Introduction

> I can only speak for myself. But what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life. And I mean that literally.
>
> *Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory"*

Let's start with this: theory is not a set of texts, it is a style of approach. Despite what it seems, to "do theory" is not to master a particular set of philosophical or critical ideas. Or at least it should not be. It is certainly not to "apply" them, which suggests the ideas are inanimate or inert. It is something more: it is to "play with possibility" as Barbara Christian puts it, to do urgent retelling of the conditions of the world.[1] Such work far exceeds any modern canons or formulaic hermeneutical strategies. It is to get a little lost in the act of speculation.[2]

I start here with Barbara Christian, who back in 1987 launched an important critique of the narrow aperture – and striking whiteness – of "theory" after the 1960s and 1970s, in order to follow her in the task of beginning to loosen our attachments to this canon and the apparent demand that we instrumentalize it, as opposed to, say, taking its invitation to speculate. I start with Barbara Christian, and I will end with her, to return us to the necessity, sometimes dire, of this retelling and conscious play that is so often the engine for our collective dives into theory (typically understood).[3]

This Element, then, will only partially be a pedagogical rendition of when and how the relatively small canon of philosophical texts over-associated with theory has appeared in the study of religion in late antiquity.[4] I begin but do not end there. In starting with "theory" traditionally understood, I hope to stretch us toward readings outside of this canon, toward practices other than "use" and

[1] Barbara Christian, "The race for theory," *Cultural Critique*, 6 (1987), 51–63.

[2] Speculation, while a synonym for theory, more directly implicates imagination, fantasy, and play. It points to theory as process, rather than as specialized jargon, schematics, or grand epistemologies. So my choice of the word "speculation" here comes from a desire to foreground creativity while also being clear about its gravity and necessity.

[3] There is much more to Christian's piece than what I have recounted thus far, some of which I will discuss at the Conclusion of this Element. It is important to note here, though, that Christian is writing about Black art and literature as theorizing, as world-making, and her essay and her writing at large have been central to Black feminism. So there is an inevitable disjoint in bringing her critique and call into the context of a predominantly white field like ancient history. I believe understanding and taking seriously her critique and call, however, is crucial to crafting a more ethical and, because more ethical, more vital field of thought.

[4] There have already been very full accounts and explanations of theory in or overlapping with the field of late antiquity studies. The two main examples, both elegant and programmatic, are Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Harvard University Press, 2004) and Michal Beth Dinkler, *Literary Theory and the New Testament* (Yale University Press, 2019). More extensive and wide-ranging, written by a collection of authors, and not unlike the Elements series, is Brill's Research Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation series. The fact that this work has already been done so well allows me to depart a bit from instructional and cartographical modes.

"application" of theory – to put our current relationship to theory/particular theories back into the context of the crises of living they attempt to resolve. I expect that moving toward these other readings and practices will sometimes be difficult and far from obvious.

To initiate this movement, I have written this Element as a history of speculative leaps in the field, often as they appear with or near what we designate as theory. It is a history of dilemmas that the field has tried to work out again and again, for which the field tried to find new (and then old, and then new) language and concepts. It is a history of intractability, impasses, and irresolution for historical, experiential, and existential questions, because often it is "theory" that is brought in to resolve or mediate these large-scale questions – ones that animate our work because they animate our lives. This Element also contains my own speculations on why we as a field are here now, and about what is going on, half-spoken, in the disciplinary unconscious.

I do not aim for comprehensiveness, either bibliographic or otherwise (overrated if not impossible). The goal is less to survey the breadth of material engaging theory in the study of religion in late antiquity than it is to offer a synthesis and primer for how to understand and connect at least the most predominant strands and themes associated with "theory" in the field.[5] These are strands and themes that generally fall under the heading of contemporary critical theory and cultural studies.[6]

This Element is structured in three sections, each beginning with a short portrait of a pivotal and early figure in the study of religion in late antiquity: Elizabeth Clark, Peter Brown, and Henry-Irénée Marrou. They are addressed in that order. I approach each scholar through dilemmas that centrally preoccupied them, and I follow the trail of those dilemmas as they lived on in the field, either through explicit struggle or subtle and underground fixations and attachments. I choose these three scholars to frame the sections not just for their influence or status as beloved figures, but because of the way these "early" figures in the field crystallize specific ongoing tensions between living history and writing history, tensions that demanded gestures of abstraction and imagination to bridge or smooth or dramatize them.

[5] "Theory in the study of religion in late antiquity" also delimits the task as mainly engaging North American scholarship since "late antiquity" tends to represent a largely North American reorientation away from "patristics" – one tied closely to a particular set of methodologies, as Anthony Kaldellis notes. Kaldellis, "Late antiquity dissolves," *Marginalia Review of Books*, September 18, 2015.

[6] These strands – gender/representation, Foucault/defamiliarization, postcolonialism/the global – are artificially separated to highlight the different dilemmas and conundrums undergirding them. Readers will no doubt notice this artificiality as they read and find returns, overlaps, and continuities across sections. These are mostly by design.

In Clark's work (beginning in the late 1970s), we see her wrestling with a knot of questions about gender, language/representation, and what we might call "thereness." How to "read" bodies in literature, how to situate their signs and meanings in their historical settings, and even to what extent those bodies are said to *be there*: these knots remain at the heart of so much scholarship. Likewise, Clark's own early hopes and struggles with feminist historiography bear out across decades and under differently pressured circumstances. One question I ask: can feminist historiography withstand the weight of these cumulative changes in time and circumstance?

His work kicking off about two decades before Clark's, Peter Brown was motivated by the question of accounting for cultural difference, which his encounters with Michel Foucault's work informed. So Section 2 of this present Element wanders around in Foucault's long and prolific reception in the field: he is a figure of both inspiration and discontent. He is often the unnamed, taken-for-granted center of new epistemological considerations, and just as often a name that carries its own varied meanings apart from the specificity of his work. Additionally, considering Brown's rapturous storytelling skills as essential to his work, I discuss his style itself as part of a long, somewhat hushed lineage in the field, a lineage of lyrical historiography that has its own integrity and ethos.

The earliest of the figures discussed here, Marrou, began his work in the 1930s. Like the Augustine he was writing about, Marrou was trying to make sense of two worlds at odds with one another. A citizen of France, he felt acutely the crisis of France's war on colonized Algeria as he struggled to explain Augustine. We see Marrou's impulses live on in later desires to write a late antiquity more accountable to the global relations of empire, and this accountability has come mainly in the form of engagements with postcolonial theory. Yet many of the direct implications of these engagements remain tentative, and so in Section 3, I try to draw out and escalate the more distinct political and ethical possibilities of this work for living in and with (neo)colonialism now, including the ways it affects the very shape of the study of religion in late antiquity.

1 Gender, Difference, Thereness, and Representation

"Soon, my interest turned to women in early Christianity: but where to find them?" In a retrospective biographical essay written in 2015 (after her retirement), Elizabeth Clark describes her scholarship through the many unexpected turns of a woman scholar encountering the openings and foreclosures of academic life specific to the mid-twentieth century.[7] As an exceptional figure privy to certain positions so often prohibited to women, she was of course

[7] Elizabeth A. Clark, "The retrospective self," *Catholic Historical Review*, 101 (2015), 1–27, at 8.

surrounded by men, a circumstance that one could imagine carried some loneliness and haunting precarity. It was in this long moment, and associatively linked to her own women's rights activism, that she began the work that became *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends*.[8] In that book, Clark describes how certain women's education and wealth mitigated their low status as women and allowed them to be seen by elite men (at least occasionally) as worthy conversation partners – echoing Clark's own uncertain inclusion in the world of idea-making men.

Twenty years after *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends*, the question of "Where to find them?" became vexed. In "The Lady Vanishes" (1998), Clark charts how poststructuralist theories had unsettled what had become fundamentals of feminist historiography, primarily the notions of women's experience and finding women as actors in history. The phrase "real women" now appears in scare quotes and the singular issue that plagued, or at least problematized, historical work was that texts inevitably constructed and narrativized at least as much as they revealed. Moreover, there was no sure way to tell which was which: "[W]e deal, always, with representation."[9]

In "The Lady Vanishes," Clark is drawing largely on Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Joan Wallach Scott, all of whom work under the umbrella of ideas, thinkers, and texts we describe as "poststructuralism." Poststructuralism is most often what is implied, by shorthand, in evoking "theory." As the word suggests, poststructuralism is the name given to a series of efforts to destabilize the very dichotomized oppositions seen (in structuralist paradigms) as basic to human understanding.[10] These were also efforts to undermine naturalized foundational and authoritative claims in the name of what anxieties haunt them and what excesses or failures those claims create.

Also called the "linguistic turn" for its emphasis on the power of language to produce realities (rather than simply referring to them), poststructuralism is associated with killing off two darlings of modernism: the author and the subject.[11] The death of the subject, Clark notes, was a loss some feminist historians were unwilling to accept. Agency and self-determination, which defined the

[8] Elizabeth A. Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and Translations*. 2nd ed. (Edwin Mellen Press, 1982).

[9] Elizabeth A. Clark, "The lady vanishes: Dilemmas of a feminist historian after the 'linguistic turn,'" *Church History*, 67 (1998), 1–31, at 30.

[10] While poststructuralism is often thought of as a "school" with clear adherents, that oversimplifies the work and trajectories of the writers involved since many of the associated writers – Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes – were, at different times and to different extents, invested in and building on structuralist paradigms. Of course, these brief summaries I am offering are also reductions of a complex network of thinkers and ideas.

[11] On the death of the subject, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). More on the death of the author in Section 2.

subject in the modern sense, were cardinal (white, bourgeois) feminist values.[12] Why take away what women had only just begun to claim for themselves?[13]

Clark was not the first scholar in the field with feminist commitments to find herself at odds with these pillar values of feminist historiography.[14] In Virginia Burrus's "The Heretical Woman As Symbol" (1991), Burrus expressly describes herself as cautioning other feminist historians against romanticizing the associations between heresy and women in heresiological literature, as if such descriptions of women might offer a history of women pushing back against patriarchy and orthodoxy.[15] As an alternative, she takes Alain Le Boulluec's recognition that heresy and orthodoxy are not obvious categories, but rather mutually constituted constructions, to the figure of the heretical woman.[16] Burrus's article is a search for the "historical circumstances that gave rise to women's supposed proclivity to heresy" and to better understand how feminized figures were props in community debates and social conflicts.[17] This article appears only a few years after Burrus's first monograph, *Chastity As Autonomy* which, in addition to the signaling of "autonomy" in the title, implies a much more encouraging picture of the relationship between texts and the social lives of ancient women.[18]

In both Burrus and Clark, then, we witness pivots between what has been called second-wave and third-wave feminism, the latter of which is often defined primarily with respect to poststructuralism.[19] This changed orientation

[12] For critiques and recalibrations of agency and autonomy/self-determination, see Judith Butler, "Beside oneself: On the limits of sexual autonomy," in *Undoing Gender* (Routledge, 2004), 17–39; Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2005); Cressida J. Heyes, *The Anaesthetics of Existence: Experience at the Edge* (Duke University Press, 2020).

[13] Clark, "The lady vanishes," 3.

[14] Clark was breaking with the feminist social history that was thriving in the 1990s, as seen in the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Antoinette Clark Wire, and Bernadette Brooten, for example, all of whom were making careers on feminist historical reconstruction of women's activity, agency, and experience in antiquity.

[15] Virginia Burrus, "The heretical woman as symbol in Alexander, Athanasius, Epiphanius, and Jerome," *Harvard Theological Review*, 84 (1991), 229–248.

[16] See Alain Le Boulluec, *La notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque, IIe–IIIe siècles* (Études Augustiniennes, 1985). Le Boulluec, as Burrus points out, is approaching the construction of orthodoxy and heresy as Michel Foucault approaches the genealogy of madness and reason as mutually constituting. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Reason: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Vintage, 1988).

[17] Burrus, "The heretical woman," 231.

[18] Virginia Burrus, *Chastity As Autonomy: Women in the Stories of the Apocryphal Acts* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1987).

[19] Feminism as a history of waves is a popular narrative, but not an unproblematic one. For one, as Clare Hemmings argues, the story of the waves presumes Black feminism and poststructuralism (for instance) as "outside" of feminism proper, only interjecting to offer complications to a more "original" feminism. Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Duke University Press, 2011).

has, over time, filtered through the field generally (if unevenly), as a not-insignificant portion of the field now tends to train its collective gaze more on *gender* than *women*, on discourse and on cultural constructions of phenomena rather than their referential ground.[20]

While critiques of the category of "woman" did not originate with poststructuralism, academic queer theory (heavily indebted to poststructuralism) popularized this critique. Judith Butler's work, specifically *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, is iconic for its theorizing of the performativity of gender and its deconstruction of the sex/gender distinction.[21] Butler's rethinking of gender as always a copy without an original, as a citation of a norm that makes possible the undermining of the norm, became both the subtext and instrument of much critical historical work.[22] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* is much less often cited in the field, perhaps because it is not offering an extractable concept like Butler's performative citations.[23] But it is no less important, no less compelling, especially for its disjoining of the normative alignments sex-gender-sexuality.[24]

The turn to discursive constructions of gender was about many things. Across academic fields, it signaled not only an indebtedness to queer theory but also a hope to move beyond the limitations and problems of "woman" – an essentializing and universalizing category.[25] In the study of religion in late antiquity, however, the turn to discursive constructions of gender paralleled other

[20] An interest in the social histories of women, as I will suggest in what follows, has certainly not evaporated by any means. Likewise, there have been integrations of the interests in feminist social reconstructions and queer theory in New Testament scholarship – for instance, in the work on Paul's letters by Joseph Marchal. See Marchal, *Appalling Bodies: Queer Figures before and after Paul's Letters* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

[21] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Routledge, 1996).

[22] For a sampling of work indebted to Butler on gender and sexual difference, see Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (University of California Press, 1997); Virginia Burrus, *Begotten Not Made: Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity* (Stanford University Press, 2000); Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (Columbia University Press, 2008); Carly Daniel-Hughes, *The Salvation of the Flesh in Tertullian of Carthage: Dressing for Resurrection* (Palgrave, 2011); Kristi Upson-Saia, *Early Christian Dress: Gender, Virtue and Authority* (Routledge, 2011); Taylor Petrey, *Resurrecting Parts: Early Christians on Desire, Reproduction, and Sexual Difference* (Routledge, 2016). For essays on Butler's work on gender, performativity, and citationality relative to the field of religion at large, see Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville (eds.), *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler* (Columbia University Press, 2006).

[23] It does appear, for instance, in Benjamin Dunning, *Specters of Paul: Sexual Difference in Early Christian Thought* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

[24] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (University of California Press, 1990). See especially "Axiomatic," 1–65.

[25] For a sophisticated and fine-grained account of the relationship between feminism and queer theory as academic disciplines and the hopes of inclusivity attached to the movement from

deconstructive enterprises that sought to denaturalize the content of identities, revealing the norms and power relations organizing them. For instance, poststructuralism produced a profusion of scholarly literature on the "construction of Jewish and Christian identities" and an attention to the "production of difference" as a sociocultural process. One casualty of this approach was the notion of the "parting of the ways" between Judaism and Christianity, typically imagined as a distinct historical moment in which two legibly separate religious entities emerged (even though there was no agreement on when this moment occurred).[26] Judaism and Christianity were alternatively being reenvisioned as ongoing, unfinished projects, always articulating themselves in relationship to one another, ultimately sharing rhetorical and social processes, and drawing from similar (if not identical) traditions in the process.

Gender itself was crucial to instantiations of social and cultural difference: Cynthia Baker's *Rebuilding the House of Israel*, for instance, contends that rabbinic texts circumscribed women's bodies and sexuality, especially as women moved in various spaces: it is not that Jewish women were relegated to only domestic, private spheres; it is rather that women were embodiments of the house.[27] But, for Baker, these texts reflect social and economic anxieties, including around Roman imperialism and the threat "foreignness" presented for Jewish cultural identity.[28] Gender and ethnicity worked in tandem.

Thus these forms of social difference were understood both to rely on gender and to operate analogically to it. "Difference" with respect to Judaism and Christianity paralleled the notion of "sexual difference," a term issuing from psychoanalytically inflected feminist theory.[29] As it appeared in the work of philosopher Luce Irigaray and historian Joan Wallach Scott, "sexual difference" implies an irreducible psychic relationship of otherness, an unresolvable dilemma, in which gender is the "attribution of meaning to something that always eludes definition."[30] In Irigaray, it also implies biological/anatomical

"women" to "gender" as an analytic object, see Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons* (Duke University Press, 2012), 36–136.

[26] For example, Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeao-Christianity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Adam Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (eds.), *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Fortress Press, 2007); Eric Smith, *Jewish Glass and Christian Stone: A Materialist Mapping of the "Parting of the Ways"* (Routledge, 2017); Ra'anan Boustan and Joseph E. Sanzo, "Christian magicians, Jewish magical idioms, and the shared magical culture of late antiquity," *Harvard Theological Review*, 110 (2017), 217–240.

[27] Cynthia M. Baker, *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity* (Stanford University Press, 2002).

[28] Baker, *Rebuilding the House of Israel*, 1–15.

[29] On the genealogy and problems of the term "sexual difference," see Dunning, *Specters of Paul*, 15–16.

[30] Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Duke University Press, 2011), 5–7.

referents.[31] Ben Dunning's *Specters of Paul*, for instance, takes up sexual difference to add nuance to the debates on Paul and gender, which have, in feminist scholarship, typically focused on the clear androcentrism and misogyny in the letters. Dunning, on the other hand, follows the unresolved and unresolvable conundrum of sexual difference through Paul and his readers.

The emphasis on "difference" in studies of cultural identity belies the fact that so much scholarship on constructions of Jewish and Christian identities was attempting to honor the blur and connectedness between Judaism and Christianity.[32] The question was not just how to honor the blur and connectedness, however, but how to do so while also accounting for the ways that claims to certain social identities can support or enact violence. Thus Christian representations of Jews, who were so often props for Christian self-definition, came under particular scrutiny. Susanna Drake's *Slandering the Jew*, for instance, follows the stereotype of the "carnal Jew" as it not only fortified Christian self-understanding but also shaped Christian engagement with scripture in late antiquity. For Drake, this sexualized invective also associatively linked Jewishness to heresy in order to delineate a proper Christianness, imagined as purged of any "outside" influences. What is "outside," however, is exactly what is in question. Drake, drawing from postcolonial theorists Homi Bhabha and Ann Laura Stoler, argues that such purity politics are best understood as muscular responses to a hybrid, colonial context.[33]

Drake's work demonstrates the heightened focus, arriving with poststructuralism, on the violence of normative reality construction. Her book, however, is also illustrative of the related conundrum of how to articulate precisely what the effects of violent texts or representations might be, how *material* those effects are.[34] Does violent language suggest social violence on the part of individuals speaking it? That question is too small, according to Drake: imperial legislation that variously propagated Jewish stereotypes and claimed protections for Jewish social spaces illustrates for Drake that discursive violence was not

[31] Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Carolyn Burke and Gillian Gill, trans. (Cornell University Press, 1983); *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Gillian Gill, trans. (Cornell University Press, 1985). *Cultural* difference owed much of its epistemology to psychoanalytic theory too, especially because psychoanalytic theory had such a central place in the postcolonial and/or anticolonial work of Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and others. More on these figures in Section 3.

[32] "Difference" was additionally a keyword for making sense of Christian incoherence, for instance, and to try to neutralize the ideologically weighted social fractures implied by heresy/orthodoxy discourse. On the narrative management of intra-Christian difference, see Karen L. King, "Factions, diversity, multiplicity: Representing early Christian differences for the 21st century," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 23 (2011), 216–237.

[33] Susanna Drake, *Slandering the Jew: Sexuality and Difference in Early Christian Texts* (University of Pennsylvania, 2013), introduction.

[34] Additionally, see Ra'anan S. Boustan, Alex P. Jassen, and Calvin J. Roetzel (eds.), *Violence, Scripture, and Textual Practice in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Brill, 2010).

abstract.[35] What is more, discursive violence is not simply a matter of words versus deeds: "To comprehend the anti-Jewish violence of this era, we must first understand the 'representability' of Jewish life in early Christian discourses."[36] Anti-Jewish rhetoric facilitated an atmosphere of anti-Jewish violence.[37] "The discourses of stereotype, name-calling, and sexual slander examined here functioned not merely as linguistic devices of ancient invective but as performative acts that themselves produced reality for late ancient Jews and Christians."[38]

There is no question about the long arc of anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic violence that Christianity has rationalized from within itself. However, the heaviness of that history also can create a kind of epistemological overreach, a sense that anti-Judaism is the primary way in which all late ancient Christian engagements with Jewish traditions should be framed, as Jennifer Knust argues. Knust plays out the history and meanings of the veneration of the Maccabean martyrs by Christians in late antiquity, wondering if perhaps the scholarly tendency to read all instances of Christians taking up Jewish figures as appropriative means that we also miss instances in which they represented more shared and mutual relations.[39] Knust describes this tendency through queer theorist Eve Sedgwick's diagnosis of "paranoid readings," an affective (non-pathologizing) description of the overwhelming orientation of critique issuing from the "hermeneutics of suspicion."[40] "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," which appears in Sedgwick's book *Touching Feeling* (one of the books that kicked off "the affective turn"), questions the dominance of the "highly

[35] Drake, *Slandering the Jew*, 99–106. [36] Drake, *Slandering the Jew*, 103.

[37] Likewise, on the relationship between rhetorical and real (historical) Jews/real Jewish-Christian relations, see Andrew Jacobs, *Remains of the Jew: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 207–208.

[38] However, Drake does not end with the ultimacy or totalizing effects of violence. She draws from Judith Butler's book *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (Routledge, 1997) to offer the possibility that these kinds of interpellational injuries can also be "the site of subversion and resistance." Quoting Butler, these rhetorical forms of violence "can produce a scene of agency from ambivalence, a set of effects that exceed the animating intentions of the call." Drake, *Slandering the Jew*, 104.

[39] Jennifer Knust, "Jewish bones and Christian Bibles: The Maccabean martyrs in Christian late antiquity," presented at the Christianity Seminar of the Westar Institute, Santa Rosa, California, 2015. Compatibly, see Maia Kotrosits, *Rethinking Early Christian Identity* (Fortress Press, 2015) on how scholars' concerns about supersessionism, while obviously legitimate, can blot out possibilities for other readings of New Testament and related texts, including readings that demonstrate the fullness of these texts' investment in Israelite/Judean diasporic culture.

[40] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Duke University Press, 2003). Sedgwick, in all of her work, built theoretical concepts from the idiosyncracies of her experiences and relationships, as well as her sharp observations of the acute and diffuse forces of normative cultures.

compelling tracing-and-exposure project" with respect to systemic violence, not to deny that violence exists, but rather to ask, "What does knowledge *do*?"[41]

> [Paul] Ricoeur introduced the category of the hermeneutics of suspicion to describe the position of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and their intellectual offspring in a context that also included such alternative disciplinary hermeneutics as the philological and theological "hermeneutics of recovery of meaning." His intent in offering the former of these formulations was descriptive and taxonomic rather than imperative. In the context of recent U.S. critical theory, however, where Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud by themselves are taken as constituting a pretty sufficient genealogy for the mainstream of New Historicist, deconstructive, feminist, queer, and psychoanalytic criticism, to apply a hermeneutics of suspicion is, I believe, widely understood as a mandatory injunction rather than a possibility among other possibilities. (124–5)

Sedgwick notes the loss of other critical positions with the prestige of such critical paranoia, as well as the irony that few have ever interrogated it: "The imperative framing will do funny things to a hermeneutics of suspicion."[42]

The question of how "paranoid" our readings should be, and whether our attunement to violence is also a crowding out of other forms of knowing, or other historical possibilities, is an important one that ultimately frames a lot of the field. Clark's and Burrus's apparent pessimism certainly has not disappeared social histories of women – or children, whose representation in ancient literature is just as fraught.[43] In some cases, the task became to understand the gaps

[41] See later in Section 1 for more on theories of affect.

[42] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 125. Sedgwick's book, and her emphasis on reparative practices/positionings as counterpoint to paranoid ones, has been extremely popular across fields. Reparative readings and practices have held so much sway that they have received their own critiques, including Patricia Stuelke's *The Ruse of Repair: U.S. Neoliberal Empire and the Turn from Critique* (Duke University Press, 2021). Importantly, *Touching Feeling* was questioning disciplinary consensus-formation and the truth value taken on by certain epistemological modes above others:

> I suppose this ought to seem quite an unremarkable epiphany: that knowledge does rather than simply is it is by now very routine to discover. Yet it seems that a lot of the real force of such discoveries has been blunted through the habitual practices of the same forms of critical theory that have given such broad currency to the formulae themselves. In particular, it is possible that the very productive critical habits embodied in what Paul Ricoeur memorably called the "hermeneutics of suspicion" – widespread critical habits indeed, perhaps by now nearly synonymous with criticism itself – may have had an unintentionally stultifying side effect: they may have made it less rather than more possible to unpack the local, contingent relations between any given piece of knowledge and its narrative/epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower, or teller. (124)

This context for Sedgwick's essay is key, and her worries about the propagation and reproduction of critical habits without consideration of the force of their effects (including dispositional ones) have been influential for me, and, perhaps obviously, lives on in this present Element, among other places.

[43] See, for instance, Ross Shepard Kraemer's very pointed critique of Clark in *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and Religion in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (Oxford University Press, 2012).