My participation, albeit complex (for the sake of having been reader, translator and critic), is rooted methodologically in stringing along thematic repetitions. Instead of focussing on structural features that may suggest a text for practical use within the setting of a congregation, facilitating a lector, cantor or multiple readers, or accompanying gestures, the corpus of my thesis, as analysis, has queried, quarrelled and continuously repeated passages that build a textual situation (around women) that needs evaluating in and of itself, especially given my comparative lack of attention to biblical material in Sölle's work when her hermeneutic strategy is itself rooted in her engagement with the Psalms. Liberation then, at the core of Sölle's hermeneutical strategy, also plays into the "object" of reception, especially of liturgical reception. This thesis, written not only in

⁵⁰⁵ Sölle: 'Well, the theological, prose language is an excellent tool for delineating, for criticism and differentiation, for clarification, for repudiating false ideologies. For the exposure of people who say God but mean profits and private market economy... I can identify experiences much more in stories, or by a poem. In lyric poetry there may also be added another dimension: liturgy' – Sölle: "Nun, die theologische, prosaische Sprache ist ein hervorragendes Instrument zur Abgrenzung, zur Kritik oder Scheidung, zur Klärung, zur Zurückweisung falscher Ideologien. Zur Entlarvung von Leuten also, die Gott sagen und die Profite und Privatwirtschaft meinen... Erfahrungen kann ich eher durch Geschichten benennen oder durch ein Gedicht. In der Lyrik kommt vielleicht noch eine andere Dimension hinzu: die Liturgie" – Sölle in *Teschuwa = Umkehr*, 21f.

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accordance with the parameters set by the institution of the University, but also in order to raise critical categories for investigation, defaults towards a reiteration of women according to a heteronormative gender ideal: women are given profile, first and foremost, in the context of a discourse on production and reproduction.

However, the relationship to women in my thesis is already working from a conception of sexuate identity that negotiates the desires of the body of the text and its contexts, in women's subjectivities. My thesis remains bound up within the "logic" of work that has already been questioned by Hans Jürgen Lübl as an unsavoury displacement of the practice of prayer onto a modern ethics of work.

Where he sees this logic operative in Sölle, I take this to be a misreading, certainly of her literary work: the radical engagement introduced by the "poetic" as inherently productive is a making, after all, that [redacted] [VL143, 1.31]. This is the "logic" of poetic translation, which my thesis aims to proximate (Section 4.1). Not only in the translation of poems themselves, but also their narrativising⁵⁰⁶ in the corpus of the thesis, are looking to exchange views, that is, to enter into conversation. While this, up to this stage, has only ever amounted to unsettling the preconceived gendered profile women receive in a patriarchal context, I now am in a position to situate a renewed praxis, a starting point for reading women, addressing women in writing, in the shape of an intersubjective literary consciousness, instead of subjugating women as literary objects, linguistic silences, and undifferentiated, oblique, mysterious and ever-reproductive matter.

In the framework designated by liberation and oppression, liturgy is the public face of a process that can venerate the status quo or embody "a new order"; its direction and interpretation relies on a critical anamnesis of the current ideology (the rhetoric surrounding liberation is itself the product of a particular ideology, pertinent especially in the anti-colonial struggles and the situation of the

⁵⁰⁶ I.e. the selection of poems, their recurrence in the course of analysis and their breaking into the exposition within analytic prose.

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“Cold War”), and its situation with celebrant members. Liturgy serves proclamation and, as such, is the established voice of a corporate membership. But for a liturgy to sustain a liberational character, it needs to facilitate renewal from within its practicing membership and the world in which it finds itself. Liberation, in real terms, requires not only the free-from, but also the free-for. By that logic, liberation is a concept of relation between bodies. A body has to be able to transcend towards another if s/he is to be able to experience her or his liberation as such. Liberation is not to be just a future concept or eschatology, of a *kingdom* to come; it also requires a window onto actuality, granting (re-)new(ed) agency. To some, as is the locus of classical Liberation Theologies, this is embodied in the newness of self-determination after a period of colonial control. In the context of Sölle’s work, the emphasis is different. A “Liberation for the (so-called) First World” does not begin with the assumption of agency as if for the first time⁵⁰⁷. It does however need to question the legitimacy of its representations of power – representations that a co-creative understanding of agency, *Stellvertretung*, would challenge as idolatrous. Empowerment in liberation does not negate the other’s flourishing, but it requires mutual responsibilities in presencing the divine in the world for one another. It is not the focus on representational economy that is at stake in the biblical metaphor of liberation, but rather the focus on engaging in representative action, pointing us along the way to a multiplicity of transformative experiences of life.

Women’s liberation is often equated with emancipation. But each emancipation requires a circle of solidarity if it is to be successful. As German national consciousness attests, there is never a clear severance – not from the Nazi

⁵⁰⁷ The affluent global North has had plenty agency over a universe of decisions. However, as Sölle notes in “Tears of creation” [ZU 125,2]: [REDACTED]’ (l.103). The affluent global North has other factors of oppression at work, not least the guilt and shame towards its southern neighbours. Oppression is systemic to property governed by exchange.

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past, and not from a shared GDR heritage. Women cannot find freedom of agency by negating their relationships with men, and negating their implication in or collusion with the oppressions of patriarchy. The crux lies in finding the balancing point between lived solidarity and emancipation from oppressive contexts that could be deemed the point of departure for liberation in practice. I think Jesus' message, and Sölle elaborates this forcefully in her poem on the Pièta [VL47], is that only in solidarity with the suffering of oppression (also the oppressive horizon of death to the living), and that means accepting suffering as the oppressive context itself, can we find release from the oppressive force behind that oppression. While Sölle's critics on *Suffering* note the privileged position assumed over against suffering, that is, the point of departure of one being able to choose to take on suffering, I maintain that Sölle, in the context of a faith-community, asks something slightly different: to move past suffering everybody needs to partake, and in order to overcome suffering's existential detriment, it has to be accepted to really *be* suffering. Women, in the context of abuse know this all too well. Only when they are willing to recognise their suffering *as* suffering, and cease to negotiate the abuse received as something God-given, or deserved, or otherwise legitimised, can that suffering transform into revolutionary potential, and can women (and any other oppressed groups) find release from their situation as one in which they could not act⁵⁰⁸.

The liturgy I read in Sölle's work is one of gendered liberation. The playful disdain for normative behaviour is giving way not to a negation of the male and the

⁵⁰⁸ Thus, while there are situations that restrict the practical means to act, and do require intercession (cf. Chapter 1), Sölle foregrounds an inhibition that needs cracking before the whole person is possible to be healed. While her text makes the psychological pattern less explicit (she has a theological interest first and foremost), her frequent citations of S. Freud, D. Dinnerstein, Chr. Olivier and others show that she has had a good grip on the psychological landscape of her theological problems.

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female, but a blurring of the boundary between the two, opening out to a vision of gender and sexuality that is pluralistic but remains interested in the desire for one another as an expression of grace emanating from the body. ‘Our efforts to see the flesh as word will not be without heartache and some fear since it will announce to us a story of who we are that may be too difficult to bear,’⁵⁰⁹ says Lisa Isherwood with reference to a post-metaphysical Christological foundation. I would consider Sölle in agreement with Isherwood, with the addition of a qualifier: the risk may be too difficult to bear *alone*. The poems are spaces that voice the fears – about letting go of the old order, as much as the fears of the abuse permitted under the old order. They address the longing for change, and the anxiety of the separations it necessitates. But most of all they look at situations and at people in a manner that translates their existence into the presence of grace. A constitution of self in faith, in the act of stepping into the context of grace, that, to speak biblically for a moment, ‘mak[es] all things new’ (Rev. 21:5). The miracle of liberation is revealed at the point of transformation.

4.3. Gender and Liberation – deprivatising women’s subjectivity

Liberation too, is a shared event in Sölle’s work, and to attain the liberty from sin that can celebrate life beyond the *exitus*⁵¹⁰ requires a solidarity with life that can at once name the conditions of the good life without being prescriptive about the means of attaining such life. On the level of discourse the situation is no different from that encountered in feminist discussions surrounding the status of sexual practices and their permissible functioning in social relations. Here it is the discourse on gender that either prescribes adherence to the norm or engenders

⁵⁰⁹ Lisa Isherwood, “Jesus past the Posts: An Enquiry into Post-metaphysical Christology,” in *Post-Christian Feminisms: A Critical Approach*, ed. Lisa Isherwood and Kathleen McPhillips (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 203.

⁵¹⁰ “Exitus,” as opposed to an existential designation of death, is the clinical description of physical death.

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solidarity in the recognition of difference. Judith Butler addresses the question astutely, pointing out that

it is important to emphasise that although heterosexuality operates in part through the stabilization of gender norms, gender designates a dense site of significations that contain and exceed the heterosexual matrix. Although forms of sexuality do not unilaterally determine gender, a non-causal and non-reductive connection between sexuality and gender is nevertheless crucial to maintain.⁵¹¹

The intersection of discourses of gender and sexuality resides with the body. Butler stresses the ‘non-causal and non-reductive connection’ between gender and sexuality, indicating that neither sexuality nor gender provide the means for one determining the other. Thus, a valuation of the relationship and emphasis given to sexual practice on the one hand and gender affiliation on the other, offers a helpful insight into the sociality that governs each side of the spectrum of structuring bodies in relationship. In each, the body is the performative site of expressing difference or sameness according to the economy of desire in play between the involved parties.

In Section 4.2 we began to unravel the complexities in writing a thesis, as a form of critical reception and the challenge that liturgical praxis has brought into the evaluation of the “poetic material” under consideration – literary expressions of women’s experiences. This brought us to acknowledge that the consciousness of the thesis has remained set, on the level of discourse, in an uneasy relationship with the normative framework that its institution prescribes; it has also made me acknowledge the thesis-text to be inherently suffering in from alienation from its poetic interlocutor. In an attempt to move from the consciousness of the thesis, as the consciousness of myself as individual scholar who has undertaken the collection, selection and re-presentation of my research in this form, into the

⁵¹¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (London: Routledge, 1993), 238.

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necessary self-conscious space of a deprivatised collaborative project, I offer a reading that shows the impact of gender on the reception (the politics) of liberation, which instigates a sea-change in reading the poetic persona's sexuate belonging.

4.3.1. "Penelope or on marriage" [FL 73]

In the above analysis, women as lovers, mothers and artists have been discussed in the context of partnerships. Appropriate to co-creation, and to the sociality envisioned for a deprivatised localisation of the personal in public, they have required a gendered discourse, seeing as the individual woman was not situated in her body, but in literary consciousness, her textual subjectivity. This means that women *as* lovers, mothers and artists – as partners – have remained tied to an understanding of their performative role. In an analytic exchange, women have had to challenge their roles repeatedly in order to become the agents in a discourse they have not devised themselves. Recognising their own sociality among women in such a way as to be able to celebrate their diverse sexuate identities, women transform gender consciousness in reference to the feminine, here not understood in terms of passivity. To become a woman no longer means to locate woman-self as the object of male desire. The exchange that gives rise to the homosocial bonding of the Male as the primary agent of discourse, at the cost of the feminine, is actively challenged by the conception of co-creation which prompts gender to be localised, deprivatised amongst women and on their own terms.

I find this forcefully portrayed in a poem on Penelope, alternatively titled "or on marriage" [FL73]. This is one of the earliest "portraits" in Sölle's work, not taken from biblical narratives, as her reworking of Mary discussed in Chapter Three, but one that derives from Greek mythology, with Penelope, the wife of Odysseus. Her odyssey is of a very different nature, now set in a problematic marriage, while striving to become a person (of gender) instead of succumbing to a

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perceived role (a performative mask). The institutionalised point of reference given by marriage also draws attention to the temporal and relational space thereby opened up. That this is not a straightforward place for women finds expression in a number of features. In the course of the poem, Penelope performs three actions: she is weaving, she is undoing, and she is dreaming. Whether or not she is undoing her dreaming, or as the myth might suggest, the woven cloth, remains to be seen and depends on the vision we grant the poem regarding the role and content given to liberation.

If we follow Homer's epic, Penelope is left alone for the majority of her married life, while Odysseus is facing challenges to his manhood (whichever way we want to read those). Penelope is left to run the affairs at home. But custom demands that leadership is men's business, and Odysseus' long absence sparks the ambition of other men to gain control. Penelope is asked to mourn her husband so that she may become free to remarry. In an attempt to protect her own virtue, and ward off the pressing suitors, she agrees to weave a death shroud for her husband, which, once finished, would determine the day on which she was to choose a new husband, if the man was proving himself of equal virtue to Odysseus. The poem plays around with this scenario. Penelope is at work; weaving, waiting and grieving are part of the same process, just as learning and undoing are connected to new realisations about marriage. Penelope's work, for the sake of her relationship to her husband, puts herself at risk insofar as her



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obedience is subversive to the norms of her society. Sölle's poem interestingly offers a very ambiguous interpretation of marriage, both as the prayer written in response to Penelope's waiting, as well as the relationship portrayed by the poem of Penelope and Odysseus.

Penelope continues to be identified in light of her partner's presence and absence. As wife and partner she is to keep herself from other partners; in light of his possible demise she is to make herself available for another man. In her choice of continuing the weaving, she projects the absent male as an unavailable presence; instead of embarking on a new partnership that would seal his absence, she ties her lot⁵¹² to his, even in the face of indefinite separation. Her silent plea for life returned oscillates between [REDACTED]' (l.4), and the alliterative repetition reinforces their interchangeable roles and colour. Not only in light of a hope of her husband's return, but also in light of the strictures of her role as dutiful wife, she finds herself in the position of supplication – the life to be returned to her, her own and/or her partner's, is made manifest in the futility of the death shroud perpetually woven by day, and undone by night. The dynamic between productive work by day (as in our earlier reference to the heterosexual that the transitions from water to light provided), and the retroactive, negative work undertaken by night (as the locus of feminine, certainly in the supposed danger she poses to male authority) illustrates a struggle in the poetic persona's means of identifying herself as sexuate and gendered agent. As long as she has to abide in the interval, with the potential of her lover's loss or his impending return, life cannot return to her and she remains in mourning, in waiting, indefinitely, and indeterminately.

While Homer extols Penelope's cunning in warding off her suitors, he fails to imagine the agony, the price Penelope pays for her loyalty to the one who seems

⁵¹² If I may be excused a "fateful" idiom at this point.

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to remain forever absent. Taken as a metaphor for women's prayer in a male dominated church, and a "saviour" whose life and example guides our prayer-life, Sölle's early articulation of *Stellvertretung* would have us question, with Rosemary Radford-Ruether, if "his" return can truly save women⁵¹³. Would Penelope, in the event of her husband's return, truly return to *herself*? Has not the time that elapsed since his departure changed her position in life quite profoundly? Despite Penelope's (relative) power to command, she cannot order his return; she can neither choose to follow suite, nor can she be assured of his continued absence, of finding closure with her grieving on a news of death. Waiting, serving, passing our days in futility betrays the relationships we could pursue if we were to face up to the call: 'Come', and 'stay' may likewise be read as invitations. Penelope, in Sölle's reworking of the myth, leaves it to her partner to make up (his) mind, one way or the other. Line 9 is particularly interesting in this respect, as the [REDACTED] of the opening is mirrored by the [REDACTED] that closes the line. In the play between affirmation and negation it is up to the reader to decide if the return, the repetition, is hoped for or resented. Compare for example the following two punctuations: "Once more!" I don't say to you: "forever", with: 'Once more I don't say to you: "Forever!'' The first would indicate that the wish for a return home is not there to tie the "you" down to a place permanently. In the second rendition the poetic persona appears to stress in more plaintive terms that she is repeating herself when she says it (the waiting) is not forever.

Equally, in lines 5 and 7, allow for playful readings: whether it is 'come' – and 'stay' (away) or 'come' and 'stay' (here)!, Penelope refuses to be apologetic about her place in this partnership. She does not hedge her wishes, not [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (l.6), or [REDACTED] (l.8). And yet, where this exchange reads like a resolution we as readers have to wonder what has preceded its deliberations: [REDACTED]

⁵¹³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 116ff.

██████████' (ll.10f.) would indicate that the poetic moment was prefaced by quite another future anticipated. Marriage, fed to girls as the life dream, rarely gets considered past the wedding day. It is not the long wait to the wedding for Penelope; it is the long wait thereafter. This second waiting is heart-breaking. After all, in the partnership rested a hope to achieve something together. In the separation Penelope is left to the waiting upon the dead, in the perpetual weaving of the death shroud. The reference to the transvestite hints at the Freudian assertion that 'the little girl is a little man'⁵¹⁴.

Irigaray offers a more hopeful vision of the in-between space, the prepositional construction that provides the passageway from the I to the you. Prepositing refrains from stabilising, localising the love that is expressed between the lovers: *I love to you*. The interval that holds for women the recognition of difference is a performative movement. Although the light of day will show that Penelope performs her duty (in this sense she fulfils gender norms), the nights tell a different story. Keeping faith in her relationship to Odysseus in the light of his absence requires an act of cunning, even though it proposes itself in the guise of infelicity to the norms that would have her remarry – she undoes her weaving in a gesture of hope. By this infelicity Penelope also forgoes the passivity which may have settled her with her fate. In the final question – as in the final analysis – we are begged the (bitter?) question: ██████████' (l.14)? The sad irony here, to my mind, is that Penelope's resistance to obeying the norm, though an act of courage and hope for the relationship that remains – certainly within the parameters of the poem – unfulfilled, her resistance does not in itself, or by itself, spell out her liberation. Instead it seems to reduce her share in

⁵¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, "Femininity" from 'New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis' (1933) in *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 22: New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works 1932-1936*, ed. by James Strachey (Vintage, 2001), 118.

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the relationship to passivity yet again. Her action confines her to the passive, the hidden spaces, the night. To [REDACTED]' (l.14), in the light of day, remains judged against her partner's absence – in reference to prayer the dictum that God's absence is his way of being-there for us *women* remains questionable to me, if God truly abides in the relationship and not in the assertion of male authority. She also needs to realise herself in light, moonlight⁵¹⁵, in relation with other women.

Making and unmaking, and their dialectic relationship, are not only key to the “logic” and/or poetic texture of deconstruction; they are also at the heart of a feminist project that unravels and ties anew moments of relation between the “sexes” and amongst women. Not dissimilar to the play on presence and absence noted in “Wishes in the garden of barbara hepworth” [FL78], Penelope appears and disappears to the view of the reader. Waiting, the silent gesturing to the absent partner, may be deemed a communitative exercise. It is thus both active and passive, at once a reiteration of silence that is inaction and silence that is an active embodiment of itself, prompting the questions that will deprivatise our subjectivities in community. Penelope's question of the becoming of women is a double-edged sword: silence as a socially becoming (decent in Marcella Althaus-Reid's terms) place for women would have her render herself up to the male; silence as the gathering up of herself to seek out, and to answer the call of the sea, hints at another kind of becoming. This latter case requires an awareness of the “right” time.

In order to make a place for ourselves in the text, as part of the textual fabric, we are asked by the poetic persona to stand judge over time, by judging that other possible undoing, Penelope's dreaming that we begin to weave into our own

⁵¹⁵ Other poems that identify the feminine with the moon, and lend themselves to explore sexual desires in light of women's sexual identities are “Selene” [ZU 29], “Southern Moon” [VL 95] and “Incurably here” [ZU 33].

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positionalities. Only then will we gather ourselves together in the context of liberation that will not wait for a '██████' (FL73, l.9), the happily ever after "guaranteed" by the institutional setup. Not the forever removed tomorrow, instead we anticipate and enact a future pregnant with hope (in this reading, the weaving and undoing are not futile actions, but active participation), to enact our sexuate belonging with God on earth⁵¹⁶.

4.3.2. Gendered Liberation

In the discussion of Penelope thus far we have been made aware of the context provided by gender, as a normative frame of reference that negotiates the social interaction as one judged by "the other". In my own understanding of gender in discourse, I have come to appreciate that the work of gender can be rethought along the lines of *Stellvertretung*. No longer deemed the idealised model that teaches us to objectify ourselves in order to substitute our own relationship to our body in discourse with that given in a socially coercive heteronormativity, gender can provide a frame of reference that is able to recognise itself, gender, as the product of a collaborative work permissive of difference. "Penelope or on marriage" [FL73] pleads a case for its readers who are made conscious of their judgment. This judgment enables or denies the creative work that needs undertaking to release women from their dubious repetitions into the becoming of their own creation.

Three images need greater reflection: '████████████████████' (l.10), going '██████' (l.11), and the weaving (ll.3; 13). That marriage is traditionally referred to as "safe haven" posits marriage in a metaphorical contra-distinction with the sea as emblem of love, in the way this operates in Sölle's poetry at large⁵¹⁷, and water with sexuality, in line with many other poems in Sölle's work. Penelope's

⁵¹⁶ Mark 12: 18-27.

⁵¹⁷ Cf. "A poem on the ice age / psalm 51 / the little mermaid and you" [FL 75], "The river loire does not cease swooshing" [BR 84], "Southern moon" [VL 95], "Charles bridge" [VL 153], "Breath" [LL 18].

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marriage is not safe. Whereas '██████████' (l.11) may be read as an image of exploring one's sexuality, in the present myth it is Odysseus who is free to be at sea, while Penelope is tied to the land. In her husband's absence, she is condemned, in honouring faithfulness, to abstinence, to '██████████' (ll.1; 15). Who could blame her if upon her husband's return she is not able to '██████████' (ll.1; 15)? In light of this kind of reading the ambiguous interchange of the middle lines is crucial: '██████████' (ll.5f.) is here a request for proximity, for intimacy that is not purely sexual. She does not ask for orgasm. Similarly the two subsequent lines address a sense of belonging that can cope with separation without falling into a demand structure. The to and fro of this interchange, it is to be noted, are the fabric of the metaphorical death-shroud, the '██████████' (l.4). It is line 10 that finally dispels the myth that accompanies marriage vows: '██████████' is an indication that the happily ever after is conditional, and the wife not at the free disposal of the husband. On Odysseus return, Penelope is not required to reiterate, to vow once more, '██████████' (l.9).

Of course, there are a number of ways to read the '██████████' (ll.1; 15), e.g. as submissiveness, as passivity, as obedience to another's demands and rule, in which case the interchange in the middle of the poem takes on a different nuance. In such a reading it is particularly interesting to identify that the positionality of Penelope shifts to one keen to go to sea herself. The shift of the poetic voice is fascinating here, from a poetic I to an omniscient descriptive voice about '██████████' (l.11) and '██████████' (l.10), which seem to suggest their correlation. In this light the '██████████' (l.10) are more ambiguous than the myth this reference derives from. Upon Odysseus' return, so the myth goes, he disguises himself so as to be in a position to investigate his wife's loyal faithfulness to his person during his absence. And why would he need the disguise? What had he hoped to find about his wife, and why? Was he dreaming of a new start? But his absence likewise

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demanding of Penelope to play the transvestite, to rule in his stead and assume a role that was not initially indicated for her, was not hers to choose. The girl that wanted to marry had not yet come to be a woman: the girl played at marriage, disguising herself as if she were a woman, but in playing along to the rule of men, forgot to go to sea, and endeavour to become a woman, just as Odysseus on his odyssey had proven himself to be a man.

So, what does this make of the weaving? What is the work of this poetic persona? And what is the dream that inspired it and maybe also inspired its undoing? The careful framing of this poem, not simply in its reference to the Greek myth in its title, but in its nuanced structure, identifies the body of this poem with the weaver's frame. The patterns of this cloth come with a forceful symmetry that nevertheless leaves the reader at odds with regards to its temporal setting. While throughout her engagement, Penelope seems to be busying herself in the work of *Clotho* (spinning the thread), the poem's *fatum* seems to suggest that her role has turned to *Atropos*, ready to cut the ties. If marriage is tying the knot, the piece of weaving untied would indicate a rift in the avowed relationship. And yet, there is no rift, no mistake, in the woven pattern – there is, however, temporal difference. To the poetic persona, both the memories of the years gone by weaving and her present situation are present in the [REDACTED], repeated at lines 1, 10, and 15. It is only in the final decision that [REDACTED]' (l.10) that we can observe a shift into the past tense. The [REDACTED] (l.11) the agent of the dreaming has been lost to the past, and with her the efforts of undoing the damage done to her dreaming (as a counter-motion of the daily weaving). Where the dreams may have been wild and boundless as the sea, the weaving is institutionally determined.

And yet, there is no easy transition away from the repetitive structures inhabited for this long, and so the question is posed in the conditional: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]' (l.14). The poetic persona is the transvestite,

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has to be identified as such because, despite her discovery of the lost dreams that separate her from the young girl, she has not yet found the means to practice her womanhood in her own terms. In light of a reflection on prayer, we could say that having identified the danger and damage that male God-talk can have in its institutional (and often abusive) form is not by itself enough to find a positive relationship to the divine in prayer, or in the service offered up to glorify God within the framework of male-dominated institutions. But what kind of God would become/be coming to/be becoming to a woman? Despite Sölle's open criticisms against the institutional side of the Church, she also can be heard to defend the institutional as a necessary aspect of a very different trinity in the face of tradition: the institutional (Petrine tradition), the intellectual (Pauline tradition) and the mystical (Johannean tradition), none of which she would dispense with willingly. In a seminar given on *The Silent Cry*, Sölle identifies the order of the institution with the potential for spaces, for creating 'places where people can meet,'⁵¹⁸ and so Penelope is left at the weaver's seat wondering what to do next, if she is ever to become a woman. If she is to find release, she needs to unlearn the pattern of the death-shroud. Penelope cannot live and remain in the in-between. Liberation will always seek out its actualisation; prolonged in potentiality the dream will die.

4.3.3. Conclusions

Many of Sölle's poems anticipate liberation, or analyse in poetic form the needs that give rise to that wish. The openness of these texts, their invitation to share in intersubjective consciousness with the reader, is what allows them their playfulness and a window (should I say mirror?) onto liberation actualised. The text is set free in its performance. 'I only read what I am hungry for, ...and then I do

⁵¹⁸ Dorothee Sölle, "Peter, Paul, and John," Seminar-recording at *Holden Village Audio Archive* <www.holdenvillage.org>, 4':00-4':25s: 'It's a very important thing to have these institutional orders, so to speak, these places where people can meet.' – reiterating Sölle, *The Silent Cry*, 1.

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not read, I eat'⁵¹⁹, said Simone Weil. In the analysis of Chapter Three I have identified water with sexuality, and have qualified this concern over the role of sexuate identification of women (their place in the discourse around production and reproduction) in the context of the desire of this thesis. Trying to locate a working conceptual boundary for women put me under pressure to assess where Sölle, and her poetic texts, fall in the debates surrounding sex and gender, not least in terms of language. 'Because women have no language sexed as female, they are used in the elaboration of so-called neuter language where in fact they are deprived of speech'⁵²⁰. On those terms, gender – and the process of gendering⁵²¹ – in my study has distinctly positive connotations for me, indicative of a process of mutual recognition amongst women, here not defined along the biological capacity or societal demand for reproduction. That gender is likewise a normativising framework, however, as Judith Butler's work has so forcefully brought to light, requires critical recognition with respect to the limits and chances opened up by such a reading strategy.

What had come to the fore in the discussion of lovers – and continues to play through institutional regulation of “sexual orientation” – is the powerful place of the erotic, as a kind of gendered desire, in the way in which we relate to one

⁵¹⁹ Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge, 1951), 15.

⁵²⁰ Luce Irigaray, “Love of Same, Love of Other,” 107.

⁵²¹ It is my understanding that within linguistic patterns of German, women become women by being sexed, rather than “gendered”, as can be observed in the linguistic curiosity of attaching the neuter gender to the word for child as well as for the word for girl: *das Kind*; *das Mädchen* (the diminutive-ending (-*chen*) triggers the grammatical neuter gender). More recently, German culture abandoned the use of the term Miss (*Fräulein*) – again a neuter term (diminutive ending -*lein*) – so that the transition between the non-descript gender of the girl and the traditional status of the married woman as social guarantee for reproduction is since diminishing, albeit only by virtue of being suppressed. Nevertheless, the level of social anxiety and control exerted over women's reproductive capacity is unabated.

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another and the world at large. That this has existential force, but necessarily breaks with the solitude of existential despair, is both its strength and its complexity. Because our affections and desires are of our bodies, each of our own, but play into a collective vision of our bodily selves, our gender and our means of engaging in ethical relationships with one another the expressions of our sexual desires have ever undergone social norming. That the mystics' amorous excesses addressing the divine have been understood as challenging displays of sexual affection underscores that erotic ecstasy does not abide by the laws of institutionalised hierarchies, harbouring a tremendous creativity of bodies in relation. Liturgical prayers, as public – authorised – texts emphasise the passion (suffering) while muting the erotic playfulness, giving instead a sanitised, functional texture to the celebrated liturgy. Here, the erotic has to be developed within other aspects of embodiment for the liturgy to emotionally, and physically connect to the celebrants. Liturgical prayers, in this light, are structural markers for the form (and formal quality) of the service. Liturgy too needs to be thought and practiced as a process in our responsive and responsible, sensuous and sensible receptions of sexuate belonging.

Understanding that liberation, too, shares its discursive field with gender, that, in fact, gendering is part of the process by which liberation is bestowed on the individual, complements the fact that theology assumes a vision of liberation that is for all. This “for all” of theology, which marks it as a unifying but also a generalising view of the existential situation faced in prayer by the believer (as an individual on the verge between faith and what theology would class as “sin” or social apathy), is taken up by deprivatised prayer as a reflection of the personal situation, the bodily, and gendered situation, “towards all” others – God and humanity. Thus, not understanding oneself in the isolation of one's self, but as a part of a greater whole, ever evolving and changing, is crucial for a theologically sound understanding and changing praxis of prayer. Hence, if a person praying

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would not understand her or himself as one with others, as living towards others (neither (entirely) at the mercy of others, nor (entirely) in charge of others), then that person would be at risk to succumb to a view of God that equals a convenient wish-fulfiller, and reflects a life utterly divorced from all ethical relationships. There would only remain the will to power. Deprivatising prayer, then, is not only a measure to assume power; it is a consciousness-raising movement, and in the elevation of consciousness (not of the ego!), women learn to confidently proclaim their faith, to act their faith, to live their faith in a way appropriate to their gender. And so we may pray in the words of the Psalm:

You have turned my mourning into dancing;
you have taken off my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy.⁵²²

⁵²² Psalm 30:11 (NRSV).

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Gender, to the argument of my thesis, harbours a transformative vision of the text. Its joys and sufferings play deeply into Sölle's poetic sensibilities. Amidst the diversity of women and the roles they assume in social contexts, women's subjectivity provides an imaginative point of reference in the negotiation of the text that transcends and brings into relation the bodies in question, women's bodies, and prayer-poetry. In their intersubjective exchanges, the co-creative work of analysis enables a perspective on the desires at work in the text that structure the communitative existence of each. Let us recall Sölle's programmatic statement once more:

For me, praying and writing poetry, prayer and poem, are not alternatives.... The thought for example that every human can pray is for me an enormous affirmation of human creativity. Christianity presupposes that all human beings are poets, namely, that they can pray... When people try to say with the utmost capacity for truthfulness what really concerns them, they offer prayer and are poets at the same time. To discover this anew, to bring it into reality or to make it known, is one of the goals I pursue in my poems.⁵²³

It is the latter part of her exposition that guides our final consideration of this text in its reference to praxis. Sölle declares her aims regarding her poetry in a threefold manner: to (re)-discover, to relate, and to make known. Hers is a language of expectation which belies any simple "return" in the discovery of the expected. The phrase Sölle uses in 'discover[ing] this anew' identifies for the reader that she expects the discovery to be transformative. The list given by Sölle for the poetic tasks is given the form of alternative explanations of the same goal: the making of sociality in prayer. Prayer-poetry not only promises a locus for transformation; it already is intrinsic to the event of transformation and its cognitive revelation. Prayer-poetry, as pursued by Sölle, invites our prayers to become deprivatised in the context of its discourse.

⁵²³ Sölle, *Against the Wind*, 153; Sölle, "Gegenwind," Bd.12, 260.

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Chapter Four has provided some measure of accountability on the side of my own aims and approach taken by the thesis, and highlighted the tense relationship between the analytic task of the thesis and the creative impetus rendered by the prayer-poetry. In order 'to make... known' how I can relate to Sölle's expectation of this relationship proposed in prayer-poetry, Sölle's general articulation on the nature of this discourse becomes inflected by my concern for and relation to gender. We arrived at the recognition that liberation – that transformational event heralded in prayer-/poetry, in its expansive aim to represent liberation for all – needs to be practiced in accordance with our sexuate belongings. As such liberation is performed in the context of a gendered discourse.

Thus, in asking after prayer-poetry as a discourse and a textual making of women's subjectivities, the thesis proceeded in Chapter One from a theological point of *departure*: the Death of God. Prayer is no longer addressing an eternal Other; it is engaging the believer in a mournful practice that seeks to deliver life by accepting its proximity with death as part of a communal, living process. Leaving behind classical theological teachings about the omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence of a male Godhead, reckoning with the Death of God in the context of a radical secularity identified this death as a public event that would restructure the relational make-up of the triune God. The self-sameness of God in patriarchal formulations of the Trinity, in the event of the Death of God, is giving way to the advent of difference that engenders incarnational faith. This death has not been private, can neither be substituted nor subsumed by our will to rationalise the loss in exchange for salvation (atonement). Instead, our grieving and loving inserts us into a context of lived faith where resurrection is the eventing of God in relationship with one another – in the presence of hope that transcends despair. In this relationship we create, we make, without taking away from each other. In *Stellvertretung* we acknowledge our *role* in the face of "the public" as one that stands in concrete relationship to our bodily and psychosocial selves. Instead of

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living in self-alienation, i.e. in substituting our role with all there is to ourselves, Sölle's critique of public prayer under the heading of deprivatisation points us to acknowledge our ontological locatedness in ourselves with one another.

Sölle's texts offer their readers a plethora of topics and concerns that require our critical attention. Chapter Two addressed the literary context of Sölle's work, of reception on her poetic stance, and its influences upon the direction of this study. Insofar as the disciplinary motif of the literary shaped the context of such an investigation, critical terms for analysis developed under the headings of genre and gender, facilitated in large parts by the work of Mary Gerhart on the generic, as a way to understand the role given to the lyric in the formal presentation of Sölle's poetry. Whereas some critics demerited Sölle's poetry on the grounds of its assumed poverty in literariness, at best allowing it to be denoted as a moderate attempt at *agitprop*, a focus on gender profiled the normative function of such genre descriptions. Approaching the role of gender to community – reading communities (reception) and the literary communities (genre) – I have differentiated prayer-poetry as a literary discourse whose function is not mimetic, but performative. Consonant with Sölle's activist concerns commonly highlighted by other critics, her texts are motivated by a clear need for participation that renders the Romantic vision of the poet as maker of art to the reader, whose position as *Stellvertreter* to the author requires co-creative action in the making of an intersubjective literary consciousness that does not deny either author, reader or critic to lend their voices to the exchange.

With these contexts in place, Chapter Three proceeded to move through analysis of women in the personas given in the poetry as lovers, mothers and artists. This strong link to public appearances of women in writing required careful reflection, and emphasised a co-creativity that associates the work of the thesis, the work of prayer, and the work of poetry with one another. While the distinction,

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hermeneutically, may be interesting, in the medial position given to prayer-poetry as a discourse such differentiation soon becomes futile. The focus on women's subjectivity enabled a localisation of a literary consciousness informed by the poetic personae and their readers. The focus on water opened up a point of transference between the questions posed by the body of the work: its literary (imagistic), sexual (oceanic) and theological (blessing, promise of liberation) contexts. A portrayal of women of their times, Sölle's work exemplifies a careful view of the needs and sufferings, but also of the joyful pleasures of women, that continues into the process of reading and responding to her text.

Identifying women as equal, situated not in a narcissistic self-enclosure, but an immersion in the textual presence of women recognised in their difference, water served as a strategic reference point in thematising Sölle's poetic oeuvre, and in selecting poems for analysis in this study. One such search is encountered in the poem "Levadia" [LL87], which has been read with reference to the myth of Narcissus. The question posed by the failed recognition of Narcissus of himself in the face of the watery mirror points to the need for mutual participation that gives rise to our recognition of ourselves in the very connection to others as equal and different. Water, as an elementary point of reference in Sölle's poetic work is noted not merely for the pleasurable role it often signals to the poetic text⁵²⁴. It is also given profile as a fluid medium that transports and transposes the relationships under investigation. In reading the location of the poetic persona of LL87 as one of women's subjectivities in the context of Narcissus' problem, namely to relate, and relate lovingly to another, we found that the realisation of the poetic persona's

⁵²⁴ I recall here Peter Cornehl's observation that Sölle took great delight in swimming, which predisposed my understanding of water with scenes of pleasure in her text that led me to explore the correlation between sexual play and water-images. Peter Cornehl, *Personal Correspondence*, skype call, 24/10/2013.

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desire for grace confronts her with her sexual position vis-à-vis her mother (imaged in the source or abyss).

Where "Levadia" [LL87] considered the impetus for seeking out solidarity with other women as the basis of sexual self-recognition, the section on Lovers (3.2) introduces sexual orientation as a parameter for transcendence in sexual relationships. Exploring the role of the body in language at stake in any transmission of sexual ethics, the poems selected for this section range from a figurative sexual encounter between two protagonists ("To believe someone's felicity" [FL25]), and an exploration into the context and conduct envisioned in sexual liberation ("Theory on the glass of water" [ZU145]), to a poetic transfiguration of the poetic persona in the course of masturbation, encountering her own desire in face of her partner's absence as a wakeful dream ("Green poem" [BR52]). Delighting in the newness of life thus encountered, the creative capacity of the poetic persona at one with all the living knows itself also in the presence of the absent partner (to which the final reading of "Penelope" [FL 73] returned us).

In the convergence between creation, procreation and co-creation, the supreme "other", the Mother, emerges as a crucial reference point for the subsequent section, also in light of the desire mandated to women in the phallic economy of exchange for having a child. "Open hands" [LL36] juxtaposed the critique given in Chapter One on the male Godhead with a reflection on the phallic mother, concluding that the mere exchange in the gendered address of God did little to deconstruct the role given to God in the symbolic order; in relation to her child the mother remained identified only in relation to the phallus. Moving from the frustration/castration of the poetic persona in LL36 in the role of the daughter to the situation of the mother in relation to her son in BR81, the poem offers itself as a context for transforming frustration/castration/separation into co-creative engagement. Instead of competing with the guitar as the vied for object of

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attention, the mother resonates with the guitar's performance of "All my trials" that allows her to recognise her grief over the separation without the urge to repossess the power given to her in her nurture of her child. The poem, as co-creative occasion of prayer, accompanies the performance that connects her with the work of her son. The identification of the mother as mother, that is, her co-creative capacity in relation to her child, is at issue in Sölle's reworking of the Pietà in VL47. The image of grief that suspends the relationship between mother and son in the past, that would cease to grant the title of mother to the woman who has lost her child, is rejected. Instead, the place offered by art – and the artistic transposition of the sculpture into Sölle's poetic text, beckons the reader to acknowledge the work Mary is undertaking in the grieving signified by her tears as co-creative, between herself and her child, as well as herself in the context of raising herself from motherhood. In the recognition of her loss, but also her active participation with that loss continued in her readers' solidarity with the mother, the Pietà emerges as a symbol of strength for women where motherhood is not conditioned by castration. As a co-creative endeavour, maternity persists beyond the presence of the object and the status granted to the child with which a mother is to bargain for her place in the economy of exchange instituted by a supposed heteronormative desire of the male. In the gesture indicated by the aggrieved mother in the poem, the wish for a different language of care and desire begins to formulate itself.

Hence, the objects – the art-works – that mark out creative performance discussed in the final analysis section (3.4) have been considered in their disposition between the work of art and the artist, foregrounding our mutual becoming towards each other, as women, participating in the making of a liberated intersubjective consciousness that would truly allow prayer-poetry to share in speech (in the sense given by Irigaray). Insofar as the role of the artist is not exhausted by reference to the author, and is typically not the focus of the lyric verse under consideration, the artist's role points to artistic enactment – the relationship

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given between doing and being. Authoring and reading, each in their own right, develop a poetic of becoming towards the text that invites images of (our) material transformations. The two poems discussed in this section have taken their cues in the art-work of other artists. "Because all creatures need help from all" [FL69] overtly makes reference to the artists – the workers – who produced the blue drinking glass, and in its title alludes to a work by Bertold Brecht. Sölle recovered here a literary exchange between the making and the utility of objects that, read in the context of Brecht's poem, crystallise in the glass of water as a symbol of sexual relationships. Relating this reading back to the section on Lovers, the glass of water, but also the elemental transition between water and light, FL69 foregrounded the material handling of the work that is undertaken in (hetero)-sexual activity. "Wishes in the garden of barbara hepworth" [FL 78] shifts emphasis from a sexual doing to a sexual identification occasioned by the observance/participation in of the sculptured garden. The material density of the shaped stonework contrasted with the delicate lucidity presented by the glass of water of the previous poem. The insight into the interior of the stonework paralleled with a closer consideration of the artist in the guise of the mother links the 'stones and missing of stones' with the presence and absence of nurturing relationships. Where Barbara Hepworth came to light in the role of artist and mother, the poetic persona learned to recognise herself, in the context of the sculptured garden, as co-creative participant, as lover in her own right.

Having identified the inner-textual relationships of the poetic personae and the work of prayer in the context of a literary inter-subjectivity, the place of women's subjectivity in the framework of the thesis-text came under consideration. Returning the argument to the role of reception that localised its literary interpretations, the final chapter closed the frame given to the work of liberation. Translation (4.1) here offered itself as literary and linguistic context for the performative workings out of the body of the text – poetry-translations and thesis-

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text. Not only in translating prayer-poetry from one linguistic community to another, but also as a metaphor for the hermeneutical turning point in presenting prayer-poetry in the context of analytic prose, translation was marked as transformational encounter. Tracing this encounter with the text, between texts, through the lens of Sölle's liberation hermeneutic in the second instance (4.2.) prompted me to address the context from which my analytic proceeded in terms of liturgical practice. Since such a practice is tied intimately to the co-creative mandate given in Sölle's notion of *Stellvertretung*, the text returned, in the reading of "Penelope" [FL 73], to the perspectives offered to liberation by gender.

In sum, this thesis has set out to contextualise Dorothee Sölle's theopoetic vision with reference to the extensive body of poetry she produced over the course of 40 years of writing. With a focus on the critical potential given in prayer-poetry as a discourse, I identified a "liturgical" praxis for reading women's subjectivities that contributes to the theological reception of Sölle's work as a whole, but also furthers research on her literary work beyond the confines of disciplinary studies. Offering the literary scholar the tools to unpack the theological milieu from which Sölle writes, the discussion on deprivatisation and co-creation became a shared point of identification for theological, literary and philosophical arguments on the sexuate body of the work. Grouping my own work under liturgical reception points my critical involvement in the direction of lived faith praxis, even where my analytic approach remains highly literary. Thus I argued for an engagement with the text that is at once prayerful and poetic (the distinction between these two becoming less and less possible⁵²⁵): an engagement that differentiates our situation

⁵²⁵ I echo one of Sölle's poems, "LOVE CARELESS LOVE" [FL 48, l.7f.]:

████████████████████'. I do not correlate desire and pain – or their affective links to love and suffering – with the pair introduced by the prayerful and the poetic. I do however mark that, like Sölle's poetic observation on the relationship between desire and pain on

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at coming to imagine in the context of one another, and that translates – brings together – word and action, dreaming and waking, asking and thanking. The question that posed itself to me at the outset of my research – namely, what it would mean to translate prayer into poetry, poetry into prayer, and to be engaging in this prayer on the basis of women's subjectivity – can never be answered by one person alone, cannot be approached without raising consciousness of our belonging in gender and in recognition of our sexuate difference. Deprivatisation, as a point of departure for women to enter into the *Stellvertretung* promised in incarnational faith, urges us to carefully critique and situate ourselves as co-creative subjects-in-relation. In this sense the Death of God truly initiates – raises – a sociality born from the solidarity of the grieving that makes room for the living and departed to enter a liberated future⁵²⁶.

the body, the prayerful and the poetic are inseparable in the work, i.e. the embodiment or performance of prayer's poetic texture.

⁵²⁶ Philippians 4: 6-7.

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