Afrofuturist Worlds:
The Diseased Colonial Imagination and Christian Hope

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Abstract: This article argues that the cultural tradition of Afrofuturism offers one potential solution to the diseased Christian colonial imagination diagnosed in the work of Willie James Jennings. This diseased imagination buttresses structures of domination after colonization and creates the self-sufficient white man as an anthropological norm. Afrofuturism names an emerging cultural tradition across different media that explores potential futures in response to Black suffering. As a conversation partner for this tradition, the theology of Edward Schillebeeckx critically engages the eschatological images of the New Testament to depict Christian discipleship as practical world building. This praxis dismantles violence threatening the *humanum*, the new humanity announced by Jesus of Nazareth. As an example of the potential resources offered by Afrofuturism, Janelle Monáe's multi-media *Dirty Computer* project evinces a practical hope reimagining social life and humanity beyond the world built by colonization, thus inspiring a decolonial Christian praxis based on eschatological hope.

T HE WORKS OF WILLIE JAMES JENNINGS HAVE THOUGHTFULLY probed the entanglement of Christian theology and colonialism. In *The Christian Imagination*, Jennings argues that theological collusion with colonialism has created a "diseased social imagination."[1] Their collusion consolidates as multi-faceted structures of domination.[2] Jennings's more recent work, *After Whiteness,* extends this colonial critique to the Christian imagination forged within theological education. Under his critique, academic theology promotes the image of the "self-sufficient white man" whose purported "self-sufficiency" is "defined by possession, control, and

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[1] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 6.
[2] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 8.

mastery."[3] This colonial infection within the Christian imagination "distorts identity and strangles the possibilities of dense life together."[4] He concludes *The Christian Imagination* by inviting theologians to cultivate an identity that enters "imaginatively into various social forms and imagines the divine presence joining, working, living, and loving inside boundary-defying relationships" to "reemerge as a compelling new invitation to life together."[5] Jennings's potent reflections prophetically challenge Christian theology to reinvigorate its imaginative faculty to create hope-filled futures beyond its colonial legacy, futures that can address racialized difference and adjacent structures of domination stemming from this limited anthropology based on the self-sufficient white man.

Inspired by Jennings's critique of Christianity's diseased social imagination from its colonial past, this article enlists Afrofuturism as a creative resource to reflect on hope. Afrofuturism challenges Christian hope to create communal life beyond the world built by colonization and imagine a new humanity beyond the self-sufficient white man. I understand Afrofuturism as a repository of cultural objects, usually within science fiction, reflecting on the African diaspora and its potential futures. Afrofuturist creator and scholar Ytasha L. Womack connects this budding tradition to social transformation:

> Whether through literature, visual arts, music, or grassroots organizing, Afrofuturists redefine culture and notions of blackness [sic] for today and the future. Both an artistic aesthetic and a framework for critical theory, Afrofuturism combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western beliefs. In some cases, it's a total reenvisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques.[6]

This budding tradition centers the experience of colonization within the African diaspora while conjuring alternative futures.

Based on the socially and politically transformative dimensions of this creative fiction, the "world building" of Afrofuturism reimagines the contours of social relations, culture, institutions, and structures of knowing animating human and non-human life.[7] This imaginative

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[3] Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 12.

[4] Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 14.

[5] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 292.

[6] Ytasha L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 2013), 9.

[7] This notion of world-building is inspired by the work of Maria Lugones. See chapter four of *Pilgrimages = Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple*

praxis touches upon the shared concerns of Black, Indigenous, decolonial, and abolitionist thinking. Robyn Maynard describes the practice of "world building" as

> The refusal to take things as they are as inevitable or given: this *itself* an act of radical imagination, of conjure work. It is its own form of warfare, and of life-making, as well. Because to be attuned to the wrongness, too, is to hold within ourselves the multiplicity of different possible futures, of worlds that are not yet born, of forms of governance based not in violence, but abundance. It is insisting on the possibility of a new timeline, and suggests, too, that they may already be on the horizon. If we care to look.[8]

An imaginative hope animates this type of world building, connecting Afrofuturism to transformative social movements.[9]

The world building of Afrofuturism finds an amicable conversation partner in the hope-filled praxis of Christian eschatology. As the study of "last things," eschatology reflects on the fulfillment of creation through Christ at the end of time. For many streams of thought within political and liberation theology, eschatology inspires a radical conversion towards new ways of thinking and inhabiting the world, making hope a practical matter—a way of life rather than an affective disposition. Afrofuturism offers a challenge to eschatological accounts of Christian hope to rethink how the world has been built within the wake of colonization, a reality encapsulated by the term "colonial modernity."[10]

While many theologians have critically probed eschatology to enliven a hope-filled praxis of social transformation,[11] this article

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Oppressions (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003). I also draw heavily from Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasomosake Simpson, *Rehearsals for Living* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2022). For a depiction of world-building within media studies, see *World Building: Transmedia, Fans, Industries*, ed. Marta Boni (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

[8] Maynard and Simpson, *Rehearsals for Living*, 157

[9] Maynard and Simpson, *Rehearsals for Living*, 176–177.

[10] This article limits its reflection to the land mass currently referred to as the "United States."

[11] The number of thinkers who use eschatology to undergird political and social projects is vast. Other well-known examples include Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1967); Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Herder and Herder, 2007); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vols. 1–3, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998); Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress,

focuses on the thought of Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx. Although he was a white man who spent much of his life engaging European academic conversations, his theology also foregrounds the harm done by colonization and offers potential paths beyond its legacy by integrating hermeneutics and a hope-filled response to suffering that works towards a new humanity. This specific set of theological tools offers one potential response to Jennings's challenge concerning the specter of the self-sufficient white man haunting Christianity's diseased social imagination.[12] Jennings and womanist theologian M. Shawn Copeland both interpret his theology as offering decolonial alternatives to the Christian imagination centering the self-sufficient white man. I understand my reading of Schillebeeckx in this article as one voice among many responding to the legacy of colonization and Christianity raised by Jennings, Copeland, and other theologians.[13]

Writing about theology and Afrofuturism in some ways resembles writing about theology and the Renaissance, a term referring to an enormous array of genres, works of art, and creators.[14] This article contributes to the reflections of scholars on Black theology and religion who have already thought creatively with Afrofuturism.[15] Rather than sampling an array of objects, I focus on Janelle Monáe's

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2004); and M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010).

[12] As later portions of this article will show, Schillebeeckx's reflections on eschatology offer a helpful contribution to Jennings's challenge by delineating the biblical images animating a hope-filled praxis. These images, when interpreted through an Afrofuturist and decolonial hermeneutic, can help expand Christianity's imagination for building a world beyond colonization.

[13] Helpful texts in this expanding conversation also include but are not limited to J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Rufus Burnett, Jr., *Decolonizing Revelation: A Spatial Reading of the Blues* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2018); and Joseph Drexler-Dreis, *Decolonial Love: Salvation in Colonial Modernity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

[14] For a concise index of well-known works and cultural objects regarded as "essential" for this tradition, see Kelly Besser, Roderic Crooks, Dalena Hunter, and Shani Miller, "Space is the Place," *Library Journal* 144, no. 1 (February 2019): 45–47.

[15] Notable precedents to this conversation include Roger A. Sneed, *The Dreamer and the Dream: Afrofuturism and Black Religious Thought* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2021); an entire issue of the journal *Black Theology* engaging Afrofuturism, *Black Theology* 14, no. 1 (2016); and Vincent Lloyd, "Post-Racial, Post-Apocalyptic Love: Octavia Butler as Political Theologian," *Political Theology* 17, no. 5 (2016): 449–464. Sneed's work on Afrofuturism helpfully demonstrates its use for eschatological theology. Using the work of Sun-Ra, he shows how the cultural tradition focuses "away from a past that centers white oppression and toward a future that centers Black freedom and creativity." His reflection shows that Afrofuturist world building can respond to the material needs of political liberation (*The Dreamer and the Dream*, 123). This article embarks on a creative endeavor similar to Sneed's but within a concern toward colonial modernity.

multi-media *Dirty Computer* project, while recognizing many other potential cultural objects to consider.[16] I have chosen this project for three reasons. First, the work spans different media and genres, including film, music, and short stories, thus demonstrating the breadth of Afrofuturism. Second, the allotment of space for a journal article lends itself to a close reading, instead of cursory comments about several pieces. Finally, the particularity of Monáe's experience as a Black and queer nonbinary individual assigned female at birth— one living within a country with a violent colonial legacy—provides a pertinent theological locus into the entanglement of different structures of colonial domination.[17] Monáe's life experiences offer a striking contrast to the self-sufficient white man whom Jennings believes infects the colonized theological imagination of Christians.

First, I will elaborate on the term "colonial modernity" and argue that Afrofuturism creates a world built beyond its limitations. Then, I will situate Schillebeeckx's theology and its use of biblical images to cultivate a hope-filled eschatological imagination, one with the potential to expand communal life and anthropology beyond colonial modernity. I finally turn to Monáe's *Dirty Computer* project but limit the analysis to critique two dimensions of the possible humanity imposed by colonization: (1) the suppression of the multitudinous dimensions of the erotic as defined by Audre Lorde, and (2) the compulsive productivity forced by the temporal regime of late capitalism. In this scrutinizing of *Dirty Computer*, specifically two of the tracks from the album and two short stories, I propose only one potential interpretation. "The symbol," to quote Paul Ricoeur, "gives rise to thought."[18] In the same way one would not limit interpretations of an eschatological image (or any religious image), this article reflects one interpretation of the themes within the *Dirty Computer* project for Christian eschatology and its articulation of hope within its moral tradition. I conclude by emphasizing the theme of "refusal" within Monáe's project to invoke a Christian hope that denies the ultimacy of colonial modernity. As one theological contribution to the challenges and conversations raised by Jennings's critiques, I propose an

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[16] The speculative fiction of Afrofuturism ought not to be perceived as the only futurist movement centering the experiences and creativity of BIPOC authors, with Indigenous futurism being a notable additional tradition. See *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, ed. Grace L. Dillon (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012).

[17] For this article, I will use the pronoun "they" for Monáe. For an account of their relationship with gender and pronouns, see Christie D'Zurilla, "Janelle Monáe Comes Out as Nonbinary and Shares Their Rather Unique Pronouns," *Los Angeles Times*, April 22, 2022, www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/books/story/2022-04-22/janelle-monae-nonbinary-pronouns-festival-of-books.

[18] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon, 1967), 347–348.

Afrofuturist hope for new worlds, building alternative futures for shared communal life and conjuring a humanity that refuses the norms of the self-sufficient white man.

COLONIAL MODERNITY AND AFROFUTURIST WORLDS

Colonial modernity encapsulates the contours of social life after colonization. For theologian Joseph Drexler-Dreis, the term demarcates the multitudinous ways modernity consolidates "relationships into hierarchical patterns of domination that continue after political decolonization."[19] These patterns of domination frame reality by prescribing Eurocentric epistemological norms. By privileging Eurocentric epistemology, colonial modernity categorizes human bodies within a racialized hierarchy, privileges nuclear and biological kinship above all relational configurations, maintains essentialized gender formulations, and violently exploits human labor and land. Colonial modernity forms what theologian Rufus Burnett, Jr., calls a "cosmovision," describing "a people's view of the material, immaterial, and spiritual makeup of their life world."[20] Anibal Quijano, a sociologist whose work influenced the "decolonial turn" in academia, identifies this entanglement of structures of domination as the colonial matrix of power.[21] The colonial matrix of power reinforces the gravitational pull of the self-sufficient white man in the world built in the wake of colonization.

The stranglehold colonial modernity maintains on structures of knowledge determines the horizon of political and social possibility. Jennings references this idea in his indictment of Christianity's "diseased social imagination." Imagination and creativity are crucial for moving beyond the present colonial world. Bryan Massingale's *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* celebrates the transformative potential of using imaginative thinking within the cultural production of Black Americans. He characterizes this thinking as a pervading "'dream,' as a vision, as a horizon of possibility, as a passionate hope that energizes and sustains risky justice praxis."[22] Art can help people

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[19] Drexler-Dreis, *Decolonial Love*, 1.

[20] Burnett, Jr., *Decolonizing Revelation*, xviii.

[21] For an introduction to Quijano's thinking, see Stephen R. Di Trolio Coakley, "Anibal Quijano," Political Theology Network, August 10, 2021, politicaltheology.com/anibal-quijano/.

[22] Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 131. A similar theme can be found in Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon, 2002).

dream bigger and, to quote the Broadway musical *Hadestown*, "see how the world could be in spite of the way that it is."[23]

Afrofuturism exemplifies this Black imaginative thinking for world building, a creativity driving the engine of social and political transformation by enhancing what communities consider possible.[24] Returning to Womack, the tradition is "a great tool for wielding the imagining for personal change and societal growth. . . . The imagination is the key to progress, and it's the imagination that is all too often smothered in the name of conformity and community standards."[25] By foregrounding Black futures, Afrofuturism challenges the hegemonic regime of colonial modernity and its structures of domination.

SCHILLEBEECKX'S ESCHATOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

To serve as a Christian interlocutor for the decolonial potential of Afrofuturism, Edward Schillebeeckx's eschatology sketches a Christian, hope-filled response to suffering. Like many Roman Catholic theologians and philosophers after the Second Vatican Council, Schillebeeckx dove headfirst into contemporary biblical scholarship and philosophy, particularly the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, to re-evaluate many of the symbols of Christianity. His hope-filled account of discipleship centers a prayerful way of being in and with the world based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. This hope-filled praxis anticipates God's coming into history by making a new world. Schillebeeckx's account of eschatological hope prioritizes the defense of the *humanum*, a term for the new humanity accompanying the new creation Christ calls into being. This hope offers one potential response and conversation partner for Jennings's critique of Christianity's diseased social imagination.

In Schillebeeckx's theology, knowledge of God does not emerge directly but, instead, dialectically through what are labeled "negative contrast experiences." Such experiences take place when reaching a limit, be it due to injustice or human finitude, thus compelling one to imagine something greater. Embracing experiences of contrast and human finitude correlates to recognizing how "real history happens

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[23] "Road to Hell (Reprise)," track 39 on Anaïs Mitchell, *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*, Sing it again Records 644216939497, 2019, compact disc.

[24] In a similar point, J. Griffith Rollefson connects Afrofuturism to the racialized categories of human built after colonization. He writes, "By engaging people in an active appreciation of such fantastic visions, Afrofuturism primes the mind and body to both imagine and live in a world apart from that depicted in the rationalized histories of Western civilization" ("The 'Robot Voodoo Power' Thesis: Afrofuturism and Anti-Anti-Essentialism from Sun Ra to Kook Keith," *Black Music Research Journal* 28, no. 1 [2008]: 106).

[25] Womack, *Afrofuturism*, 191.

wherever sense and nonsense exist side by side, overlap or intermingle, where there is joy and suffering, laughter and tears."[26] Elaborating on this idea in an early article, he writes,

> In our present society moral imperatives and historical decisions spring, moreover, particularly from the experience of a *collective evil*, such as the too low income of certain sections of society, colonial exploitation, racial discrimination, and other injustices. When we analyze these contrast-experiences insofar as they may lead to new ethical imperatives we find that these negative experiences imply an awareness of values that is veiled, positive, though not yet articulate. . . . Here the absence of "what ought to be" is *experienced* initially, and this leads to a perhaps vague, yet real, perception of "what should be done here and now."[27]

Summarily, negative contrast experiences inspire hope that anticipates a new world. His eschatological hope offers one potential response to the multitudinous harm caused by colonial modernity.

While reflecting on the sources of harm caused by Christianity's collusion with colonial modernity Jennings invokes Schillebeeckx's theology. Jennings notes that the Dominican thinker scrutinizes Christianity's theological culpability in reproducing the self-sufficient white man. Schillebeeckx's 1980 essay, "Secular Criticism of Christian Obedience and the Christian Reaction to That Criticism," performs a genealogy relating Christianity to secular accounts of the human within philosophy.[28] Jennings comments that Schillebeeckx's genealogy of this anthropological motif tracks its pollution of the Christian imagination: "European Christian settlers to the new worlds of Africa, the Americas, and other soon-to-be-colonized lands, from the fifteenth century forward, were . . . already weaving together a pre-Christian and a Christian vision of the self-sufficient man and lodging that weaved vision definitively in its educational visions in the new worlds."[29] In this same essay, Schillebeeckx comments that Christianity's engagement with the Enlightenment reproduced "middle-class norms" later imposed as colonizing universal norms.[30] Jennings's

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[26] Edward Schillebeeckx, "Experience and Faith," in *Essays: Ongoing Theological Quests* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 21.

[27] Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Magisterium and the World of Politics," *Concilium* 6, no. 6 (1968): 17. Schillebeeckx also notes that the idea of "negative contrast" does not emerge only from the Frankfurt School, particularly the thought of Theodore Adorno, but also from Cardinal Cardijn's support of the Worker Priest movement.

[28] Edward Schillebeeckx, "Secular Criticism of Christian Obedience and the Christian Reaction to That Criticism," in *The Language of Faith: Essays on Jesus, Theology, and the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

[29] Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 28.

[30] Schillebeeckx, "Secular Criticism of Christian Obedience," 179.

analysis indicates an important untapped potential in Schillebeeckx's thought: his recognition of the collusion of Christianity with universalizing and historically contingent Eurocentric norms that later shaped colonial modernity, along with the requirement to imagine alternative communities and visions for humanity.[31] In a similar vein, M. Shawn Copeland's work scrutinizes the production of colonial violence on Black bodies, particularly women, and invokes Schillebeeckx's conception of the *humanum* as offering an alternative humanity released from colonial domination.[32] For both Jennings and Copeland, Schillebeeckx's theology offers a potential contribution to the many hope-filled responses to the harm done by colonization and its limited imagination for categories ascribed to humanity.

To sketch a shape of this hoped-for otherwise, Schillebeeckx turns to biblical texts. Biblical texts disclose a hoped-for future and are mediated through human forms of meaning-making. Christians today have access to the recorded experience of Jesus of Nazareth according to the convictions of early church communities.[33] These communities composed their writings in the media of the time, using a language now identified as Koine Greek, terms and religious themes associated with Jewish religious thought: references to an apocalypse, subversion of the social order, and the figure of a Messiah emerging from traditions associated with many of the prophetic texts within the Hebrew Bible. The texts belonging to the New Testament canon built

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[31] Schillebeeckx directly engages the history of the use of the word "Catholic" and its Eurocentrism. He writes, "The universality of Christian faith means that the Christian community of faith is an open community. Sadly, however, the institutional church has had a tendency to universalize precisely its non-universal, historically inherited, particular features tied up with a particular culture and time, and to apply them uniformly to the whole of the Catholic world. . . . However, universality—which in Greek is 'catholicity'—means that the Christian faith is open (critically) to all, to every people and to every culture. 'Universal' means that which is equally valid for all. This universal must, moreover, be incarnate in each and every one without all the potentialities and virtualities of the universal being exhausted in these particular incarnations." See Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2014), 167.

[32] See Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 90–92. For a more direct account of Copeland's decolonial thinking with the cultural production of Toni Morrison, another Black artist, see Copeland, "Enfleshing Love: A Decolonial Theological Reading of *Beloved*," in *Beyond the Doctrine of Man: Decolonial Visions of the Human*, ed. Joseph Drexler-Dreis and Kristien Justaert (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 91–112. See also Copeland, "Turning Theology: A Proposal," *Theological Studies* 80, no. 4 (2019): 753–773.

[33] "The Christian believes that the living God showed the uniqueness and power of his unconditional love for man in Jesus Christ, and thus revealed himself as man's salvation. The first Christian generations confessed this event and expressed this confession in many varied ways in the books of the New Testament. These books, therefore, give us interpretations of the Jesus-event against the background of the Old Testament sphere of understanding." See Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1.

upon eschatological themes depending upon human beings as meaning-making and meaning-interpreting entities.[34]

Schillebeeckx scholar Daniel Minch characterizes the theologian's work as promoting an "eschatological hermeneutics," a way of viewing and interpreting a hoped-for world at the core of his theology.[35] Schillebeeckx's eschatological hermeneutics interprets and anticipates a world beyond the present order, rethinking the grammars of the human and creating an alternative, more life-enriching sociality. His account of eschatology anticipates the fulfillment of creation, particularly humanity. The term humanum invokes a phrase from Irenaeus of Lyons, *gloria Dei vivens homo*, which is often interpreted as "the glory of God is humanity fully alive."[36] Christian hope demands an end to the sources of human suffering, violence threatening this new humanity, a foil in contrast to the self-sufficient white man.

As part of this practical orientation, Schillebeeckx's eschatological hermeneutics necessitates imaginative thinking. To help cultivate this imaginative thinking, biblical images form an eschatological imagination, a term used by theologian Scott MacDougall to describe "the lived vision of what suffuses with divine meaning the entire drama of the cosmos from creation to ultimate fulfillment."[37] Schillebeeckx's theology implements three main eschatological images to instigate the creative reimagining of humanity and social relations. The first and primary image, the Reign of God, portrays a radically egalitarian world wherein "master-servant relations no longer prevail, pain and tears will be forgotten, and God will 'be everything to everyone' (2 Cor 15:28)."[38] Sometimes referred to as the "Kingdom of God" or the "Kingdom of Heaven," the Reign of God emphasizes how humanity and social relations are transformed through God's fulfillment. Copeland notes that the term "Reign" is significant because its implementation serves as a counter-response to the harm done by the Roman Empire, the colonizing hegemony during

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[34] Schillebeeckx summarizes this history succinctly towards the beginning of the *Jesus* volume. See *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Crossroad, 1979), 19–23.

[35] Daniel Minch, *Eschatological Hermeneutics: The Theological Core of Experience and Our Hope for Salvation* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2018).

[36] A more direct translation of this passage would be "the glory of God is a living human." Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.20, *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* vol. 1*, The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 490. Readers can think of Schillebeeckx as developing this anthropological motif further within the context of his eschatology.

[37] Scott MacDougall, *More than Communion: Imagining an Eschatological Ecclesiology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 3.

[38] Schillebeeckx, "Theological Quests," in *Essays: Ongoing Theological Quests*, 159.

Jesus's life amid first century Palestine.[39] Within the structures of violence due to colonial modernity, this eschatological symbol serves as a powerful hope-filled response and offers a decolonial reimagining of one of the tools of domination. The Reign announced by Jesus of Nazareth challenges all formulations of justice and love to a deeper and more radical meaning: "We never quite make justice and love a reality. It will always have to go further—radically further."[40] Consider a mathematical image: the love, compassion, and egalitarianism of the Reign of God form an asymptote within human history, a point never quite reached yet toward which one always strives.[41]

The next two images provide greater texture to the Reign of God. The second image, "the resurrection of the body," portrays the "perfect salvation and joy of the person (what the Bible calls *sarx*, body or flesh) in that perfect community."[42] Simply put, the body in all its complexity matters. The resurrection of the body calls attention to the violence done to certain bodies over others. Such a term, like the "Reign of God," fantastically exceeds human understanding. For Schillebeeckx, envisioning the resurrected human body suggests new possibilities for what human beings can become, an anthropological orientation for any idea of the human to remain deferred to the future.[43]

The final significant image is the parousia of Jesus Christ. This parousia "pronounces God's final judgment on human history and that he, the crucified and outcast of history, will bring eternal justice to all those who are cast out, tortured, and killed by and in human history: *they* are promised exaltation."[44] This image hopes for a future time in which the "crucified people of God," to use a motif made famous by liberation theologian Ignacio Ellacuría, will at last be taken down from the cross and justice will prevail.[45]

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[39] Copeland writes, "Jesus lived and carried out his mission in the palpable tension between resistance to empire and desire for *basileia tou theou*, the reign of God. This desire carried with it certain religious and political convictions: that the messiah would lead the destruction of the Roman empire, that YHWH would rule as king, and that Israel would be vindicated, justice established, peace and prosperity restored" (*Enfleshing Freedom*, 59).

[40] Edward Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1983), 28.

[41] In math, an asymptote names a line that continuously approaches a given curve but does not intersect it within a finite distance.

[42] Schillebeeckx, "Theological Quests," 159.

[43] "Those are pictures of liberation which rejects the idolatry of the present and holds upon the future. At the same time salvation is promised to the whole of man and not just to his soul" (Schillebeeckx, "I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body," in *God Among Us*, trans. John Bowden [New York: Crossroad, 1983], 137).

[44] Schillebeeckx, "Theological Quests," 159.

[45] See Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Crucified People: An Essay in Historical Soteriology," in *Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013). Ellacuría's reflections were in response to economic injustice, a product of the colonial matrix of power. For an account of the decolonial possibilities

These images of the Reign of God, the resurrection of the body, and the parousia serve as three sites for inciting the eschatological imagination: social relations, anthropology, and conceptions of time in relation to justice. While Schillebeeckx mentions other images,[46] these three are the most widely invoked. Schillebeeckx writes that the eschatological imagination formed by the images of the New Testament compels "greater justice, peace, and the integrity of all creation," with special attention to "the outcasts, the voiceless, and the marginalized, those who have been stricken by life."[47] He continues,

> It should also be directed to pastoral care for communication among people, and to unremitting criticism of culture and society wherever such institutions wound people and injustice is rife. It should be directed to care for the human body, and the psychological and mental health of men and women in our society; for our scorched earth, the environment of everything that grows and flourishes, comes to life and breathes; for the purity and strength of what one might call God-centered . . . virtues: faith, hope, and love; for meaningful, prayerful liturgy, and truly human, meaningful sacramental worship by the religious community; for spirituality and a culture of prayer; and for pastoral ministry to individuals, especially the lonely and those "who have no hope" (1 Thess 4:13).[48]

The fantastical images cultivate and shape spirituality as a "quest for God" remaining at "the core of all theology."[49]

Finally, the *humanum*, the hoped-for humanity within Schillebeeckx's eschatology, remains "fragmented and incomplete" this side of the eschaton.[50] Since the *humanum* can be actualized in a fragmentary manner, the Reign of God, the new understanding of the social order announced by Jesus of Nazareth, can only be partially fulfilled this side of the eschaton. Schillebeeckx's theology thus fits

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of Ellacuría's theology (and of other liberation theologies from Latin America), see chapter 3 of Drexler-Dreis, *Decolonial Love*.

[46] Schillebeeckx also uses the image of "new heaven and earth." Such hope is for "our earthly world, redeemed from upheaval." Creation, including non-human life and matter, participate in God's salvific action too. Analogous to the many conversations of integral ecology that have emerged within Catholic social teaching, eschatological hope also includes relationality between human beings *and* the rest of creation ("Theological Quests," 159). For parallel ecological concerns, see Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: From Leo XIII to Pope Francis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016). See also Francis, *Laudato Si'*.

[47] Schillebeeckx, "Theological Quests," 160.

[48] Schillebeeckx, "Theological Quests," 160.

[49] Schillebeeckx, "Theological Quests," 161.

[50] Marjin de Jong, *Metaphysics of Mystery: Revisiting the Question of Universality through Rahner and Schillebeeckx* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 259.

within the well-known "already-but-not-yet" eschatological model.[51] As later sections will show, this specific eschatological framing mirrors the challenges of world-building within contemporary decolonial movements. Many contemporary decolonial movements, like the Zapatistas (about whom I say more in the conclusion), struggle to bring a new world into being while mired in the imposed contradictions and structures of harm of the present one, tensions necessitated by the colonial matrix of power.[52]

With his emphasis on hermeneutics, narratives, and images to shape a hope-filled response to human suffering, Schillebeeckx sketches a Christian hope responding to negative contrast experiences and the infected social imagination associated with colonial modernity. Eschatology mobilizes creative images to challenge conventional perceptions of how the world ought to be built along with determining possibilities for humanity. Afrofuturism helps rethink eschatological symbols, those historically implemented in the colonial matrix of power as part of the diseased Christian imagination, to become sources of emancipation. With this hope-filled interpretive lens, I turn to Monáe's work to exemplify a decolonial rejoinder to rethink social relations, humanity, and time in relation to justice before reflecting within an eschatological horizon informed through the creation of Afrofuturist worlds.

MONÁE'S AFROFUTURISM

Janelle Monáe's *Dirty Computer* project evinces hope for living within and beyond colonial modernity in the United States.[53] Since its 2018 release, the wildly popular and critically acclaimed concept

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[51] See the different types of eschatological models examined in MacDougall, *More than Communion*, 168.

[52] The decolonial parallel I make using the "already-but-not-yet" eschatological model must not be interpreted as capitulating to a colonial status quo. Catherine E. Walsh notes that "decoloniality is not a condition to be achieved in a linear sense, since coloniality as we know it will probably never disappear." See Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 81. In her reflection, she warns the reader of the potential over-simplification of decolonial movements as only those working in a context that is "'ethnic,' predominantly rural, and devoid of the institutional *isms* of the dominant system." Decolonial thought also risks challenges such as its commodification within spheres of power or the assumption that one can frame movements outside of the world built by modernity. For an account of her reflection on the tensions and contradictions defined by decolonial work, see Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 82–88. Based on her theoretical and practical reflections, I argue that the dialectical eschatological model offered by the "already-but-not-yet" paradigm can contribute to Christian decolonial projects and futures.

[53] My theological reflection on Monáe's work is a parallel example to imagine a world beyond colonial modernity, much like Burnett's work to use the blues to recreate space to envision a world "that provides a location from which to organize a vision for life and living" (Burnett, *Decolonizing Revelation*, xii).

album has expanded into different media, including a forty-six minute "emotion picture" (their version of a visual album) and a collection of short stories written with Black and queer science fiction authors called *The Memory Librarian*.[54] Monáe's decolonial hope offers a starting point for imagining the contours of an otherwise sociality. Observed by theologian Anne M. Carpenter,

> Monáe's kinetic-symbolic expression of memory and hope in her work is both concrete, connected to the real cities of Kansas City and Atlanta, and stridently all-encompassing, rising with ever-increasing capacity toward a "geography" far more ambitious than memory alone. Hers is a re-membering that gathers a lost past for the sake of an as-yet unknown future, a future that disassembles the modern (colonial) world to make way for a new one.[55]

For the purposes of this article, I limit my analysis of Monáe's critique of colonial modernity to the suppression of the anthropological hegemonies concerning the erotic and late-capitalist notions of temporality. I will show that Monáe's Afrofuturist world building offers a decolonial rejoinder to Schillebeeckx's eschatological theology.

First, the *Dirty Computer* revels in the erotic.[56] In using the word "erotic," I employ Audre Lorde's development of the term in her seminal 1978 essay, "The Uses of the Erotic." Lorde defiantly reclaims the erotic as a modality of relationality validating a diversity of affective life, embodiment, sexuality, creativity, gendered expression, and political hope. She writes,

> The very word erotic comes from the Greek word eros, the personification of love in all its aspects—born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. . . . I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.[57]

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[54] See Janelle Monáe, *Dirty Computer*, Bad Boy Records 567348-1, 2018, compact disc. See also, Monáe, *The Memory Librarian and Other Stories of Dirty Computer* (New York: Harper Voyager, 2022). For a detailed account of almost every creative project Monáe has been involved in, see Dan Hassler-Forest, *Janelle Monáe's Queer Afrofuturism: Defying Every Label* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2022).

[55] Anne M. Carpenter, "Not America's Nightmare: Hans Urs von Balthasar, Janelle Monáe, and Aesthetic Form," *Religion and Literature* 53, no. 2 (2021): 24.

[56] In his analysis of the project, Sneed also uses Lorde's formulation to interpret Monáe's work (*The Dreamer and the Dream*, 70).

[57] Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life: A Reader*, ed. Karen E. Lovaas and Mercilee M. Jenkins (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 89.

Lorde's reclamation of the erotic relates to categories ascribed to humanity beyond her contextual experience as a queer Black woman. The universal notion of "man"—the same anthropological motif Jennings's work highlights—accompanies gender and sexual expectations within the colonial matrix of power.[58] This account of "man" forms a "default" for the human through suppressing the erotic by establishing the authority of types of men over others, along with prescriptive heterosexuality and a myopic fixation on the so-called "nuclear family" as the ideal relational configuration. Demonstrated by the work of Hortense J. Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, and C. Riley Snorton, the North Atlantic slave trade has also perpetuated gender norms through the fungibility of Black bodies that resonate in social relations to the present day.[59] The afterlives of colonization squash the erotic in the name of an artificial uniformity through this anthropology. In engaging the multitudinous dimensions of the erotic, the *Dirty Computer* project foregrounds the effects of colonial modernity while trying to envision alternative futures. Connecting this theme to American mass culture, music critic Sasha Geffen comments how American pop music has frequently subverted the artificial gender binary imposed by white supremacy.[60] Monáe's artistic output has contributed to these musical subversions, uniquely offering a "queer imagining of the future."[61]

The world building of *Dirty Computer* intentionally struggles against an imposed colonial hegemony and epistemic framework. This artificial uniformity takes the shape of an organization called New Dawn. This totalitarian organization aims to erase forms of perceived difference, particularly those deviating from the norms of gender and sexuality. Humans unable to fit within this hegemonic regime are labeled "dirty computers." In the narrative, New Dawn serves as a stand-in for the norms of the colonial matrix of power. The album tracks the memories of Jane 57821, a dirty computer, depicting her perilous journey as she sketches a political manifesto to survive as a fugitive from New Dawn.

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[58] See Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/ Power/ Truth/ Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

[59] See Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Culture and Countermemory: The "American" Connection* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64–81. See also Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). See also C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

[60] Sasha Geffen connects imposed gender norms to colonialism and offers an analysis of how music can shelter "gender rebellion from those who seek to abolish it" (*Glitter Up the Dark: How Pop Music Broke the Binary* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020], 2).

[61] Geffen, *Glitter Up*, 208.

Represented by the album's most popular track, "Make Me Feel," the sonic world of the project offers a bacchanal celebration of the erotic.[62] With funk-inspired guitar riffs clearly showing the influence of their mentor, Prince, Monáe revels in an "emotional, sexual bender," embracing feelings more congruent with her authentic self. The accompanying visuals for the track demonstrated Monáe's attraction to more than one gender. Another track called "Pynk" celebrates the beauty of queer erotic love among women and other feminine-aligned folks. The lyrics and unquestionably yonic iconography of the accompanying visuals validate the emotional vulnerability of sapphic love while repudiating patriarchal norms. Within the trajectory of the album, although specifically pronounced in this song, Carpenter notes that Monáe's song depicts "an exultant sharing of communion."[63]

Enriching themes of the erotic developed in the album, the short story "Never Mind"—published in *The Memory Librarian* collection—was written by Monáe and non-binary science fiction author Danny Lore. The piece fleshes out the community depicted in the music video of the song "Pynk." In the story, Pynk names a community of ostracized queer feminine-aligned folks. New Dawn tries to control marginalized communities through a gaseous drug called Never Mind. The drug obliterates memories, functioning as a colonizing epistemology that erases difference and obfuscates entire cultures and histories for the purposes of the organization's constructed uniformity. In the story, Jane flees to Pynk as a fugitive from New Dawn. She is accompanied by her companion and partner Neer, a non-binary AFAB, someone assigned female at birth. The community validates all facets of the erotic defined by Lorde, such as embrace of bodily difference, relationality with others, and creative production.

Rhapsody, one of the members of the community, discloses the location of Pynk to New Dawn. Rhapsody wants to remove Neer from the community because their presence in Pynk challenges essentializing and binary gender norms. Rhapsody also plans to surrender both Jane and Neer to the organization, hoping New Dawn would turn a blind eye to Pynk. After the residents thwart an attack from New Dawn, they ostracize Rhapsody from the group, allowing the authors not only to critique trans exclusive radical feminism but also warn against capitulating to the same logic of gender relations

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[62] Commenting on this track, Sneed observes, "In the case of 'Make Me Feel,' Monáe combines the Afrofuturistic palette and model of her prior works with frank sensuality, projecting a freedom—a dangerous, volatile freedom—that can only be experienced through the erotic" (*The Dreamer and the Dream*, 74–75).

[63] Carpenter, "Not America's Nightmare," 35.

accompanying the imposed uniformity of colonial modernity. The short story communicates to the reader that the norms associated with totalizing epistemic hegemonies are best left in the dust.

In addition to offering alternative communities that embrace rather than suppress the erotic, Monáe's *Dirty Computer* project also destabilizes late-capitalist conceptions of time: the compulsive fixation on productivity so valued by the self-sufficient white man. Colonial modernity imposes a specific conception of time as part of its hegemonic regime, compelling all measurements of time to capitulate to compulsive productivity along with a linear temporality coming from European epistemologies. According to media scholar Dan Hassler-Forest, Monáe's interpretation of Afrofuturist themes brings into focus the collusion of most Eurocentric science fiction within racial capitalism.[64] Hassler-Forest labels Monáe's alternative to capitalist formulations of time "chronopolitics," a term that "expresses a strikingly different approach to concepts of time, memory, and power."[65]

Monáe's chronopolitics take center stage in the short story "Timebox." The short story written with Eve L. Ewing, directly confronts the impact capitalist formulations have on time and human bodies. The narrative features Raven and Akilah, a couple who, after having moved into an apartment, realize their pantry is also a time pocket, a sealed container where time does not pass. Raven studies as a nursing student always under temporal imposition. Faced with a long commute, work, and her responsibilities as a student, the narrator notes that she struggles with an unrelenting schedule: "Raven found herself oscillating all day between bouts of frenzied energy and completely debilitating fatigue."[66] The economic requirements of capitalism force her to exhaust herself, pushing her body and emotions to their limits. Upon realizing the pantry potentially provides her with unlimited time, she first considers all she can now produce. Akilah challenges this idea: "This is . . . this is *community* wealth. We should open the room up, to—to organizers who need to get work done! . . . Something good for everyone. Think of all our people. Think of what this could mean for them."[67] Akilah directly challenges the reflex of productivity. By severing their current relationship to time, they could "end capitalism."[68]

Later in the story, Akilah ruminates on how colonialism has robbed many folks of time:

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[64] Hassler-Forest, *Janelle Monáe's Queer Afrofuturism*, 11.
[65] Hassler-Forest, *Janelle Monáe's Queer Afrofuturism*, 17.
[66] Janelle Monáe and Eve L. Ewing, "Timebox," in *Memory Librarian*, 172.
[67] Monáe and Ewing, "Timebox," 183.
[68] Monáe and Ewing, "Timebox," 184.

> Time purchased with hoarded and illegitimate wealth, time wrung from the muscles of Black bodies, time wrenched through a vicious alchemy from the violent arms of colonialism. Friends, we exist in a perpetual state of time debt, wherein only those who have benefited from this thieving achieve the privilege of what we so blithely call genius. Comrades, what would it mean if what was once stolen could now be repaid?[69]

When considering how to work towards social transformation with the Timebox while also respecting and engaging epistemic differences, Raven ponders how organizers could communally share time "as a resource" and deliberately utilize the space for those wanting "to give more freely of our love, our creation, and our support to those in greatest need."[70] Yet sadly when she returns one day, the pantry is sealed, robbing Raven of the opportunity to explore any potential radical change. The ambiguous and abrupt ending suggests Akilah may have decided to seal herself in the time box. The chronopolitics of the story beckon the reader towards a different relationship towards time—a relationship embracing epistemic difference to move beyond the diseased Christian imagination—even as the story's conclusion may frustrate those whose difficult lives demand that temporal alternative.

TOWARDS AN AFROFUTURIST HOPE

The decolonial themes of Monáe's project challenge Schillebeeckx's eschatological hope to address the "diseased social imagination" of Christianity to envision a world and *humanum* beyond the negative contrast of colonial modernity. The artist's Afrofuturist hope dares Christians to think anew the well-worn eschatological images of the "Reign of God," the "Resurrection of the Body," and the "Parousia." Knowing the colonial history of Christians' diseased imagination, including eschatology, Monáe's world-building helps recontextualize these abused images to forge alternative Christian futures.

Like the sociality suggested in the "Reign of God" image, the Pynk commune depicted in the title track and "Never Mind" sketches an alternative community, imagining social relations built on healing, mutual responsibility, creativity, and love. Represented by the community's refusal to capitulate to the epistemic regime of New Dawn, the sociality implied by this decolonial Reign does not validate a perceived uniformity but celebrates difference in the material specificity of femininity. When reflecting on embodiment,

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[69] Monáe and Ewing, "Timebox," 190.
[70] Monáe and Ewing, "Timebox," 199.

Schillebeeckx's interpretation of "the Resurrection of the Body" image promotes a future-oriented account of the human and affirms its embodied materiality. The world built by *Dirty Computer*—most uniquely emphasized in "Never Mind"—celebrates the multitudinous dimensions of the erotic and challenges the anthropological hegemony accompanying colonial modernity. When put into dialogue with Schillebeeckx's reflection on this eschatological symbol, the work highlights how the colonial norms associated with gender, sex, and sexuality have over-determined the diverse ways one can be human. This dialogue challenges Christians to dismantle the harmful colonial constructs of perceived difference infecting many imaginations and propose an alternative sociality open to multiple futures for humanity. The self-sufficient white man is decidedly removed from his perch.

In "Timebox," Monáe's world building tantalizes an alternative chronopolitics in opposition to the hyper-regulated time management of the present day. An essay by Linn Tonstad illuminates the importance of alternative temporal frameworks. Working within queer theology, Tonstad scrutinizes the ways queer performance art can offer alternatives to "debt time," a temporal measurement imposed by late-capitalism and a motif pertinent to the short story. Against such temporal frameworks, she argues for "prophetic acts as bodied acts that generate new dreams against the forces that demand the sacrifice of social hopes for a future that is *otherwise*."[71] Such acts create coalitions for those "subjected by debt into temporal and spatial contiguities with the dreams of others."[72] Like in "Timebox," the forces of market capitalism dominate structures of time, space, and energy. The world building of the story and its accompanying suggestion of such an otherwise can "shift relations between structures of authority and embedded hierarchicalizations."[73] Art like the short story "can mobilize us into a 'we,' caused by a future that does not yet exist and that is impossible under current conditions. . . . Their myth-making figures our truth; their world-making casts golden words before us that open new affiliative horizons."[74] For Schillebeeckx, the

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[71] Linn Marie Tonstad, "Debt Time is Straight Time," *Political Theology* 17, no. 5 (2016): 434. Tonstad makes a similar connection between capitalism and time in "The Entrepreneur and the Big Drag: Risky Affirmation in Capital's Time," in *Sexual Disorientations: Queer Temporalities, Affects, Theologies*, ed. Kent L. Brintnall, Joseph A. Marchal, and Stephen D. Moore (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 218–239.

[72] Tonstad, "Debt Time," 435. See also Jayna Brown, *Black Utopias: Speculative Life and the Music of Other Worlds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

[73] Tonstad, "Debt Time," 444.

[74] Tonstad, "Debt Time," 447. In an essay on Paul's meditation on the Christian *ekklesia* in his letter to the Romans, James N. Hoke makes a similar point about dominating conceptions of time, noting how the anticipation of Christ's return unbinds the imperial chronopolitics imposing regulatory frameworks on gender and

alternative temporality and radical justice hoped for within the "Parousia" image envisions the "crucified people of God" taken down from the cross. Monáe's alternative chronopolitics rejects the regime of compulsive productivity of the self-sufficient white man benefiting from the temporal regime of late capitalism. The imagery of communally shared time in *Dirty Computer* beckons creative alternatives.

As the reader may have noticed, the capitalist critiques made by Monáe's project seem to be in contradiction with the media outlets used to disseminate the project itself. The *Dirty Computer* album can be found on Spotify and YouTube. Book buyers can order the short story collection through Amazon. This project evinces hope for a new world while it is simultaneously implicated in exploitative structures and media conglomerates which clearly benefit from the injustices of colonial modernity. Commenting on this dimension of Monáe's work, Hassler-Forest observes that their work persists as "a potent expression of Black utopian postcapitalism: it shows stubbornly how even the grimmest capitalist dystopias are riddled with pockets of resistance with the power to spark a revolution."[75] Monáe and many of those who agree with their critiques eagerly await and hope for this revolution to create social relations not limited to late-capitalism. Until then, the material realities and structures of the present-day determine any attempt to actualize God's hope within history: partially, haphazardly, and perhaps idealistically, or even naively.

The Afrofuturist hope of Monáe's *Dirty Computer* project offers an alternative cartography for the "diseased social imaginary" infecting the thinking and action of many Christians. This cartography charts potential futures beyond the colonial violence done to the *humanum*. The eschatological images and biblical world building explored in Schillebeeckx's theology prioritize attention to the marginalized. While Monáe's work itself does not provide a direct "blueprint" for dismantling these dimensions of the colonial matrix of power, the project provokes reflections for beginning to build alternative Afrofuturist worlds.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I will sketch some of the practical contours of Monáe's Afrofuturist enriching of the Christian eschatological imagination. The *Dirty Computer* project—and the two short stories analyzed especially—promotes a practice of refusal toward the ultimacy of colonial hegemonies. Reflecting on this theme of refusal

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sexuality. See Hoke, "Unbinding Imperial Time: Chrononormativity and Paul's Letter to the Romans," in *Sexual Disorientations*, 68–89.

[75] Hassler-Forest, *Janelle Monáe's Queer Afrofuturism*, 125.

within the political theology of Indigenous activism, Elisha Chi writes:

> Refusal is a strong current resisting the structure of settler colonialism. It crashes, churns, and erodes the death-dealing dams of settler knowing. Its path turns away from the settler's gaze. . . . It refuses to authorize the dissipation and violence of colonizer cultural and racial inclusivity, instead focusing its life-giving force back onto communal sovereignty. Refusal leans away from all that would place it under a microscope (and then confine its life to the space of a Petri dish), into a spacious opening-up away from the violence of knowledge and into the flow of nourishment, sovereignty, and decolonial life. Refusal strengthens one's kin beyond linear notions of time and dematerialized notions of place. It provides multi-generational nourishment for Indigenous communities grappling and turning away from the structure of settler-colonialism.[76]

In "Never Mind," the Pynk community refuses to capitulate to the gender norms of New Dawn, including trans* exclusionary forms of exclusionary feminism. The narrative of "Timebox" wonders what it would be like to refuse capitalism as the last word for organizing communal life.

Monáe's politics of refusal come to the forefront in the album's closing track, "Americans." Monáe uses an up-tempo anthemic song to skewer many of the uninterrogated injustices of the "American Dream," a specific vision of how life ought to be organized in the United States. "I like my woman in the kitchen," they sing, satirizing imposed colonial religion and gender norms. "I teach my children superstitions/ I keep my two guns on my blue nightstand/ A pretty young, she can wash my clothes/ but she'll never ever wear my pants."[77] Pointing fun at its most bucolic images, the pre-chorus mocks, "I pledge allegiance to the flag/ Learned the words from my mom and dad/ Cross my heart and I hope to die/ With a big old piece of American pie."[78] Monáe highlights the injustices built into the fabric of the colonial imaginary of the United States, specifically its ability to perpetuate an idealized vision of itself despite its flagrant violations of human dignity.

Monáe refuses to accept this "American Dream." They include an excerpt of a sermon by the Christian pastor Sean McMillan. He proclaims,

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[76] See Elisha Chi, "Refusal," Political Theology Network, November 15, 2022, politicaltheology.com/refusal/.
[77] Monáe, "Americans."
[78] Monáe, "Americans."

> Let me help you in here. Until women can get equal pay for equal work. This is not my America. Until same-gender loving people can be who they are, this is not my America. Until Black people can come home from a police stop without being shot in the head, this is not my America. . . . Until poor whites can get a shot at being successful, this is not my America.[79]

By including an excerpt from a Christian pastor's sermon, Monáe refuses to be limited to such unjust contradictions. Referencing this theme of dreams and aspirations of the self-sufficient white man, an anthropology inherent to the "American Dream" and the Christian theological imagination, Jennings ponders, "What does it mean to be inside someone else's dream? What does it mean to be inside the aspirations of others? And what does it mean to be educated between dream and aspiration?"[80] Afrofuturist hope refuses to live under such dreams and aspirations by imagining bigger, rejecting, for example, the "rituals of comportment" compelling many bodies to one possible horizon.[81]

Monáe's work thus refuses the ultimacy of colonial modernity. In this act of refusal, Afrofuturist hope also means that any vision for escaping this limited horizon will be enunciated in the world built within colonization's wake. Walsh frames such enunciation as

> a responsibility to think *with and from* the insurgent constructions, creations, practices, and subject-actors that, from the outside, the borders, edges, and cracks challenge and defy modernity/ coloniality. . . . It is a responsibility to open, widen, intercede in, and act from the decolonial fissures and cracks, and to make cracks within the spaces, places, institutions, and structures of the *inside*.[82]

This hope necessitates the careful negotiation of the contradictions emerging from refusing hegemonic regimes. Walsh's decolonial praxis hopes to "live within the cracks" of colonial modernity to reimagine what social life might be, a literal example of the "already-but-not-yet" eschatological model referenced earlier in the article.[83]

The Zapatistas, the famed decolonial movement of Indigenous communities living in Chiapas, Mexico, offer a practical example of trying to "live within the cracks" of colonial modernity. Since the 1990s, this community has resisted exploitative relationships imposed by colonizing forces, most famously in their opposition to loss of land

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[79] Monáe, "Americans."

[80] Jennings, "Against the Finished Man," *Modern Theology* 37, no. 4 (2021): 1055.

[81] Jennings, "Against the Finished Man," 1056.

[82] Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 84.

[83] Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 86.

sovereignty through NAFTA.[84] In an article, Drexler-Dreis argues that the movement enriches Christian enunciations of freedom and eschatological hope through their "negative critique of the present world of neoliberal capitalism."[85] In their refusal to capitulate to the demands of late-capitalism, they reimagine political autonomy and how communities can relate to their lived environment. Drexler-Dreis writes, "They demonstrate the practice of 'widening' the 'crack' in the 'wall' of history that presents itself as the only possible world, for in failing to claw at this crack, it can close for good."[86] I can best summarize this decolonial praxis through their goal of building a world "where many worlds can fit."

To apply this theme of "living within the cracks" to Schillebeeckx's theology, Christians can only actualize fragments of God's hoped-for fulfillment described as a Reign, clawing at its cracks that threaten the *humanum*. Incorporating the decolonial world building of Afrofuturism into an eschatological imagination creates a Christian hope that lives within the "cracks" of colonial modernity by refusing its ultimacy. Afrofuturist hope demands that colonization and the self-sufficient white man will not have the last word.[87] Represented by Monáe's *Dirty Computer* project, Afrofuturist hope enriches the eschatological imagination by inviting Christians to interpret and rethink the type of world they ought to build, well-beyond the one of today, in which the *humanum* is no longer threatened with recapitulations of the same colonial violence of past generations. Afrofuturism provides inspiration for the new world Christ demands to be called into being, living within the present-order's cracks in hopes of rupturing its foundation.[88] M

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[84] For an overview of the Zapatistas as a historical movement and their political practice, see Mariana Mora Bayo, *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

[85] Joseph Drexler-Dreis, "The Meaning of Freedom and the Kingdom of God: A Struggle against the Fetishization of our Present World," *Horizons* 48, no. 2 (2021): 304.

[86] Drexler-Dreis, "The Meaning of Freedom," 314.

[87] In his book *Decolonial Love*, Drexler-Dreis incorporates themes of Latin American liberation theology into modes of being offering alternatives to the world built by colonization. Decolonial love, for him, posits a relatedness that "allows for a decolonized image of salvation: an image that opens up to an alternative way of imagining and encountering reality outside the interests of colonial modernity" (*Decolonial Love*, 149).

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