Networks of Belief

An Introduction

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> Who says everything is a network? Everyone, it seems. In philosophy, Bruno Latour: ontology is a network. In literary studies, Franco Moretti: Hamlet is a network. In the military, Donald Rumsfeld: the battlefield is a network. . . . Thus I characterize the first assumption—"everything is a network"—as a kind of network fundamentalism. It claims that whatever exists in the world appears naturally in the form of a system, an ecology, an assemblage, in short, as a network.
>
> Alexander R. Galloway, "Network Pessimism"

It no longer registers as a shock to hear proclamations of an emerging age of networks, of algorithms, of artificial intelligence, of machine learning, robotics, ubiquitous digital devices, or the cloud. From economics to genetics, computation is heralded as the skeleton key to a treasure trove of the world's best-hidden secrets.

Alexander R. Galloway's above-cited "network fundamentalism," we contend, reveals the extent to which these notions of networks are bound up with questions of belief. But is the belief that

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"everything is a network" something that emerges in response to the emergence of ubiquitous digital connectivity? Or, rather, does the figure of the network have a deeper history that the digital simply brings into sharper relief? What is the relation between (belief in) the ubiquity of networks and late capitalism, that is, capitalism with cybernetic characteristics? Just as Galloway has pointed toward contemporary beliefs in networks, we ask whether belief is inherently *networked* and to what degree political-theological questions are themselves machinic, as Roberto Esposito would have it: the fabric of an exclusionary *dispositif* that has long held sway over our conceptions of politics, law, and theology.[1]

Apprehending networks and belief as intertwined phenomena requires understanding that the contemporary declarations of "network fundamentalism," announcements of what we might call "the good news of computing," are not merely the consequence of technological successes brought about by a newly empowered data-driven paradigm—the newfangled digital epistemology, which divorced computation from the model- and physics-based approaches dominant in the 1970s and 1980s, in favor of the more "real-world groundings" of ubiquitous data collection.

Instead, the present data-driven approach to network connectivity must be understood in terms of its aim at a profound transformation not only in how subjects experience the world but also of that world's very nature. Analog activities are ontologically refigured by tech companies like Google and Facebook as information-rich behavior. The world at large is redisclosed as having been information all along, in a perpetual state of waiting to be harvested.

If an ontic explanation of increasing technical capacity and the revelations of data science are insufficient to apprehend what we have termed networks of belief, how then should we make sense of it? In response to that question, this special issue, "Networks of Belief," presents an interdisciplinary conversation between and across new media studies, political theology, anthropology, religion and secularism studies, philosophy, and critical race theory via the figure of the network and the ever-contentious frame of belief in order to ask not only what it means to live in a networked world but also, perhaps more important, what it means to *believe* that we live in one.

Belief in the Network

Why is the technical redisclosure of reality something we are willing to believe in? What does it mean for data-driven conclusions to be popularly persuasive explanations of everyday phenomena? These questions are essential to understanding the power of computation. Moore's Law, personal computing, multicore processing, the Zettabyte, ubiquitous computing—none are sufficient to explain computational belief on their own. Overlooked in these explanations is that when we measure the technical capacities of present machines against their past incarnations, judgments made about their capacities to act are inherently arbitrary, for, paraphrasing Spinoza, we know not yet what a machine can do. Computational excitement is generated not only by retroactive comparison, but also by forecasting what machines will eventually become capable of. Time spent in the heady technoculture of Silicon Valley underlines the truth of this hypothesis: the future is where the money is.

Given this, we argue that popular belief in digital technology exists only in partial relation to technique; belief in the digital is instead in large part lodged within the realm of speculation. We find, ensconced within computational hype, a relationship to the future wherein technological affordances forge scaffolding for variable quantities and qualities of credulity for myriad digital futures.

Here we must reconsider what it means to speak of "the digital": not only the collection of technical inventions and devices but, more broadly, an inhuman assemblage of sense-making, increasingly the anchor for popular fantasies of the good life (drawing on Lauren Berlant's formulation regarding affective attachments).[2] If, per Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, assemblages are composed of, on the one hand, forms of content and, on the other, forms of expression, the prison and the penal code, that operate in reciprocal presupposition—in other words, if the prison tells us what criminality looks like, while codes of criminality tell us who belongs in the prison—then computational belief is perhaps the pure form of expression pertaining to the digital assemblage, both enunciating and making legible the aforementioned digital redisclosures of life's unfolding.[3]

In highlighting this question of belief, we turn to the French microsociologist Gabriel Tarde, for whom social relations belonged to two groups, desires and beliefs, which together formed the basis of societies. For Tarde, desires are like commands: they express needs, exercise varying degrees of power, and induce docility. Beliefs, on the other hand, instruct: they produce dogma and induce credulity. In the case of computation, we might say that the technical explanation corresponds to Tarde's desire, the need and power to explicate the world computationally.[4] This alone, however, fails to account for the genesis, distribution, and affect of belief. The architecture of the digital is built not only by commanding the world into its contemporary datatized appearance but by instructing subjects how to perceive and act within such a world, how to implicate themselves within the digitally explicated world.

Here implicating oneself within the digitally explicated world means not only realizing that one is being apprehended as data (as Bernard Stiegler put it, the capture of the being that we ourselves are in data) but also agreeing to the datatized representation of oneself. With belief as self-implication, we find ourselves implicitly agreeing, as with one more unexamined terms-and-conditions agreement, to all the fine print that underwrites the digital contract.[5] Because, for example, FitBit appears to know more about our bodies through reading their data than we ever could, we find ourselves, in this asymmetry of knowledge, metonymically contained in the device, clinging through it to a fantasy of futural thriving.

Computational belief in the present represents a moment where the knowledge held behind the silicon veil is optimistically subscribed to like any other service. Enmeshed within this is the operating logic of societies of control—remembering that control in William Burroughs's initial formulation was a time-binding mechanism. Consumers buy Amazon Alexas with full knowledge of their privacy harms because they implicitly believe that Amazon's data-driven grasp on their future becomings, the future at large, is both more perceptive and more powerful than their own embodied knowledge.

In this way, belief brings digital parishioners into strange alliances with the technical desires of Silicon Valley and venture capital. Here *belief operates as positive feedback*: we learn to believe in the versions

of ourselves given to us by digital technologies, in return spurring on technocapitalism's advance through endless consumption and the manufacture of a novel set of silicon desires.

The contents of this issue reveal that politics in the so-called digital age must actively account for the affective powers of belief, in part because, as Maurizio Lazzarato claims, following Guattari, the crisis of capitalism is a crisis of subjectivity. We would add that in times when digital technologies apprehend people as the composition of dividual informational parts, we are amid not only a crisis of subjectivity[6] but also a crisis of sense. The ongoing reconstitution of subjects as users of networked technology leads to the subtle conceit that social existence is itself made possible by technology. For digital natives especially, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok seem to make possible social life in the first place in the form of a miracular ecstasy of communication—truer still now with quarantines and a social life that in existing only via digital platforms appears to be delivered to us by Zoom and Google like manna from heaven.

Networked Belief

But in examining belief in networks, we must consider that *belief*, of course, is not itself a neutral term, an "outside" to the network: to the contrary, it is enmeshed in long-standing networks, which this issue seeks to uncover, deconstruct, and inquire into. Belief has long been accorded an essential place within conceptions and definitions of "religion": as Donald Lopez puts it, for Aquinas, "to believe (*credere*) is to believe in what is true," transcendent, and thus beyond the scrutiny and critique of reason.[7] This early modern formulation is transformed and reiterated throughout the years; Kierkegaard's leap of faith offers another example of an emphasis on interiority, while William James would later characterize the "life of religion" as "the *belief* that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto" (emphasis ours).[8] Even some conceptions of secularism remain bound to the model of belief and the notion of interiority on which such a model relies. In his canonical study *A Secular Age* (2007), Charles Taylor

defines the episteme of the secular as one in which the choice between belief and unbelief is given equal legal protection—and, perhaps more important, both choices are seen for the first time as equally viable.[9] Taylor thus draws throughout on the notions of faith and belief: the experience of residing within the secular age, what Taylor terms "the immanent frame," is described as a "Jamesian" open space. The frame substitutes natural for supernatural, immanent for transcendent; any experience of living in the modern West is an experience of residing within it, an invisible though felt Wittgensteinian "picture," to which we can imagine no alternative.[10] Such a frame, Taylor claims, can be experienced as open or closed to what lies beyond it (beyond immanence); the difference between the secular age and all that came before it is that our selves are "buffered" rather than "porous," able to disengage from spirits, things, and the world more broadly.

Are we, in fact, capable of this sort of disengagement in the contemporary? It is, of course, the ultimate aspiration in our current predicament of global contagion: complete enclosure, monadic existence if it ensures survival, buffering at the level of our very cells. But what COVID-19 has revealed is that we are perhaps more porous than Taylor claims: reliant on networks (of humans, packages, internet providers, food chains), capable of "possession," if not by spirit than by viral "thing."[11]

Where Taylor's account most fails us, however, is where it is most typical: it fails to historicize its own terms and description of secularity. The "Jamesian" or Kierkegaardian dilemma of Taylor's frame is of course a Christian one: Jamesian open space remains the open space of *belief*; Kierkegaardian leaps of faith require "faith," where neither term is universal. Taylor's immanence may be "open," but it is limited, constructed around a Christian imaginary that comes to stand for religion in the West writ large.

As Donald Lopez has succinctly put it: "The notion of belief . . . is neither natural nor universal. It might be described as an ideology, not so much in the sense of false consciousness but as an idea that arises from a specific set of material interests."[12] The scholarly interest in belief can itself be historicized as a product of Christianity, one that intensified with the rise of Protestantism and its focus on

interiority as opposed to bodily practice. Lopez helpfully delineates the influence of "belief," which is not dissimilar from the influence of terms like *world religion* or even *religion*[13] in their colonial, Christian origin stories: "Belief (rather than ritual, for example) seems to have been the pivot around which Christians have told their own history. . . . Christians have also described what came to be known as world 'religions' from the perspective of belief [and] through complicated patterns of influence, the representatives of non-Christian religions have come to speak of themselves in terms of belief."[14] Belief, in this way, is part of a Christian network, one that became hegemonic in a story bound up with imperialism, colonialism, and dialectical "patterns of influence" and emulation, as Lopez puts it. In other words, belief was a Christian import that spread with the rise of Protestantism[15] and with globalization more broadly: the evidence surrounds us perhaps no more so than in the present belief in the ubiquity of networks.

We must ask, then: What is obscured when scholarly conversations and definitions are delineated only by *belief*? What is lost, for example, in shorthand references to religious practitioners as "believers," or in the unacknowledgment of belief's own networked context and history? Talal Asad has been a key figure in encouraging a move in anthropology and religious studies beyond the analytic of belief, turning instead to an exploration of sensibilities, the senses, and the originally Wittgensteinian "form of life" (*Lebensform*). Within such an analytic, explored by Aaron Frederick Eldridge in "Movement in Repose: Notes on Form of Life," Asad can shift the emphasis to *sensing* and *living*—registers that, unlike belief, do not assume the ever-present existence of an interpretive, intellectual frame.[16] Eldridge's article asks us "what it means for a tradition . . . to disclose a form of life," where form of life becomes far more temporally dynamic than "belief," the antidote to what Ananda Abeysekara has referred to as the historicist, secular flattening of religious life worlds.[17] Belief, Eldridge argues, is itself form extracted from life within a historicist paradigm; the homogeneous, linear temporality of belief cannot contain what Eldridge calls the change and force of a form of life, the motion that creates its very coherence. He finds that motion, paradoxically, in stillness: first by leading us to the site of his

fieldwork in an Orthodox Christian monastic community in Lebanon, where ascetics practice a posture of bodily stillness (*hesychia*) in their quest to gather the soul. The temporality of capitalism, Eldridge claims, effaces the stasis implied in earlier forms of life: capitalism is structured on belief, on promise, on form divorced from life. It is by moving, methodologically, outside the network of "belief," that we may begin to reexamine the capitalist structures it enables as well as register those forms of life whose motion and force continue in the face of the multitude of networks (historicist analysis, neoliberalism, globalization) that threaten to flatten them.

Meanwhile, Alex Dubilet's article, "An Immanence without the World: On Dispossession, Nothingness, and Secularity," asks us to reexamine the network of secular studies and political theology more broadly, dismantling the typical and prevailing identification across scholarship of immanence with secularism and transcendence with the divine. The secular, Dubilet argues, is inevitably theorized within a narrative of loss—immanence is always theorized *against* transcendence and thus, inevitably, as lack. In his speculative account, he considers immanence not through the paradigm shared by the network of religious scholars and secularists alike but instead as that which is *excluded* from the frame of the Christian-secular modern world in its very construction. According to this conception, "modernity would be less definable by the creation of an immanent frame than by an imposition of a world that excludes immanence from it." In its form and method, "An Immanence without the World" poignantly enacts the "troubling" of the reigning secular network of which it speaks: weaving across temporalities and periods, finding resources for thinking through sites of dispossession and wordlessness in Meister Eckhart, Fred Moten, and François Laruelle, the piece asks us to move outside the bounds of linear historicity, instead offering a poetic meditation that comes to elaborate "an undercommon immanence." We might venture to theorize this undercommons, as it figures within Dubilet, as outside the network, or perhaps, more properly: *below* it. In the space of violent dispossession and exclusion—"the dislocations of modernity"—Dubilet has envisioned a site of indifference and resistance. If indeed "everything is a network"—if networks are as ubiquitous as we believe

them to be—we might look to sites of exclusion and violence that such networks necessarily enact.

This is precisely what "Living In/difference; or, How to Imagine Ambivalent Networks," a piece by Carina Albrecht, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, and Laura Kurgan, seeks to do. The authors inquire into the history of the term *homophily*, coined by Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton in a seminal 1954 essay to refer to similarity-based friendship. Since the publication of this research, which used a combination of empirical and speculative analysis of social processes to analyze the friendship patterns among neighbors in a biracial housing project in the United States, homophily, the authors argue, has been assumed to be the model for network science more generally. Networks are imagined—*believed*—to form around clusters of similarities, likenesses; this, as the authors point out, is what makes them searchable. But a look into Lazarsfeld and Merton's archive reveals the exclusions that the inauguration of the homophilic principle necessitated: the responses of Black residents were removed from analysis. A powerful *image* of homophily, an imagined network of connections grounded in similarity, delimited Lazarfeld and Merton's conclusions, and, as Albrecht, Chun, and Kurgan argue, naturalized intolerance. Through a speculative reconstruction of the archive, the three authors ask how we might read the traces differently, thus deconstructing homophily as foundational to networks. Through their own use of statistical and graphical modeling, they, like Dubilet, reveal networks to be not additive, as the concept of homophily assumes, but structured by subtraction. Moreover, they reveal that homophily—with its Manichaean emphasis on *likeness* and *intolerance*—papers over indifference. Albrecht, Chun, and Kurgan's piece asks what affects are lost in the very construction of the network at the site of its founding, what resists easy incorporation. Once again, an indifference, or ambivalence to the structures of the world, might be a key resource through which to reexamine networks built on binaries of like and unlike, tolerance and intolerance.

In "A Liar's Epistemology: Herbert Simon's Performative Artificial Intelligence," Brett Zehner continues to think through the themes of indifference and ambivalence in relation to the intellectual and political history of network optimism and artificial intelligence

(AI). Zehner attends to the contradiction between what networks do and what they claim to do. Drawing on Guattari, he reveals how contemporary artificial intelligence does not say what it does but does what it says. That is, in a novel form of ideological hailing, AI constructs and produces subjects and desubjectivizes those it claims to represent in accordance with a bad-faith and brute-force procedure of subjection. For Zehner, the data dance of life is seized on by AI to performatively produce incorporeal transformations, performative reconfigurations of subjecthood, based on the operational statements of AI and the political leverage and profit-seeking desires of the automated capitalist corporations that wield it. Crucial to understanding how these performative utterances unfold is understanding the thinking behind them. For this reason, Herbert Simon figures powerfully in Zehner's essay as an evocative example of the lie in AI, the bad faith and "the long lineage of corporate decisionism, state power, and the weaponization of human behavioral modeling at the heart of contemporary artificial intelligence research." In his analysis Zehner calls for us to understand the hybridity of technological objects and their ideological productions, the hybridity of networks of belief. In this way, he concludes with a powerful directive to understand the specificity of "computational subjection" and the tactical responses afforded to us. Zehner both proposes and troubles a number of specific tactics but reminds us that for any such tactics to become operational, it is a necessary prerequisite to understand AI as not only its technical procedures but also its history and, more broadly, "through the performative regime of mixed semiotics that is the computation-wielding institution."

Whence the power of an originary network optimism, that which will eventually metastasize to become Galloway's contemporary network fundamentalism? Matteo Pasquinelli's article in this special issue deepens our understanding of the origins of artificial intelligence and network optimism both. In "How to Make a Class: Hayek's Neoliberalism and the Origins of Connectionism," Pasquinelli reveals that the history of pattern recognition in artificial intelligence owes a debt not only to its cybernetics forebears but also, importantly, to the neoliberal economist Friedrich Hayek. In this article Pasquinelli reads Hayek to show the influence of economic rationality on

early artificial intelligence, revealing that the competitive market and the calculation of price coalesced in Hayek in the form of a "mercantile connectionism." As Pasquinelli shows, Hayek forwarded "the first systematic treatment of connectionism and classification as a general faculty of the mind" with the publication of his 1952 book *The Sensory Order*. With gestalt theory to aid him, Hayek extended his theory of classification to the economic realm. Pasquinelli underscores Hayek's importance here, showing how he ought to be understood as the economist who "stole pattern recognition and made it a neoliberal principle of market regulation." Having demonstrated the importance of Hayek to early artificial intelligence, Pasquinelli turns, in conclusion, to Hayek's role in arguing for neoliberalism against socialist calculation. Here he places Hayek into conversation with Alfred Sohn-Rethel and Marx, among others, leaving us with the materials necessary to think "toward a political epistemology of neural networks." For Pasquinelli, Hayek's theories of self-organization, information, and pattern recognition justified his belief in the order of markets. We can clearly see the legacy of his thinking today in the landscape of computational capitalism and corporate capitalization on emerging technologies, especially artificial intelligence; hence the importance of reckoning with Hayek for discussions about contemporary AI and surveillance capitalism.

Finally, Luciana Parisi, registering both the triumphalism of network fundamentalism and the ambivalence of its critics, forwards an important warning to both in her interview with William Morgan: one cannot go backward, back to the prelapsarian, precomputational scene of poiesis. What this means for Parisi is that philosophy must wrestle with computation and with its entanglement in the complex political histories that spawned it. During the conversation Parisi elaborates the stakes, both scholarly and political, of this "machine philosophy," what it might require and portend to commit to producing what Pasquinelli termed the "political epistemology of neural networks." The interview, "What Is (Machine) Philosophy?," inquires after its titular question directly: What are the relevant questions of such a philosophical enterprise; what are its concerns, its objects of inquiry; where does it locate the important moments of tension; and what are the manner and methods of its mode of

investigation? For example, the interview asks how we ought to grapple with an ascendant cybernetics that is not merely a command-and-control science but in fact a metaphysical reconfiguration on behalf of technics. For Parisi, the key is to stay with computational specificity, to stay with the medium rather than search in vain for an outside. In this schema, the syntactic operations and the logic of the machine are not solely technical or ideological but, as with Zehner, performative. This transformation of meaning entailed within machinic performance necessitates a belief on our part in that meaning—we must ask, Parisi claims, after that belief, as well as after the machinations of the network and its history. For Parisi, although we are no doubt confronted by the cold rationalities of the machines of control, we are at the same time increasingly alert to a genre of new questions portending new solutions, new tactics, and new performative operations of belief.

Neoliberal Enchantment

This collection of pieces, then, is crucially united not by common field or discipline but by its investigations—historical, theoretical, and quantitative—of our guiding concepts: *belief* and *network(s)*. Each piece in this issue traces an archive, whether historical or speculative, asking after the enmeshment of these concepts, and examining, too, what remains in their interstices, whether form of life, tradition, dispossession, indifference, or an atopic immanence divorced from secularity. We ask, and they ask, sometimes explicitly and sometimes more obliquely, after the status of belief, and after the status of *belief in the network*, whether the network of secularism and religious studies, the network of artificial intelligence, the network of connectionism and neoliberal economics, or the "network" as structuring *homophilic* concept.

What emerges through these varied investigations is that despite the ubiquity of networks, networks are not totalizing—or, rather, the network is always structured by its outside, even if, per Parisi, that outside is paradoxically internal to the medium itself. It is true that we live in a globalized world: we write from amid a global pandemic that arose from networked, viral spread, while our social

interactions are now largely confined to those our social networks afford us. Yet the concept of total *interconnection*, a Latourian notion now central to fields such as environmental studies and science and technology studies, strikes us as overstated in the distinctions and originary exclusions that it fails to consider.[18] Foundational notions of homophily—and we might think here too of terms like *association* and *connection*—as Albrecht, Chun, and Kurgan's work shows us, are ultimately grounded in fantastical projections of the network, in pure Deleuzian becoming and process, without, as Eldridge would have it, the connection to the stillness of form. Dispossession, on which the modern world is grounded, mounts a problem for such notions: If all is purportedly interconnected through an intricate network of likenesses, what of those who have been violently dispossessed by the horrors of slavery; what of those Black residents in the Lazarsfeld and Merton archive whose voices were written out of the narrative?

Pasquinelli reminds us of the critical and historical conjuncture between neoliberal economic theory and artificial intelligence: Hayek's pattern recognition was crucial to both. In describing Taylor's famous discussion of the "waning of belief" in the age of secularism, Asad has commented:

> One may suggest, incidentally, that it is because Taylor is here working with an intuitive definition of religion in terms of *transcendent*—Christian—*beliefs* that he ignores the enchantments imposed on individual life by secular consumer culture—as well as by modern science and technology. If the term *enchantment* is to be understood to refer to being in the grip of "false causes" [superstition], then this is not something that moderns—whether secular or religious—necessarily regard as a loss. On the other hand, understood as a state of rapture and delight, enchantment is still very much present in modern secular life.[19]

Here Asad speaks to the operative network of Christianity inherent in the use of the term *belief*, as discussed earlier: Taylor's notion of belief is delimited by Christianity, by visions of transcendence. The network of Christianity—and of secular studies, which is indebted to Christianity's belief-centric orientation even in its attempts to

theorize beyond it—thus limits Taylor's theoretical purview. Inherent in the network are its constitutive exclusions. Religion, in its Christian, transcendent definition, seems to obscure for Taylor what Asad refers to as "the enchantment" of "modern secular life," enchantments "*imposed* . . . by secular consumer culture—as well as by modern science and technology" (our emphasis). This is the rapture that fuels neoliberalism as well as artificial intelligence, the enchantment of a new order, of which Parisi says we must now make sense. But if this enchantment, critically, is imposed—if our belief is so often tacit, a resigned consigning of our data in the hopes of optimized subjectivity and an optimized world order—then the answer to imposition, as the pieces in this issue reveal, lies not in adamant disbelief but in the affects a network cannot capture. We might seek to cultivate and explore indifference,[20] or even ambivalence, finding ourselves in the blank spaces between the nodes of the network rather than in thrall to the fantasy on which it is constructed.

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Notes

1. See Esposito, *Machine of Political Theology*. Esposito argues that one mechanism that has long governed political theology is the notion that thought must be located within the subject; questions of "belief" are thus consonant with the *dispositif*, or network, he describes.
2. See Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.
3. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 80–82. The proliferation of tech start-ups (which are as a matter of course expected to pursue AI),

alongside massive funding of those start-ups by venture capital investment firms and those start-ups' eventual acquisition by the "Big Five" (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft), reveals increasing buy-in to computational hype in the market. Add to this the early adoption of emerging autonomous technologies in education, health care, transportation and logistics, public safety and security, and entertainment as well as the increasing popularity of computational degrees in universities and rising employment opportunities and salaries that accompany them, and one arrives at an image of the digital that is increasingly adopted and believed in.

4. Tarde, *Laws of Imitation*.
5. Stiegler, Tron, and Ross, "Ars and Organological Inventions."
6. Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*.
7. Lopez, "Belief," 23; see Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*.
8. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 38. In a generative reading of James against the grain, Amy Hollywood points to the ways in which other elements of James's text betray his nominal focus on interiority ("William James, Phenomenology, and the Embodiment of Religious Experiment").
9. See Taylor, *Secular Age*.
10. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 549.
11. Taylor writes of the lack of buffer between morality and illness in the premodern era: "Illness and sin were often seen as inextricably related. . . . Some of the old attitudes are not beyond recovery, in a sense. It is just that in espousing them seriously one goes against the grain of the modern identity in a fundamental way. One adopts beliefs which most people will castigate as weird" (*Secular Age*, 40). Here it seems to us that the relation between illness and sin in the contemporary is far more common (if subconscious) than Taylor acknowledges: far from "weird," late capitalism, with its focus on productivity, still attaches slothfulness to illness and disability, and poor immune systems to sin (obesity, "preexisting conditions," lack of exercise, etc.).
12. Lopez, "Belief," 28.
13. For more on the Western Christian imposition of terms *religion* and *world religion*, see, among many others, Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*; Barton and Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*; and Anidjar, *Semites*.
14. Lopez, "Belief," 21.
15. Asad, among others, has written about the process through which Protestantism came to reject Catholic ritualism, which was deemed

irrational and separated from interiority. Belief, with its interior status, became associated with the values of liberal democracy. See Asad, "Thinking about Religion, Belief, and Politics," 41.

16. Asad, "Thinking about Religion, Belief, and Politics," 49.
17. Abeysekara, "Religious Studies' Mishandling of Origin and Change."
18. For more on the critique of Latour's notion of interconnectivity, see Neyrat, "Elements for an Ecology of Separation."
19. Asad, "Thinking about Religion, Belief, and Politics," 49.
20. Or "in/difference," as Albrecht, Chun, and Kurgan term it in this issue. Indifference also moves us beyond the Taylorian notion of a dyadic choice between belief and unbelief.

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